

## **Time Unshackled**

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### **Abstract:**

One of the biggest truisms of our age is the fact that we never have enough time to accomplish all the things we set out to do or that are imposed onto us. Our lives are not only ruled by clocks, they are always filled with looming deadlines, un-ticked to-do lists, ever-fuller inboxes... “I just won’t have enough time,” we lament again and again. We are handcuffed to time. But how can we make sense of these shackles? In this essay, this truism is analyzed through the emblematic experience of the treadmill (this electric exercise machine made up of a continuous belt that allows one to run in place). Instead of suggesting a different or slow pace, instead of attempting to stop or step off the treadmill, the aim of this exploration is to think a new stance that allows us to diminish the allure of the treadmill and in doing so, unshackle ourselves from all interpretations of time as calculation. To achieve this bold aim, this essay takes its source of inspiration from the work of the late Heidegger and of a selection of complementary texts on speed, time, and the politics of temporality.

### **Keywords:**

Time, Speed, Acceleration, Heidegger, Fourfold, Nancy

## **I. Life on the Treadmill**

I’m running on a treadmill in a large concrete basement lit with artificial lights. On my headphones, I hear the music of the rap video I’m watching on the screen in front of me and, in the distance, the synth-pop music played in the basement’s overhead speakers. I’m also connected to a heart rate sensor, which gives me an accurate reading of how I fare in comparison to my heart rate target. My smart phone is on a small shelf on the left of the treadmill screen, the flashing little LED light telling me I have messages waiting. On the other small shelf, an artificially sweetened orange flavored sports drink is at hand in order to quench my thirst. I feel exhausted and yet determined to continue in order to meet the target I imposed myself: thirty minutes at 7.5 km per hour moving up to nine, then thirteen for the last ten minutes, with a corresponding incline increment of 2.5, 5, and 8 per cent. After that, I will stretch, shower, dress, and sprint to the station to take the 11.05 train to work just in time for my 11.30 appointment to re-calculate my job’s contract hours. While on the train, I will check and maybe even answer the emails I received while at the gym. But I am not there yet. I’m now running and will continue to do so for another twenty-seven minutes.

Two things become apparent to me while on this treadmill.

The first one is that everything appears to be accessible, ready-at-hand. The screen in front of me gives me all I need for now on this run: the news, television entertainment, popular music, and even though I am not using it today, access to the

Internet and therefore the possibility of checking my emails if necessary, thus bringing my office directly in front of me while on the run. What else could I possibly need while reaching the number of calories target I have fixed myself for today? Everything is, as Heidegger says, 'before [me] at the shortest range.'<sup>1</sup> A uniform distanceless dominates; my wired technologies allow me to access my immediate world and, if I want to, virtually, the most remote confines of the world. Everything is happily at close range and yet at the same time, I wonder about the kind of experience I am actually undergoing here in this basement, on this run.

The second thing that becomes apparent to me while on this treadmill is that everything around me is given to calculation. Time, distance, heart rate, elevation, speed, workout profile, pace, calories burned per hour, total calories burned, watts: everything is here calculated for me. Even my overall fitness is measured thanks to the Metabolic Equivalents of Task (MET) calculator, giving me a reading of my body's metabolic rate: i.e. how much oxygen I consume per kilogram of body weight per minute in comparison to a person sitting in a resting position. A simple algorithmic estimation based on personal data added at the start of my run: weight, age and speed. I feel oddly reassured by these numbers lighting up my control panel. It gives me a certainty that technology is able to confirm the fact that I am not so much alive, but in full possession of my physical properties. It makes me realize that, as Heidegger says, I am 'certain of "being," [and] that everything conforms to the current state of calculation.'<sup>2</sup>

Everything ready at hand. Everything calculated, monitored, informative. My time-space, this "making present,"<sup>3</sup> is closed in and measured. Even the potential spontaneity of my movements is indistinguishable from my run's mechanization. My right leg steps forward; my left leg catches up forcing me to realize that the overall step I have just accomplished only brings me closer to my starting point. I operate in a distanceless and calculated horizon structured by only one law: the law of the treadmill, the law of the wheel, the law of the clock. This law dictates that life can only be determined not by cycles, but by enclosed proximity and calculation; even the most indeterminate aspects of my life (for example, my metabolism: i.e. the chemical processes that maintain me alive) are also processed and made readily available for me in the shape of finite numbers. And there is no evading this law: no impetuous or involuntary reflexes can escape the *possibility* of being *eventually* detected and recorded.

Contemporary time-space is indeed a closed and calculated phenomenon. At the current setting of 8 km per hour and a gradient of 2.5, the twenty-four minutes I have left will cover an imaginary 2.1 km. If I don't increase my pace, I will burn 199.6 Kcal and I will achieve a MET of 9.4: a better score than the 186 Kcal and MET of 8.7 I achieved yesterday. No more unpredictability and hidden depths in this world of dials and screens. Similarly, flicking to a news channels, gives me a reassuringly

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, New York, Harper Perennial, 2001, p165.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p95.

