

Currere as punctuated manifestations

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Abstract

Currere emphasizes individual experience and how one can learn from these experiences (Pinar, 2011). This paper explores how one's individual experience (*currere* writing) affords "punctuated manifestations" in which one who is spatially and temporally embodied and entangled engages in a recursive helictical motion of transformation while wandering through various thresholds of understanding toward infinity and traversing between/across the imagined and unimaginable and beyond. In associating with ancient Chinese novels and certain ideas in Chinese Taoism, this paper illuminates the construction and reconstruction of layers of experience, which may contribute to an alternative way of understanding *currere* by highlighting *currere* as a method that embraces the endless fluidity of one's experiences creating an infinite, yet subliminal myriad of intersectionalities, crossings, and synthesis. Such a *currere* of punctuated manifestations describes emanating intersectionalities of particularity and universality, lived crossings of subjectivity and contingency, entangled convergences of past, present, and future, orienting us toward our "interiority" (Doll, 2017, p. 96). Then, *currere* becomes a thriving centerpiece from which to extend, to punctuate, to attune. Unfolding through contingency, the punctuated manifestations of *currere* stress endlessly approaching one's "interiority" while embedding oneself within expanding encounters with self and others.

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Introduction

Currere is a paradigm shift in the way we ruminate education experience (Morris, 2015). The Latin infinitive of the curriculum—*currere*—invoked by Pinar (1975) emphasizes the lived, embodied experience of curriculum that is structured by the past and potential future for the sake of self-understanding and social reconstruction.

Currere occurs through conversation and ongoing dialogical encounters among students and teachers in classrooms but also within oneself in solitude (Pinar, 2011). Acknowledging that the running of the course occurs socially and subjectively through academic study (sometimes silent, sometimes spoken), the concept of *currere* reconceptualizes the meaning of the curriculum as complicated conversation, which comprises the lived experience of curriculum and the social, political, and cultural enactment of experience through conversation (Pinar, 2019). Curriculum as complicated conversation takes individuals far beyond the conception

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that curriculum is simply a body of academic knowledge separated from us who study it; on the contrary, curriculum as a conversation emphasizes the ongoing reconstruction of knowledge – subjective reconstruction of academic knowledge and life experience which courses through one's life (Wang, 2020). This method of *currere* understands curriculum as a lived path as well as a course of study. Curriculum is not merely a “thing” to be studied; it is a path that is lived.

Currere provides a “sketch of subjectivity-structured temporality” (Pinar, 2011, p. 6). In the autobiographical method of *currere*, the student of curriculum situates simultaneously in the past, present, and future, which allows a “reconstruction of the present through the reactivation of the past, differentiating present-mindedness into the co-extensive simultaneity of temporal attunements, expressed individually in a social context through academic knowledge” (Pinar, 2011, p. 51). *Currere* is a conversational process in which participants, threaded through the study of academic knowledge, reactivate the past, reconstruct the present, and look to the future by talking with themselves, with figures across time and space (Wang, 2020). Such a conversational process from within transcends the boundary of classroom and school.

Certainly, *currere* emphasizes the everyday experience of the individual and one's capacity to learn from that experience (Pinar, 2011). Such understanding—however partial and provisional—can be achieved by studying one's lived experience, the experience informed by political, social, and cultural norms and events (Pinar, 2019). Hence, such educational experience encourages subjective and social reconstruction. Informed by phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis, this autobiographical theory of curriculum – *currere* – suggests a shift in focus “from external, behaviorally oriented learning objectives and predetermined subject matter content to the interrogation of students' and teachers' inner experiences and perceptions” (Miller, 2010, p. 62). *Currere* emphasizes how each individual is socially and culturally situated in a particular historical moment and what his or her situatedness means to each. Pinar designed four steps (regression, progression, analysis, and synthesis) to “reveal educational experience and understand what principles and patterns have been at work in one's educational experience” (Cortazzi, 2014, p. 13).

