

**Zeitschrift:** Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am  
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

**Herausgeber:** Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

**Band:** - (2020)

**Heft:** 37

**Artikel:** Metaphysical materialism

**Autor:** Costabile, Isabella

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-981457>

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*«Habitual thinking implies closing unfamiliar pathways of reasoning and communication out of fear of revealing different attitudes and behaviors present in the world.»*

# METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM

## Isabella Costabile



Writing and appreciating poetry and expressing oneself through art forms are acts of pure feeling. Getting to know oneself through words, shapes, images, sounds, landscapes and the settings we encounter is a birthright. It is a necessity for the survival of our true selves to remember experiences and dreams with the aim to transform these resources into a reality. Choosing to respect the emotions we experience every day, reshaping them from their abstract state into discovery and understanding, is an attempt to break the silences we subject ourselves to, evolving from the imitations we learn to exist within.<sup>(1)</sup> When personal expression is conditioned to ignore uncharted thoughts and feelings, then all the unknown possibilities found in ourselves and in our social exchanges are lost, or remain hidden forever. The forms, words and signs that accumulate in a person's daily experiences, can be uniquely regenerated through this point of view. Ignoring these sensations so that they become intangible and get forgotten because it seems more convenient to suppress them, inevitably means renouncing potential parts of the self, to stay in the realms of thought that are served and repeated, which often only provides a false sense of protection.<sup>(2)</sup>

Habitual thinking implies closing unfamiliar pathways of reasoning and communication out of fear of revealing different attitudes and behaviors present in the world. Cultural commodification and standardization are modern tools that descend from colonization, as their impact on various territories and cultures has threatened the value of diversity, implementing a set of conformist ideals to mute the intuitive potential expressed by unfiltered voices. These unrecognized identities — living in marginalized and alienated states of being in their time — can, however, continue to shine from their struggles, gifted with the ability to share stories that could not be told or understood through the parameters of a conventional, dominant culture.

It is not a luxury to dream and allow space for the imagination to develop, so that those visions can be pursued and manifest in reality. We must be grateful for dreams and the prospects they allow us to see beyond the present, so that in the service of truth we may extend our light onto others touched by its reflection.<sup>(3)</sup> Since these visions instil a hopeful light keeping us alive, then maintaining an uninhibited approach towards the unknown, seeking knowledge outside of the stereotypical descriptions of life are acts of hope which challenge alienation to overcome the subjection to various types of silence.<sup>(4)</sup> The practice of giving form to the formless and a name to the nameless, is an essential part of our ability to learn from observing the surrounding environment, as well as our ability to emotionally relate to what we see.<sup>(5)</sup> These opportunities are unlimited because our habitual interactions with the external environment are much more transitory than they seem. Change occurs whether our character is disposed to receiving it or not, but developing a sense of interpretation in the situations happening around us is a beneficial skill that permits a sense of purpose, concerning both the predictable and the unpredictable.

In the middle of a valley, surrounded by fields of wheat, it is sometimes possible to have a shift in energy as the stillness

of the body is felt in the open space. The view of the horizon signals a connection to the movement and position of the planet. The existence of the landscape is much more significant than human perception often comprehends, simply as a source of beauty, of wealth or of consumption. When in nature, it is fundamental to remember that we are standing within an ecosystem: a rare balance of elements that can sustain the presence of life in the universe.

Poetic impressions carry a curiosity for overlooked characteristics in reality, when these selected details are taken from the world and elaborated by a writer or poet, they have the capacity to impact the perception of a situation or an object. These incisive gestures mutate words, images and light by releasing the obscure and the unnamed into a formal language. To observe signs that appear around us as though collecting new codes of information, is a practice that shapes a living language through documentation and invention. Over time, experience grows and deepens and so do the possibilities in this process of elaborating feelings and cultural memories, the unfamiliar parts of the self willingly emerge from the grey undefined areas of thought that would be too daunting to encounter in day-to-day expression.<sup>(6)</sup>

The intimate and radical tones of voice that can be heard throughout the collection of essays *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, resonate within this present moment of cultural expression in the year 2020. While I find myself moving through a presentation of words reflecting similar ideas stirring in and around me recently, I can only confirm the values that her writing proposes to society, with regard to understanding and appreciating the principle of diversity that life depends on.<sup>(7)</sup> This source of reasoning is a blessing for younger generations of thinkers and survivors, particularly in her encouragement towards activating one's self truth by respecting all the variations of being that exist in the social spectrum, in an awareness of the cultural, physical and emotional differences in every person. She also suggests empowering one's poetic voice from the submission to silence, by embracing the symbol of the black mother as intuitive power, to affront trials and manifest truth from them — rather than associating reason exclusively to ideals fathered by a white paternalistic society.<sup>(8)</sup>