<sup>3</sup> On "time-space," see Martin Heidegger, "Zeit-Raum" in *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, New York, Harper, 1972, p14.

closed and calculated approach to the world, which on this day reads like this: the Israel-Palestinian war is given a lower algorithm of importance than the Malaysian airplane crash in Ukraine, with the other news of the day in decreasing importance. On my phone, my social media newsfeed transforms the world into a comprehensible conveyor belt of close and distant news, in only one language, and with only a few baby symbol ('like,' for example) to help me limit both my emotions and thoughts. The infinite expanse of the world is covered, hierarchized, and sold to me in measured and thereby easily digestible economy-bites.

Shrunk and ordered, my life not only obeys the law of the treadmill, it is also and above all delimited by an implacable logic. There is nowhere else to go, but 'ahead' on this treadmill, which also means, curiously at the *same* place: the seemingly eternal repetition of the *same*. I am running on the *same* spot. I am listening to the *same* re-sampled song I heard ten and even twenty years ago. I will be answering emails that are more or less the *same* ones as the ones I replied to yesterday, albeit with different recipients and subjects. I will check the news, which invariably will be the *same* as yesterday: catastrophes I am helpless to prevent or put right, leaving me with only the possibility of pointless commentaries on algorithmically delimited social media. I will go through the day in exactly the *same* way: knowing that I will never be able to accomplish all the things I set out to do. The logic of the same reassures me that very little remains in the hands of the contingent or the unpredictable: stuck on the same spot, I press ahead.

In my distanceless and calculated time-space with its intractable law and implacable logic, I can only take myself as an object within a great regulative and repetitive process. The 'I' becomes an object; i.e. an immeasurable fact reduced to the status of cold data. 'I' am lost to it. Heidegger predicted this curious life a long time ago: 'The "world" becomes ever smaller, not only in the quantitative sense but also in its metaphysical significance: beings as being, i.e., as objects, are ultimately so dissolved into their controllability that the character of beings with respect to being disappears...' <sup>4</sup> The distanceless and calculated time-space with its intractable law and implacable logic turns me into an object amongst objects and dissolves my being into a background noise of calculations. On my treadmill, I am simply an object extended by further objects <sup>5</sup> living amidst other calculated and delimited objects. <sup>6</sup>

So the question beckons: if it were possible to rethink the time-space that structures my current treadmill experience, would it at all be possible to imagine a new kind of 'being on the treadmill' that would be free from the law of the wheel and the logic of the same? In other words, if what structures my experience of time-space on the treadmill is re-thought, can there be a way of rekindling 'the character of being' that Heidegger talks about, thereby embracing a less controlled and consummated life? These are the questions that will preoccupy me in this essay.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p389.

<sup>5</sup> On this prosthetic extension, see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time I: The Fault of Epimetheus*, translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p235.

<sup>6</sup> On this theme, see Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, translated by Patrick Camiller, London, Sage, 1999.

In order to address them, I have made a deliberate choice of reading. The usual response to the problem of the treadmill is to retain a commonplace understanding of time-space: i.e. measured (i.e. cyclical and/or progressive) and finite (i.e. with memorable pasts and foreseeable futures). A few social-theorists<sup>7</sup> attempt to explain the treadmill from a single temporal perspective (linear, universal, abstract, and commodified) and with a general societal perspective (modern technological advancements, capitalism, globalization). These perspectives always ignore the author's very own temporal structures, as if, eternal and unique, they were able to remain unaffected by the processes they themselves are part of. For example, Rosa notes magnificently: 'The time structures of modernity change according to a unified pattern as it develops.'<sup>8</sup> These breathtaking perspectives invariably end up with incredibly problematic clairvoyant predictions leaving the reader puzzled as to the godly origins of their very utterances.<sup>9</sup> The present essay will strive to avoid these commonplace spatial and temporal perspectives and projections.

In philosophy, the treadmill is often analyzed as the result of technics: machines and devices are constitutive of our measured and distanceless time-space and are therefore going quicker than our own ability to deal with it. Speed becomes in this way not only more important than time-space, it literally replaces it. As Virilio says: 'Speed is Time saved in the most absolute sense of the word, since it becomes human Time directly torn from Death.'<sup>10</sup> Less hyperbolically and more cautiously, Stiegler shows that speed is 'the prosthetic *already-there* in mortality.'<sup>11</sup> In the process, speed, this technics replacing time-space, can only therefore leave us stranded in the 'idiocy'<sup>12</sup> of this *already-there* and the ceaseless return of death. The recurring characteristic of this emphasis on speed is that although speed as technics is indeed (constitutive of) time, it says nothing of the way in which it can be inflected or accentuated. What politics can derive from speed as technics, from speed as time? The answer is short in coming<sup>13</sup> because speed can only leave us behind, even from ourselves. In order to inflect and accentuate, a multi-faceted apprehension of time-space is therefore necessary and this is what this essay will strive to show.

In more recent philosophy,<sup>14</sup> the general tendency is to press forward and accelerate the treadmill as much as possible and, in doing so, side with the dynamics of global capitalism in order to precipitate a new future. The general aim of this new philosophy is to ignite and galvanize a type of dehumanized schizo-market-driven subject who will bring an end to the horrors of the current world order: cultural

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Volume 1*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981; Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*, New York, Harper Collins, 2005; Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, translated by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, p299.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Rosa's predictions in *Social Acceleration*, pp320-22.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, translated by Marc Polizzotti, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 1977, p46.