Currere engages students in autobiographical writing that provokes reflection on how and why they have developed intellectually and emotionally. Through a reflective study of the relations between school knowledge, life history, and intellectual development, *currere* fosters a enhanced engagement with the world instead of an isolated retreat from it (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 415). In this complicated conversation, academic knowledge and life experience are entangled with each other, mutually informative and constitutive. Academic knowledge enables a more sophisticated understanding of the world. With academic knowledge, one can understand life experiences more deeply and can make connections that may not have been noticed or may not have been previously recognized as important (Wang, 2020). While searching for the connection between the private and the public, *currere* also creates opportunities to consider the particularity of each experience. It is a temporal and recursive process.

In what follows, while associating with Chinese classical novels and certain ideas in Chinese Taoism, I will focus on my understanding of *currere* as punctuated manifestations. The punctuated manifestations of *currere* describe one's experiences that are superimposed and

entangled spatially and temporally and how one engages in a helictical form of transformation approaching one's interiority while embedding oneself within the netted intricacies of "manifestations." This paper explores how one's individual experience (*currere* writing) affords "punctuated manifestations" in which one dwells between the past and future, the thinking and feeling, the given and possible, the limitation and infinity, while traversing across them again and again, thereby reaching toward one's interiority.

Currere as Punctuated Manifestations

Each story manifests a certain reality. *Currere* presents itself as various manifestations that are layered spatially and temporally and describe how these different layers of manifestations (of any element) may interact, integrate, or permeate among each other. Thus, through various ever-expanding encounters between themselves, manifestations become "punctuated" in which both past and present, thinking and feeling, the given and possible, limitation and infinity are sparked, entwined, enmeshed, structured by sedimented, entangled webs of trails and traces with no end and no start. Punctuation is the imbricated point where everything connects with a myriad pattern of dichotomies reconfiguring all the time.

Such sedimented, punctuated manifestations are not "mappings of an existing site or context, but of the complexity of the intended programme for the site" (Corner, 1999, p. 235). The construction of *currere* is "not a two-dimensional cartographic representation of something like landscape or geography but rather a construct of 'vacant layers' or a living grid of layered planes made up of 'contextual points' which one can ricochet up, down, across and between so that liminality becomes multidimensional across space and time" (Sameshima & Irwin, 2008, p. 5). Layered manifestations, hence, describe complexity, characterized by in-between liminal space awaiting to be read. They are not simply co-existing or layering (as one recalls one's past), and they may constitute a flow across layers, express one or more themes, representing a certain type of experience in particular, in a mobile fashion, like what Pinar et al. (1995) describe "as a series of narratives superimposed upon each other, interlaced among each other, layers of story merged and separated like colors in a Jackson Pollock painting" (p. 448). One wanders within and traverses across such a layered, storied manifestation as one recalls one's past and contemplates the present and future (Irwin, 2006). In doing so, one reconfigures one's path with both temporal and spatial elements imbricated, eventually sparking at points from which they lead to new directions again. Between and among each manifestation, there are invisible "trails"; any element of each manifestation can be a starting point, conveying one to more directions, like a flash of lightning.

To illustrate, I will use an example of a Chinese classical novel. Of the Four Chinese Classical Novels, *The Journal to the West* describes how *Xuanzang*, a Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk, travels to the West Region with his three disciples to obtain Buddhist sacred texts. His first disciple, *Wukong*, has 72 polymorphic transformations. He can become a bird or a sword—anything he wants. He can fly in the sky and dive in the deep ocean, transforming himself into a different person or a little insect to make his way into another's stomach. He can also transform other things, including his furs into what he wants. He is a monkey, but he exceeds all the imagined boundaries, traversing through heaven, earth, and hell. Such a figure represents the incarnation of liminality, always transitional to something different. He is either strong or vulnerable (as an insect), either a man or a monkey. He travels through/in/between earth, heaven, and hell. He is himself, and he is not himself forever.