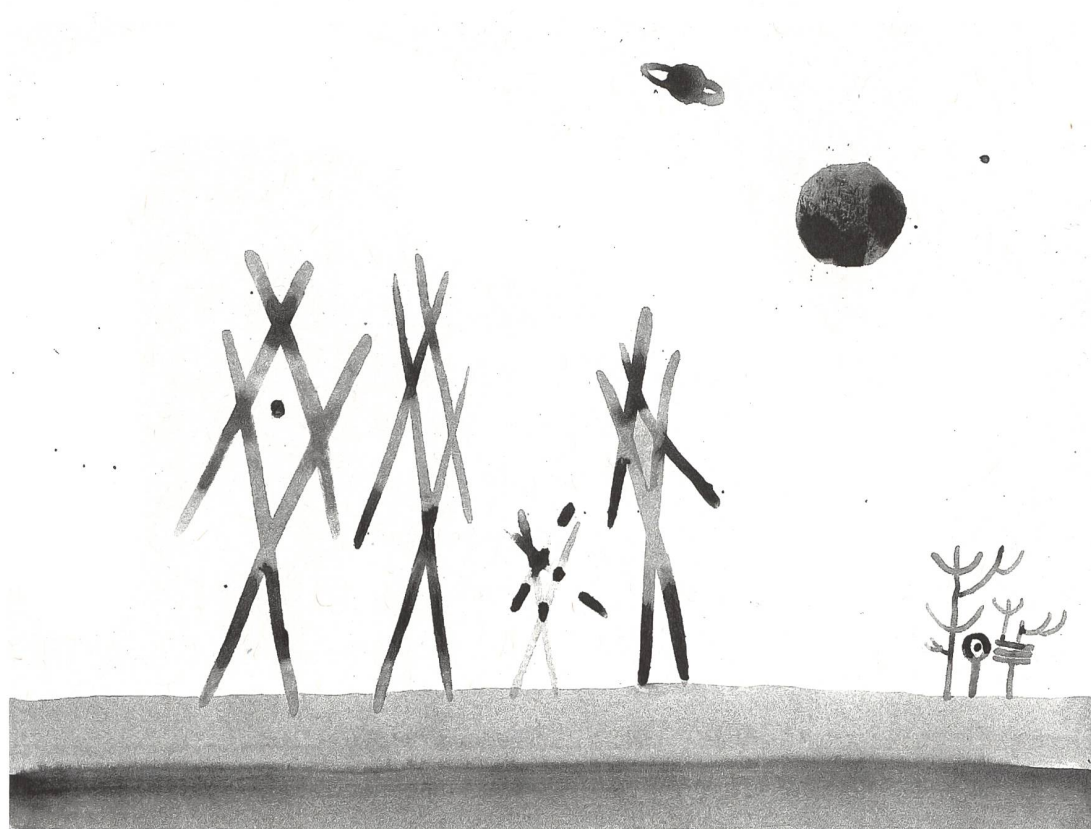
4,200 years ago lived a High Priestess in Ancient Mesopotamia, whose engravings on clay tablets have been studied and identified as the first forms of writing found with a signature.<sup>(9)</sup> They were, in fact, poems that Enheduanna decided to sign with her own name, in contrast to the common practice seen in many previous examples of Sumerian and Akkadian texts which were written anonymously.<sup>(10)</sup> These verses were dedicated to the goddess of the moon Inanna, and devotedly express her political and spiritual role as a messenger to the people of the Sumerian city called Ur.<sup>(11)</sup> This historic and mythical figure was a female leader of a religious institution and is the first author known by name in human history.

Enheduanna is remembered today as the original teacher of poetry and has sometimes been thought of in archeological reconstructions as a dark-skinned woman, a representation