<sup>11</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time I*, p235.

<sup>12</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time I*, p240.

<sup>13</sup> On this shortage, see Oliver Marchart, 'Antagonism and Technicity: Bernard Stiegler On *Eris, Stasis and Polemos*,' in *New Formations* 77 (October 2012), 150-63.

<sup>14</sup> See the work of Nick Land and his Cybernetic Culture Research Unit.

homogenization, climate change, surreal economic disparities, and a perpetual state of financial crisis.<sup>15</sup> Taking their clues from the work of Deleuze, Guattari, and Lyotard, the work of these accelerationists will not feature here simply because the majority of their arguments stumble head first in the dead-end occasioned, once again, by a measured and enclosed understanding of time-space.<sup>16</sup> Precipitating the end of capitalism in order to foster, encourage, or promote a new horizon, results from a conventional (and predominantly neo-Marxist) understanding of time and history that offers no way out *or* forward except a fruitless exacerbation of the present, a ‘frenetic standstill’ as Rosa says, that has no place here.

In contrast to these responses, this essay will tackle the issue from a more complex perspective, taking on a multi-dimensional spatial and temporal structure. This multi-dimensional structure is provided by a close reading of the work of the late Heidegger and specifically by a reading of the fourfold (*das Geviert*) and the way it has been interpreted by some of his commentators. The fourfold indeed helps to formulate a different approach to the apprehension of time-space. This approach shows that neither technics (as speed, for example) nor, by extension, capital can solely structure time-space because these organizing principles only offer single-meta-narratives (teleological) incapable of precipitating a new future. By contrast, the fourfold, as a multi-dimensional spatial and temporal structure, allows us to see beyond our current calculated and distanceless predicament. The fourfold has already been extensively analyzed<sup>17</sup> and will therefore not be explained *in much detail* here. Instead, the aim is to reveal how the fourfold can help us expose a potential new ‘being on the treadmill.’

The political intentions of this new ‘being on the treadmill’ are not to stop the treadmill, step out of it, increase its speed, or invent another time-space. The treadmill is the only condition of possibility we know: we can only continue our run ruled by the law of the wheel and the logic of the same. But, *mortal*, we can *also*, as we will see, *side-line* technics and capital and *tune* ourselves instead to a different apprehension of time-space for which close-range calculations no longer hold such an alluring power. The political intentions are therefore to inflect<sup>18</sup> the tension between the two, that is, between this capitalist, techno-driven, and distanceless ‘I’ and this multi-dimensional *mortal* ‘I’ that curiously escapes, as we will see, all forms of calculation, laws, and logics. In other words, the aim is to vary the stress between the mono-logic of our inescapable calculated time and the poly-logic that also, secretly, structures us. With such political intentions, this new ‘being on the treadmill’ will

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<sup>15</sup> On this movement, see Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, eds., *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, Falmouth, Urbanomic, 2014 and Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocity: Accelerationism and Capitalism*, London, Zero Books, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> For an example of this stumbling head-first see, Reza Negarestani, ‘The Labor of the Inhuman (Part I and II),’ in *e-flux magazine*, #52 [bit.ly/1fz3b7M](http://bit.ly/1fz3b7M).

<sup>17</sup> See in English, for example: Andrew J. Mitchell, ‘The Fourfold,’ in Bret W. Davis, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, London, Acumen, 2010, pp208-18; Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, pp209-225, fn. 158, p348; and Mark A. Wrathall, ‘Between the Earth and the Sky: Heidegger on life after the death of God,’ in Mark A. Wrathall ed., *Religion After Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp69-87.

<sup>18</sup> On this inflection, see Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Political and/or Politics,’ paper presented at Birkbeck College, University of London, 14 March 2012, translated by Christopher Sauder, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/bih/nancy-jean-luc-the-political-and-or-politics-frankfurt-2012.pdf>.

hopefully acquire *the choice* of freeing itself from what we perceive today as being time's shackles.

The essay will be structured in the following way: I will first explore this potentially new approach to time-space by *succinctly* exposing Heidegger's fourfold. This will allow me to begin the process of rethinking my experience of the treadmill from a completely new perspective. The following section will explore the most problematic, but also the most important element in Heidegger's fourfold: the gods. This necessary diversion will help me to re-envisage the weal that maintains me on the treadmill: instead of a reaffirmation of the law of the wheel and the logic of the same, the gods pave the way for a different weal. A fourth section will explore in detail this new weal. The fifth and concluding section will seek to tease out the political implications of this shift in perspective.