The four persons experience 81 adventures along their journey to the West, during which they fight against all kinds of evils and monsters. In the end, they obtain the Buddhist scripture and return after trials and suffering. Each adventure, for me, is one possible manifestation of reality; eighty-one adventures form a reservoir of manifestations with various aspects. These layered manifestations are interwoven, superimposed, mutually constitutive and informative, with one foregrounding as well as backgrounding another, rationality traversed by irrationality, and vice versa. Permeated through the manifestations is the gnawing sense of self, endowed with a penetrating power that inspires feelings and thinking. Then, one becomes the transcendental embodiment of the temporal, spatial particulars, of new possibilities, new configurations. This manifestation breeds non-phenomenal possibilities, with all structures being “provisional, momentary, a collection of twinkling stars in a firmament of flux” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 449), and each intersection point becomes “punctuated” along the invisible trail across manifestations. The movement of *currere* experienced by us might be exactly akin to the layered manifestation presented by this classical novel, allowing us to wander, to linger, and even to exceed.

Across the manifestations, a particular self exists, who lingers, discovers, attunes, and is haunted by unarticulated “desires” all the time. The face of desires varies, and their presence is contextualized and expressed through various encounters. However, they all point to a belongingness that is primordial and real.

The currere of manifestations unfolds itself through contingency. Wang (2020) argues that contingency refers to the particularity of the event, contingent upon one’s perspective and situational context, informed by the universality that is both known and unknown. Contingency, hence, seems to be the expanding and poignant center as one’s perspective and context in which one inhabits may alter, in which an unrestrained and infinite pool of connecting details which has relevance for the emerging formation (Ames, 1996). Apparently, contingency is not enclosed; it is open to transformation, open to perspectives taken, which is “neither willing to stop moving, restless, transient and transitive...drawing one charged moment into another, constituting knowledge in an ongoing process of transmission and transferal” (Pollock, 1998, pp. 90-91, as cited in Sameshima & Irwin, 2008, p. 6). Contingency may foster a threshold for various understanding and possibilities toward a world that is between the imagined and the unimagined—a space of resonated wandering. It is similar to co-dependent arising in Buddhism. Contingency is either a movement or a site where transformation is triggered.

As one “reads” each particular manifestation (story), one may see and understand differently. Each story conveys an individual particularization among readers through readers’ diverse reflection and resonance, opening itself up to all others, the aggregate of which reflects as far as the eyes can see and the heart can feel, even though each of them is oriented in a slightly different way (Sameshima & Irwin, 2008). Each manifestation is open and dynamic, engaging one in cyclical transformation. Each manifestation and analysis, through *currere*, is one’s own “reading” of one’s lived experience of the world. With those stories being put together, a more holistic picture and understanding ensues. *Currere*, hence, compels one to perceive the plurality of reality and creates a space for one to wander among these layered manifestations. It is akin to how internal alchemists interpret texts that are classical, canonical, and foundational. These internal alchemy texts do not have only one real sense and are created

precisely in order to embody concurrent manifold senses (Clarke, 2000) by different internal alchemists. Moreover, what is derived from contingency is subject to further transformation, the process of which is cyclic, recursive, leading one to the deeper and broader realm of exploration. *Currere* renders one this freedom to make sense of one's own manifestation(s).

Each manifestation is thus derived from one's lived sense of self (subjectivity) and contingency. Contingency as the particularity of one's situatedness is both subjective and objective. *Currere* of punctuated manifestations is where social, psychical, and personal (subjective) work in and through oneself, where subjectivity and contingency converge and intersect, where the past and present, thinking and feeling, the given and possible, are entwined. *Currere* of punctuated manifestations describes "the invisible but felt convergences" that pervade through manifestations, in which one's ever-shifting differences (temporally) constituted by one's subjectivity and contingency encounter one another again and again. Experiences, therefore, continually flow across the limits and boundaries established by certain nodal points.