## II. The Fourfold Against Technics

Above me, the sky; beneath me, the earth; out of me, the *event* of being (*Ereignis*);<sup>19</sup> away from, but dependent on this event, the gods: this 'is' the fourfold following Heidegger. The position is that of a mortal living between earth and sky, whose event engages unruly gods. These are not proper physical or metaphysical compass points. They have no proper equivalent in the world (or in another) because they stand for the very constitution of the event of being. The four participate in and as this event; they take part—without creating a supra-representational structure—in the fact that I 'am' here, on this earth, mortal, under the sky. The fourfold is the same for everyone, even if they are astronauts floating in space because the earth in question is not literally the soil on the ground, but, as we will see, what ties us to the earth in one way or another. Mortals, earth, sky, gods are the four<sup>20</sup> non-mystical dimensions that make the event of being. There would be no being, no other, and no world without this four-dimensional chiasmatic structure that utterly defies the entire arsenal of archic and telic representations and their inevitable epochal stampings.

Because the fourfold creates the event of being, it effectively creates time-space. In other words, it is out of the fourfold that time-space arises. As Jeff Malpas remarks, 'time, as usually understood, arises out of such gathering in the same way as does space, in the ordinary sense, also.'<sup>21</sup> Time-space therefore occurs because of this dispersion of the fourfold that fractures all singular points of view, exclusive vistas, and uniform narratives. This means that out of me, as one dimension of the fourfold, and out of gods, earth and sky, time-space arises. This does not privilege the human being as the subjective point out of which time-space emerges. This is not a

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<sup>19</sup> On the event of being (*Ereignis*) see, Richard Polt, "Ereignis," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, eds., *A Companion to Heidegger*, London, Blackwell, 2005, pp375-91.

<sup>20</sup> On this number see Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, translated by Keith Hoeller, Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000 and *Hölderlin's Hymns, "Germania" and "The Rhine,"* translated by William McNeill and Julia Ireland, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. For a commentary, see Jean-François Mattéi, *Heidegger et Hölderlin: Le Quadripartite*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p242.

supposedly correlationist perspective. The fourfold is not just about mortals;<sup>22</sup> time-space emerges also because of earth, sky, and gods. The event of being, and therefore the event of time-space, necessarily enrolls all four dimensions in their very eventuality.

But what's the point of focusing on the fourfold? The fourfold makes us aware of the conditions that make events possible. It's like the prerequisite for any form of happenstance. As James Edward says: 'Each of the four is... intended to put in someone's mind the particular *conditions* that make possible... the life that brought to presence the actual thing... before us.'<sup>23</sup> So for example, my existence is conditioned by a number of factors: the ground out of which humanity grew, the sky into which it elevates itself and allows me to breathe, my parents who made me mortal, and the divinities, these 'entities' that, as we will see, radically disturb my currently calculated and distanceless living-present. It would be wrong to think that this conditionality is a causality. Because the fourfold creates time-space, this conditionality is relative to the always accidental occurrence of any given spatial and temporal configuration.

The fourfold therefore allows us to perceive the condition for the existence of objects and subjects. The question now is this: why do we need to pay attention to this conditionality? The answer is because, as human history has shown, we have lost touch with this conditionality. The one responsible for this loss is technics. Technics is not just machines. It stands not for an instrumental means to bring into being what is not (creating a moving surface for running in one place, for example), but for the project of calculative reason to pursue life by means *other* than life. This calculative reason not only structures life; it also, more importantly for us, gives us our *measured* sense of time-space. As such, we can only follow Bernard Stiegler's well-known arguments in the volume, *The Fault of Epimetheus*, when he says that technics is 'constitutive of temporality as well as spatiality.'<sup>24</sup> Technics orders and measures life and gives us our sense of time-space. Through calculative reason, we can only lead measured and distanceless treadmill lives. It is against this project of calculative reason to pursue life by means *other* than life that we need to develop the idea that time-space derives *not exclusively* from technics, but *also* and above all from the fourfold. But how is one to go about it in this ever-alluring and frenzied mechanized process? How can Heidegger's fourfold help us to think a life not entirely led by means other than life?

Three of Heidegger's four dimensions (mortals, earth, sky) are pretty much self-evident: 'Earth is the serving bearer... The sky is the vaulting path of the sun... The mortals are the human beings.'<sup>25</sup> One could object that a treadmill cannot stand for the earth and an artificially lit basement cannot stand for the sky. If one were to say 'yes' to these objections and therefore acknowledge the fact that treadmills and artificially lit basements are unrelated to their supposed opposites (earth and sky), one would

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<sup>22</sup> On the marginalization of mortals, see Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, translated by Reginald Lilly, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2003, p211.

<sup>23</sup> James C. Edwards, 'The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work,' in Dreyfus and Wrathall, *A Companion to Heidegger*, p458, my emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time I*, p17.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp147-8.

immediately pitch culture versus nature. While it's true that earth, in its silence, always ruins any attempt to transform or manipulate it<sup>26</sup> and the sky stands for 'the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, and the drifting clouds,'<sup>27</sup> it would be wrong to just limit them to a typical Heideggerian peasant naturism that rallies against culture. What matters when it comes to earth and sky is that they stand for human's place of dwelling. It is under the sky and on earth that mortals dwell, that is, it is there in between the two<sup>28</sup> that they initiate their own nature—their being capable of death as death. So to be running on a treadmill in an artificially lit basement is a form of dwelling, the act of setting myself free into my own presencing.

If the first three elements in Heidegger's fourfold make more or less sense, what to make of the last element in the fourfold: the gods? How is one to understand them or more precisely, how can they help us experience time-space anew? In order to address these questions, it is necessary to offer a slight, but necessary alteration to Heidegger's fourfold. This alteration should be read in the same vein as Graham Harman's attempt to 'improve' Heidegger's fourfold, but without the arrogance of imagining creating a new philosophy.<sup>29</sup> The alteration consists in simply allowing the gods to do their job, which is to surprise the fourfold with what mortals would never have anticipated between earth and sky. This alteration is neither grandiose nor a betrayal of Heidegger's philosophy if one thinks that the gods are conceived, as we will see, as 'messengers.' This alteration is a necessary one for the fourfold to reveal itself as what allows us to think a life not so much free of technics (and capital), but at least aware of its inherent conditionality. So how can one understand Heidegger's gods and how, with a slight adjustment, can they show us the way to a new interpretation of time-space and of life on the treadmill?

### III. The Gods

To my knowledge, the only non-allegorical definition that Heidegger provides of the gods is that they are 'the undecided because the open realm of divinization is always withheld.'<sup>30</sup> It's pretty clear that within a Heideggerian framework, it is not possible to make a distinction between what escapes rational thought (*the* realm of divinization) and what remains firmly within it (what is *understood* as the realm itself). In this way, the gods are both historical<sup>31</sup> (the history of the characterization of this realm including its many religious incarnations) and radically unknown at the same time (that which this history points to). This radically unknown is not otherworldly. There is no metaphysical assumption here; there is only an indication that a realm is withheld. This means therefore that *as part of the fourfold*, mortals cannot be understood without the gods and this always withheld realm of divinization.

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<sup>26</sup> See, Frank Darwiche, *Heidegger, Le Divin et le Quadriparti*, Nice, Les Editions Ovidia, 2013, p100.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p147.

<sup>28</sup> See, Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p186.

<sup>29</sup> Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, London, Zero Books, 2011, p50.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p17, translation modified.

<sup>31</sup> On this theme, see Darwiche, *Heidegger, Le Divin et le Quadriparti*, p156.

In other words, the gods' undecidability is an element of the fourfold and consequently an element of the life of mortals on earth and under the sky.

Now, why gods in the plural? Both Darwiche and Harman explain this very well: the plurality of the gods is not due to a disbelief in monotheism or a desire to see the return of a kind of pagan polytheism, but an attempt to show that no god can stand for any form of singularity (such as, for example, *the* infinite or *the* absolute) because no singularity can evade having a multiplicity of features.<sup>32</sup> This means we have many gods *or* we have *a* God with many different incarnations. The same can be said of the other plural in the fourfold: mortals. There isn't just one mortal standing for all mankind or a human being in contrast to a divine being. There are many mortals or a humanity subject to many deaths. The plural equivalence between mortals and gods is key because both participate in the creation of the fourfold and therefore of time-space. As such, they are both incalculable because the fourfold always already bursts any attempt at totalization and puts out of play all "focalising despotism."<sup>33</sup>

On their own, these gods can only have one function: to announce that something is changing. Their messages add something new to the fourfold; they designate the irruption in which everything suddenly needs to be rethought.<sup>34</sup> They are messengers announcing what can suddenly be recognized as un-expected. These messages show that the future does not happen in one lump, the gods do not provide us with a chunk of future every now and then; they provide us with a plurality of un-predictable messages, that is, with an incalculable multiplicity of un-expected future-presents. This is the only way the future materializes itself: *un-expectedly* from that which we have *already identified* as the future. However, it would be wrong to think that the gods are free-floating entities interfering with the fourfold whenever it suits them. The gods are *tied to* the very event of being and their messages aim to give a certain directionality to the event itself. Heidegger's gods are what Darwiche rightly calls 'destinal voices.'<sup>35</sup> This does not mean that they spring from the human spirit in order to fulfill a specific emotional need. This means that the gods can only be understood *as part of* the event of being's destinal trajectory; a trajectory that they themselves help to create with their always un-settling messages.

This gives the gods a really surprising dimension: contrary to what one might expect when it comes to divinities who always seem to lord over us, the fourfold's gods are not so much a part of the event of being; they are effectively *dependent* on this very event. As Heidegger says: '[The event of being] attains its greatness only if it is recognized as that which both the god of gods and all divinization *need*. What is "needed" is opposed to all mere utilization.'<sup>36</sup> We are no longer in the dependency of an all-knowing God to whom we owe our existence. This is not a reversal of incarnation whereby God would owe its embodiment to Jesus Christ, for example. This is not a reinterpretation of Greek gods either, whereby Zeus, for example, still

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<sup>32</sup> Harman, 'Dwelling With the Fourfold,' in *Space and Culture*, p296; Darwiche, *Heidegger, Le Divin et le Quadriparti*, p189.

<sup>33</sup> Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, p594.

<sup>34</sup> On this, see Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, p225.

<sup>35</sup> Darwiche, *Heidegger, Le Divin et le Quadriparti*, p190, my translation.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p192, my emphasis.

needs mortals in order to remain meaningful.<sup>37</sup> The gods simply *need* the event of being in order to sustain their undecided nature and messaging role.