Unfolding through contingency, one acquires self-understanding through *currere*, a method of turning inward. This self-understanding, which is derived from tangled up manifestations and socially and culturally informed, dwells between thinking and feeling, the given and possible, past and future, "a passionate inwardness" (McKnight, 2010, p. 510) that attunes one to the world in which one inhabits. This self-understanding, as attuned sensitivity to which thoughts, emotions, and bodily senses point, provides its own path of opening and unfolding (Wang, 2020). However, after one attains a certain self-understanding (to some extent, as one always engages in change), with this understanding, one may attune oneself to a broader world, being woven into a space of transformation, seeing the unordinary in the ordinary. It gestures toward a "back journey to everyday spirituality" simultaneously. Therefore, *currere* presents itself as a recursive process involving seeking and discovering, re-discovering and re-seeking again and again, an endless process with no start and end. Such a process seems to resonate with the concept of seeking and returning in Eastern education.

Eastern education with a spiritual orientation is defined as "an attempt for awakening or enlightenment" (Nakagawa, 2008, p. 240), and this spirituality of education involves a path seeking toward infinite reality and returning from infinite reality—two modes of movement. *Currere* involves both seeking and returning. The seeking starts with one's writing and contemplation using the method of *currere* for the sake of self-understanding. This return can be interpreted through the concept of attunement proposed by the author (Wang, 2020; 2022). Attunement derived from *currere* describes how one can learn from one's daily experience, and as one acquires deepened self-understanding through *currere* writing, with this understanding acquired, one can learn more from one's daily experience (Wang, 2022). It refers to inspirational, passionate learning guided and experienced by oneself subjectively. Attunement, then, corresponds to the returning of the twofold movement of seeking and returning—a dynamic character found in many Eastern spiritual practices (Nakagawa, 2008)—a returning from spiritual awakening. The spiritual awakening in this paper might be akin to the acquisition of self-understanding or self-knowledge. Being attuned means seeing beyond the present, rendering oneself endless openings to see something unordinary in the ordinary. Attunement guided by the method of *currere* is what everyday spirituality harbors; even the corpuscular in this world reveals the infinite as it actually is. "To see the world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower" is the way poet William Blake puts it. One can thus find spirituality in everyday life, which emphasizes that one views self and world beyond

what it is currently contained after one experiences spiritual awakening (acquisition of self-understanding). Thus, seeking and returning, self and world, and East and West are not separated from each other, a crossing bridge is one's attunement. Reverberating each other, each existence traverses another. In such a vein, what *currere* affords might be similar to, in Taoism, the movement of change, which is considered cyclic:

The movement of change thus conceived is never one-dimensional in direction. If we keep to an image, cyclic movement is the best term for it... The notion of progress, which we have incorporated in the idea of cyclic movement by the image of a spiral, is alien to the ancient concept of change (Wilhelm, 1962, p. 20).

Taoist cosmology is cyclic, not evolutionary... Since Taoism is cyclic in outlook it naturally does not worship at the shrine of progress (Cooper, 1972, p. 46).

Taoism views all kinds of visible cosmic and biological change, not only of the seasons and of birth and death, as cyclic (Needham, 1956, p. 75, as cited in Freiberg, 1975). There are some quotes in *Tao Te Ching* that may echo this sentiment: In Tao, the only motion is returning (Ch. 40); This is returning to the state of infancy (Ch. 28). In the Taoist world of circularity and unity, the patterns "repeat themselves endlessly on all levels" (Freiberg, 1975, p. 316). Freiberg (1975) observes that the concept of circulation of chi (breath), or sometimes of light, lies at the heart of the Taoist meditation techniques, as shown in the following passages from "The Secret of the Golden Flower" (Wilhelm, 1962):

Therefore, you only have to make the light circulate; that is the deepest and most important secret... When the spirit lives, the breath (ch'i) will begin to circulate in a wonderful way... The most marvelous effect of the Tao is the circulation in conformity with the law... (p. 22, 29, 72).