Inversed, what all this is saying is that, paradoxically, the event of being effectively *fosters* the gods.<sup>38</sup> Now, this does not mean that the gods are inevitably absorbed by the event of being, thus leaving no room for the other in general. The gods all point to a realm necessarily outside of all forms of thematization and rationalization; to ‘things’ utterly unpredictable, dangerous, and even perhaps worrisome. This incalculable danger renders the event of being essentially vulnerable. Although the gods depend on the event of being in order to sustain their divine nature, they do not by the same token change the fact that danger or opportunity structures the event of being and mortals can still be called by an elsewhere. In this way, the gods bring about change (with their messages) and yet this change would not take place if it were not for the event that gave rise to it. Once again, this paradox does not erase or absorb the other. The messages can be lethal. The event of being can collapse at any time. This is what makes the fourfold: it includes, for example, the *certainty* of our death in a future utterly *unpredictable*. Not even the comfort of the future I can foresee is immune to the gods’ potentially erratic behavior.

So what is one to make of this fourfold and this specific understanding of the gods on our treadmill run? How do they allow for a loosening up of the stronghold imposed by our capitalist, techno-driven, measured, and distanceless time-space? In order to expose this new approach to time-space, it is necessary to examine in more detail this event of being on the treadmill. The aim in the next section is to rethink our run by rekindling our position on earth, under the sky, and with these gods that transform everything anew.

#### **IV. A Dis-stance on the Treadmill**

On the treadmill, I am I. However this ‘I’ is not, as is well known, a zero-point in time-space, the place at which the event of being starts. This mortal ‘I’ is a spacing, but a type of spacing that implies *both* a measurable spatial and temporal dimension *and* what escapes all forms of measurement.<sup>39</sup> In other words, I am at once a measurable distance in time-space (a body *in* space and time) and an immeasurable one, i.e. what gives the possibility of the measurable distance in the first place.<sup>40</sup> This dis-stance (the hyphen emphasizing the two spacings) therefore knows no point of gravity, no center of signification, no nucleus, core, soul, or kernel. ‘I’ or dis-stance thus stands for both the opening of time-space *and* the occupancy of this time-space in a situation where there is no opening properly speaking and this occupancy is never

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<sup>37</sup> On this theme, see Tim O’Connor, ‘L’ Appropriation et la trahison de l’autre absolu,’ in Richard Kearney and Joseph Stephen O’Leary, eds., *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009, pp293-309.

<sup>38</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, translated by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary, London, Continuum, 2006, p208.

<sup>39</sup> On this theme, see Rebecca Saunders, ‘Keeping A Distance: Heidegger and Derrida on Foreignness and Friends,’ in *Angelaki* 16, 2 (June 2011), 35-49.

<sup>40</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2011, p74.

precisely determined. The double connotation of the word put forward to make sense of this ‘I’ on the treadmill (i.e. dis-stance) *must*<sup>41</sup> be respected if one is to think the time-space of this run anew.

But how is one in all simplicity to understand this mortal ‘I’ as dis-stance? Within the context of the fourfold, this dis-stance is a ‘between’ mortals and gods.<sup>42</sup> Once again, this ‘between’ is not a now-point or the place where body and mind aggregate themselves. This ‘between’ (or dis-stance) can never be *entirely* given over to the ontic sciences (biology, physiology, psychology, history, biomechanics, nutrition or medicine) for analysis or evaluation precisely because it is constitutively part of the fourfold. This does not mean that the dis-stance or ‘between’ referred to here is mystical, escapes all formal logic, or evades history altogether. The dis-stance *has* to make sense simply because it is a recognizable event as such. However, because it is structured by the fourfold and involves gods, it is necessarily *at the cusp* of formal logic, *on the verge* of being analyzable by the ever-dissatisfied ontic sciences—including the discursive attempts of this very essay, which for example, asks:

But what on earth could this ‘between’ on the verge of being analyzable actually mean? What on earth does a sweating dis-stance look like under the sky? The only way to make sense of this is to pay close attention to the temporal structure of this dis-stance or ‘between.’ If one takes this mortal ‘I’ as dis-stance seriously, then it becomes clear that with every step, we have not one time (measurable) but two times: a chronological time and an originary time, a time out of synch and a time that looks back at this out-of-jointedness.<sup>43</sup> The ‘between’ in question here therefore refers not to a spatial measure, but to a stretch dis-stance two temporal dimensions: the finite measure of a mortal sweating and struggling with the machine and the in-finite interruption of that very finite measure. This two-time structure gives us a better sense of what we earlier meant by ‘what escapes all forms of measurement.’ On the treadmill, this ‘between’ or dis-stance is both in time and the origin of time, without the latter ever constituting an *arché* as such.