Such a circulation of *Chi* implies a recursive process of turning inward, and it may "visualize" the work of *currere*. In Taoism, this circulation of *Chi* is the practice of internal alchemy. Internal alchemy is the Taoist technique for enlightenment through engaging in mental, physical, and spiritual practices (Robinet, 2011). In internal alchemy, the human body becomes a cauldron in which the three treasures of *Jing* ("Essence"), *Chi* ("Breath"), and *Shen* ("Spirit") are fostered for the purpose of improving physical, emotional, and mental health, and ultimately returning to the primordial unity of the *Tao*, i.e., becoming an Immortal. Within the individual's body, an alchemist is to "breed" an "internal elixir" through which one enhances the body and reaches perfection (*zhen* 真). To achieve this goal, internal alchemists employ the method of inner vision, which has come to be termed in the West as the method of "visualization" (Clarke, 2000). This inner vision is a crucial component of Taoist internal alchemy, a method that "appears to open up avenues of inner exploration which are not part of the traditional Western spiritual repertoire" (Clarke, 2000, p. 125). It typically involves rotating the breath or the light within the body through a dynamic means of inner "seeing" or "imaging" (Clarke, 2000, p. 126). By this means, alchemists are guided to usher into an inner space and to awaken the myriad spirits inside one's body cultivating an inner elixir (Clarke, 2000). Thus, by turning their gaze inwards recursively, the use of the method of inner vision, alchemists are able to perceive particularly and prudently the gods in their bodies, visualizing them as well as leading them through the inner body, and so to attain unity with the *Tao* (Clarke, 2000; Kroll, 1996). Eventually the Taoist alchemist's spirit, mind, and body completely attain perfection and harmony in accord with the *Tao*. This unity with *Tao* might be similar to semiotics proposed by Kristeva, which is "the psychic receptacle—archaic, mobile, unstable, prior to the One, to the father" (Kristeva, as cited in Silverman & Welton,

1988). It is pre-Oedipal, preverbal, growing out of bodily drives, mediated through tones, rhythms, and traces, a poetic reality, as discussed by Stone (2007).

This concept of inner vision “visualizes” or “crystalizes” the process of transformation of internal alchemists that happens within their body, thereby achieving self-transcendence. Hence, it is an inner process that focuses on inner exploring, assembling, integrating, creating, and recreating inner energies in order to realize self-transcendence while continuously corresponding and harmonizing with the external, working from within that explores “archetypal core,” a process of recovering the hidden. For internal alchemists, the searching and cultivation for a Golden elixir in one’s body is to reverse, back to the most primitive, the original. Internal alchemy is a process of turning inward, and for me, *currere* is the method of inner vision.

Essentially and eventually, the *currere* of punctuated manifestation possibly points to the innermost part of one’s experience—“the interiority” (Doll, 2017, p. 96). For Doll (2017), this interiority is the archetypal core of oneself, an inherited psychological structure and process. In her journey of *currere*, Doll (2017) describes how myth and literature can allow her to see the archetypal core—“the basic givens of psychic life” (p. 16), “the reality that lies underneath words” (p. 139), a psychic reality through which one approaches self and world, made available through reading literature and myth, guided by *currere*. Thus, one is able through story “to grasp more coherently the world” (p. 48) in which feeling, thinking, and imagining, rational and non-rational, systematic and nonsystematic, multiple modes of thought and feeling are complementing each other. To understand this psychic reality is to approach interiority that is embodied in one’s thoughts, behaviors, and dispositions. Approaching this interiority and “tapping” the coursing within animate our inner world and render self-understanding (Casemore, 2019; Doll, 2017). To make it explicit, “The work of the curriculum theorist,” Doll (2017) posits, is to “tap this intense current within, that which courses through the inner person, that which electrifies or gives life to a person’s energy source” (p. 49). This interiority is akin to what Pinar calls subjectivity—lived gnawing sense of self. The work of *currere* through literature reading allows one to tap one’s interiority, approaching the core of oneself, the innermost part of a person. *Currere* is to see archetypally.