But at what time—or from which of the two times—do gods interfere? When—or from where—do they send their messages while creating and being in time-space? Undecided, the gods can only operate on—or at—*both* these two times. On the one hand, they operate within chronological time: they belong to and manifest themselves *in history*. On the other, as it were, they retreat in the realm of divinization thus preventing mortals from *ever* being able to perceive the creation of time ‘as such.’ The gods are what sustains the hyphen in the open word dis-stance; they bring the ‘between’ to light without ever allowing humans to completely shed light on it. Inversely, their undecidedness between these two times is the result of their dependency on the event of being overall. They can only send their messages *on time* or from *out* of time because their divine status is both utterly dependent on the event

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<sup>41</sup> On the imperative for this indeterminacy, see Oliver Marchart, *Post-foundational Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University press, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p192.

<sup>43</sup> On this theme, see Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, p. 595 and using a different vocabulary, Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Patricia Dailey, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, p67.

and radically unpredictable, making the event of being always already out of synch, unfathomable as to its origin or end.

These two times (chronological and originary) allow us to make sense of the relationship between gods and mortals within the context of the fourfold. On earth and under the sky, mortals look up to the gods. However, this looking up is no mere idolatry<sup>44</sup>: they do not hope for a sign, salvation, or redemption. The reason they don't idolize the gods is because contrary to a religious God; the gods suffer no *proper* representation, not even that provided by non-iconodulist religions whereby god has, for example, ninety-nine names. The gods remain here always already on the edge of representation or designation. Heidegger is very clear on this when he draws attention to the fact that the gods are not harbingers of salvation, but are *a hold* in mortals' engagement with their very event. He writes: 'Mortals dwell in that they await the gods as gods. In hope, they hold up to the gods what is un hoped for.'<sup>45</sup> The most difficult thought imaginable. To hold up to the gods what is un hoped for is to be aware of something recognizable that is also, curiously, without contents, outside of all conceptuality, even if structured by emotion.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that the hold cannot be explained. This simply means that what is held is both within and beyond calculative reason—the gods would not hold such an alluring power if this were not the case.

So here we are. The 'I' on the treadmill is not just a subject. He might be gendered, he might be wearing a gym outfit, listening to rap, and nearing the end of his run, but all this really doesn't *count* for much. Between earth and sky, this event is a sundering of dimensions, a fourfold: 'I' am both 'here and now,' mortal, at this very hour, in this basement *and* 'I' am the origin of everything I face today. To put it in a nutshell, I am a 'stance'<sup>47</sup>: I am both a body covering a certain distance (my 1.81 m and 75 KG body has now accomplished twenty-three minutes, my incline is 8 per cent and my speed is 13 km per hour) and a body dis-stanceing all this measuring. This stance is not just a deconstructive paradox summed up with one quirky word because on this earth and under this sky, the gods also play their disruptive part, encouraging or threatening at any moment this stance running here on this treadmill.

But what motivates this 'between,' dis-stance, or stance on this run? What's the weal that drives this run on these wheels? And finally, but most importantly, how does this weal give this stance its political impetus?

## V. Towards a Fourfold Life

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<sup>44</sup> On this topic, see both Jean-Luc Marion, 'La Double Idolâtrie,' and Marie Viella-Petit, 'Heidegger est-il "idolâtre"?' in Kearney, *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, pp67-94 and 95-141, respectively.

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p148, translation modified.

<sup>46</sup> For a contrasting content-based hope, see, for example, Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vols. I, II, III, translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1995 and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London, Penguin, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> On this word, see Nancy, *The Creation of the World* and Jean-Paul Martinon, 'Im-Mundus or Nancy's Globalizing-World-Formation,' in Sanja Dejanovic ed., *Nancy and the Political*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp219-244.

In order to work out what keeps ‘me’ on the treadmill, we need to return once again to these gods because these hold the value that drives ‘my’ stance. For the gods to be gods, they need to stand for something that has a memorable value without at the same time being general or universal. So, for example, the gods that structure the fourfold of my event here and now do not subject me to a particular value that belongs to the people or the masses (fitness, for example), as if a regulative idea in a Kantian sense.<sup>48</sup> I hold up to them a value that, *however unstable*, sustains me in my run. This value is at once negotiable (because it is memorable; it enters an economy that I can trade or write off) *and* non-negotiable because however dependent, the gods can break the ‘hold’ without me having a say. In other words, the ‘hold’ here is at once a recognizable expectancy (the gods can potentially open up to the divine realm) and something that falls outside of all forms of expectancies. The value ‘held’ by the gods is therefore impossible to pin down properly and yet it sustains my thought stream as I run.

So what strange negotiable and non-negotiable value do I hold up? What are the gods *of* my run? A seemingly immature, but nonetheless necessary question. We have seen that this value is simply what is “unhoped for,” that is, what I cannot hope, predict, project, or plan, thus confirming that the value indeed shelters a side that falls outside of all expectancies. The gods promise me what I cannot hope for. What kind of value is that? What god holds such a value? If I stay with the topic of this run, then this value is the state of finally getting hold of the shackles of capitalist, techno-driven, measured, and distanceless time-space. This is the god *of* my run; this is my unhoped-for value. Unhoped-for because I know that this will never happen. Nonetheless, I hold up the value that I alone will eventually hold the shackles of time-space as ruled by the law of the wheel and the logic of the same. An incredible value, an incredible god; because it implies that what triggers my very existence—creating time-space—can also take hold of the fastening mechanism of measured time-space. As this clearly shows, this is not any kind of value that can be measured. The only measure that such an unusual value can have is that of being effectively the *other* of all measure: a god, a life: at once calculable and incalculable (hence the strange equivalence between gods and mortals). An infuriating situation that can only disappoint all those who seek a reassuring certainty for either the presence or absence of gods and (in either case) a secure return for their in-valuable life spent on earth.