Seeing archetypally orients us to navigate through reality that is non-translucent, “charged with unconscious meaning” (Casemore, 2019, p. 11), during which one lingers back and forth, approaching the infinite encountering with alterity, sameness, and beyond. This lingering allows one to feel, to resonate, to grasp archetypally. To expound, there is a famous story in Chinese history:

During the eighth century Wu Tao-tzu (d. 792) completed his last masterpiece for the royal court. It was a landscape painted on a wall of the court. Wu worked patiently on it in solitude and kept the work draped until it was completed and the Emperor arrived for its unveiling. Wu drew aside the coverings and the Emperor gazed at the vast and awesome scene and its magnificent detail: woods, mountains, limitless expanses of sky, speckled with clouds and birds, and even men in the hills. “Look,” said the artist pointing, “here dwells a spirit in a mountain cave.” He clapped his hands, and the gate of the cave immediately flew open. The artist stepped in, turned, and said, “The inside is even more beautiful. It is beyond words. Let me lead the way!” But before the Emperor could follow or even bring himself to speak, the gate, the artist, the painting and all faded away. Before him remained only the blank wall with no trace of any brush marks. (Chang, 1963, p. 95)

What can we see from this story? Can we dwell in such a surreal, fugitive world that can only be approached through our feeling? The feeling allows one to enter the lived connection with oneself and the world that one has ignored, calling for attunement, both conscious and unconscious. Do we see the world through feeling, through what makes us attuned and inspired? Intervoven with rational thinking, such a complex feeling yields expanded new formation(s), an ontological translation of what deeply inspires us, attunes us. Coupling with such a feeling, one unearths a cosmos of imagination grounded on layers of experiences available to our contemplation. Dwelling in a superimposed world in which rationality crosses irrationality and feeling intersects with thinking, how can we comprehend and understand more? The *currere* of manifestations, which is abundantly textured and distinctively formed, invites one to feel, to unfold, to re-envision.

Implications

In associating with ancient Chinese novels and certain ideas in Chinese Taoism, this paper further illuminates the construction and reconstruction of layers of experience, which may contribute to an alternative way of understanding *currere* by highlighting *currere* as a method that embraces the endless fluidity of one's experiences creating an infinite, yet subliminal myriad of intersectionalities, crossings, and synthesis. Such a *currere* of punctuated manifestations describes emanating intersectionalities of particularity and universality, lived crossings of subjectivity and contingency, entangled convergences of past, present and future, orienting us toward our "interiority." Thus, our experiences begin to "flow," from one place to another, from one temporal structure to another, from fixed to expanding, from universal to particular (and vice versa), during which we reconfigure, re-contemplate, re-feel in a mode of growing circularity. This is a manifold process in which each experience intersects with another, each perspective is interwoven into another, at the crossing point of East and West, particularity and universality, feeling and thinking. It offers a possible praxis for understanding *currere* through connecting with novels and certain ideas in Taoism. I would call it folk-poetic *currere*, an everyday poetic that affords us an opportunity to approach the essential structure of our beings. In comparison to the mythopoetic of *currere* (Doll, 2017), this folk-poetic of *currere* emphasizes the poetic quality of everyday experiences rendered by the method of *currere*. *Currere* of manifestation may help us understand entangled intersectionalities and crossings, unsettling what is currently lived and known, leading to alternative ways of knowing and thinking.

Conclusion

Currere offers a living field, a living space, and a living possibility. *Currere* takes one to the far and then brings one back home, eventually resituating one in a "poetic" reality that allows one to connect with one's interiority and galvanize the "inner flow" that sparks. Thus, *currere* is "my sword" by which I create a winding path, build a bridge to linger, and "venture" through the world. It has no fixed moves, with the most fluid gesture and transformative possibility. *Currere* (autobiography) is like a small rock being thrown into the water. When we throw a rock into a lake, and ripples start to form, first small ones appear in the area where the rock comes into contact with the lake, and then the displaced water extends in all directions, creating slightly larger and more distant waves or ripples. Each "ripple" allows certain insight into our educational experience and offers ways to embrace and cultivate self, then the world around, without much agitation.

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