What becomes clear now—finally—is that to sustain in my thought stream such an unusual value can only foster the most resilient political *stance* against the oppression and hegemony of clock time. This resilience helps me to basically say: I ‘am’ part of a fourfold in which there are gods that, in their quasi-other-worldly powers, prevent me from absentmindedly abiding to the constraints of measured time-space. As *one of* the ‘origins’ of time-space, I will not let myself be placed under the authority of what has been calculated and traded in the negligence of the fourfold. Because it marshals my very own life-drives, my fourfold stance, even on this treadmill, with-stands all forms of measurement and economy. As such, this stance is not a power, strength, capacity or ability. If it were, it would be tradable, thus returning me to being again a prisoner of measured time-space. This fourfold stance is resilient precisely because it is at the

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<sup>48</sup> On this regulative idea, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Mary Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

very cusp of the event of being, just when time-space is created, here, now, on this treadmill, in the very last seconds of this chrono-metered run and also, afterwards, in the showers and on the train taking me to my next timed appointment—my in-finity in act.

This resilient political *stance* necessarily puts itself on the side of approximation. A commodified, calculable, and measureable life basically says: by abiding to capitalist, techno-driven, measured, and distanceless time-space, you will eventually reach what is proper, what occupies time-space properly. The delusion of properness is, as Jacques Derrida rightly observed, a veiled enigma that rules our lives.<sup>49</sup> This veiled enigma sustains all efforts, political, economical, and theoretical, including the efforts of putting together, for example, this issue of *New Formations*. Against such veiled enigma and therefore against all these efforts, my fourfold stance can only call, by contrast, for approximations: a life finally unshackled by any form of calculation and computation. This does not mean a life led by rough guesses or devoid of punctuality.<sup>50</sup> This simply means a life attuned to the vagaries of the fourfold, to the impenetrable darkness and silence of the earth, to the elevations provided by a diurnally lit sky, at the hands of utterly dependent gods. This stance with its odd promised value will not make treadmills disappear, but it will at least unveil the enigma that controls our urgent regulated lives.

Unveiled and on the side of approximation, this resilient political stance, which is not a calculative resistance properly speaking,<sup>51</sup> can only thereby foster the most effective of political *acts* because these are addressed from the fourfold to a future *beyond* the distanceless that confines me. The acts of this resilient stance can only indeed address themselves to a future *without me*, a future free of all future-presents *in which I still matter*. In a situation where there are gods, it is indeed no longer possible to act exclusively for goals or ends in *this* life.<sup>52</sup> The acts of this stance can only stretch themselves out towards a beyond the event of being, that is, beyond all future-presents shaken to the point of atheism. As such, these acts cannot become accountable or tradable and they cannot end up being seen as transcendental or devotional in a religious or institutional setting. These acts are effectively *tuned in*—here, now, in this basement—to the fourfold, to the gods and their messages that not only come from the very event of being, but also from a place totally alien to it; a divine realm where I no longer exist, *where I no longer matter*. This is the only way the measured distanceless can be overlooked. *Finally*, with the fourfold, I can act and my actions go beyond capitalist techno-driven time-space—even if these are tied to the erratic nature of my dependent gods.

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<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, translated by Barbara Harlow, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979, p49.

<sup>50</sup> On this theme, see Allen C. Bluedorn, *The Human Organization of Time: Temporal Realities and Experiences*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, especially the chapter 'Seldom Early, Never Late.'

<sup>51</sup> On the theme of calculative resistance, see the remarkable Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> For life-structured goals see, for example, Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, London, Schocken Books, 2005, pp193-9.

With actions attuned to the fourfold, this resilient *stance* can only thereby generate an ‘I’ and, by extension, a world un-hooked from its own maddening urgencies. As it stands, the world is, like me, on a treadmill, building, trading, fighting, always in the hope of a return in the present, *in this life*—billions of singularities desperately keeping pace in order to hope for a repayment—*now*. A curious desperation because this frenetic pace can, like me, on my treadmill, adjust itself to a fourfold life, *un-tied* from measured time-space, in accord with earth and sky, and receptive to gods’ messages. Without any decrease in speed and without any romanticism, religiosity, or idealism, such adjustment can only rekindle the world to its own weal, a weal not structured by any form of redemption, resolution or by the dialectics of means and ends. The world’s weal is precisely what allows it to project itself *beyond* its own finitude, beyond its very survival, into a realm where *the world itself no longer matters*. On this *other* side, the gods always hold their promise—even if it is not what we hope for. We only have to hear them and act. The fourfold life awaits us.

Average speed: 8.1 km per hour. Distance: 6.5 km. Calories burned: 328.8 Kcal. Body fat Combustion: 23.5 g. MET: 19.3.

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