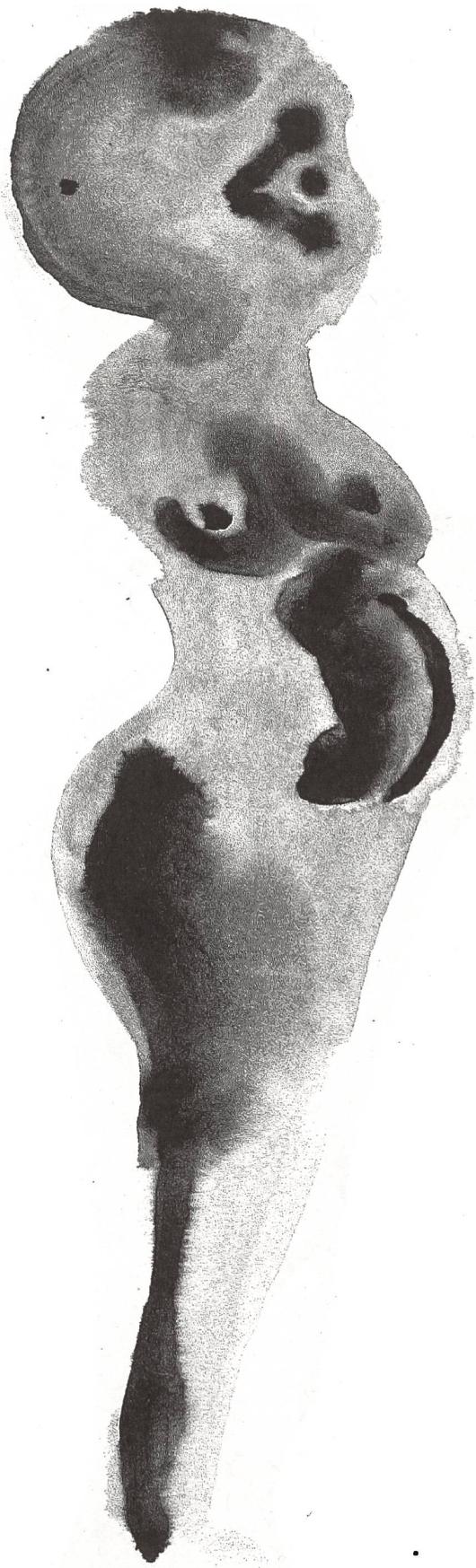




Emiliano Furia, 2020  
Pigment, water and wax on paper



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that is proved accurate through recent studies acknowledging the African origins of human civilization.<sup>(12)</sup> A deeper and truthful understanding of history can therefore attest that people's complexion of the ancient Sumer civilization were of diverse skin tones, in part due to migrations of black people coming from the Nile Valley and Sub-Saharan regions of North-East Africa.<sup>(13)</sup> Relations with various other ethnicities from the Mediterranean and Asia occurring during later dynastic eras, also contributed greatly to the combination of cultural and physical characteristics embodied by this particular population.<sup>(14)</sup> It is also important to note that every ethnicity on the planet can trace its DNA to the first homo sapiens who evolved in Africa, migrated across the continents through Asia, Europe, Australia and the Americas and after a long period of adaptation to the environmental conditions, developed newer physical characteristics.<sup>(15)</sup>

In these early periods of time when mythological tales were part of documented history, the early homo sapiens learned how to use and develop the first tools and systems for living, eventually forming large clusters of social organization around rivers and green pastures. They conducted life through fragile and powerful relations with the forces of nature and the notion of wealth began to be attributed to the cultivation of life sustaining resources, held together through a spiritual balance with the gods.<sup>(16)</sup> Their faces became more and more detailed on the walls of their temples, as cosmic knowledge was shared among tribes and between cities and kingdoms. One of the first terms used to name the geographical area in Africa where the Nile River runs through was Kemet, meaning *the black land* which is known in English as Ancient Egypt, taken from the word *Aígyptos* used by the Greeks.<sup>(17)</sup> Influences between the ancient cultures extending from North-East Africa to Mesopotamia can be seen in their religious art, as well as writings and in their practice of medicine, agriculture and astronomy. These traces from the past demonstrate exchanges of knowledge over millennia.<sup>(18)</sup>

A traditionally nomadic black population called the Nubians who came from south of Kemet, also had intertwining periods of political and social significance within Kemetic society which are known from the descriptions of Nubian Pharaohs.<sup>(19)</sup> During certain eras, these neighboring cultures worshipped similar gods, a visible spiritual relation that is still retraceable when considering the appearance of the Nubian pyramids built where Sudan is found today.<sup>(20)</sup> In the territory of Nubia moving south of the river Nile, the Kingdom of Kush was formed. Its inhabitants were referred to in the Bible as Kushites and are said to be related to the Biblical figure Cush, remembered in the stories told by the Hebrews as one of Noah's grandsons through Ham.<sup>(21)</sup> The Greeks called this region Attiopia which is a variation to a very similar name Ityopp'is, native to several languages spoken on the Horn of Africa.<sup>(22)</sup>

Amun was one of the principle deities worshipped in the fertile lands of Kemet and Nubia. The image of Amun was fused with the God of the Sun, Ra, seen in the many iconographic depictions produced by the Ancient Egyptians.<sup>(23)</sup> It seems to have been a common practice among populations

of the ancient world to adopt certain religious practices from others living in the surrounding areas, often merging their native stories and the divine figures who represented them with influences from other cultures. Another example of this archaic tradition is seen in the city of Thebes found in Greece, where the same divine figure was incorporated through the worship of Zeus Ammon.<sup>(24)</sup> The similarities occurring between different belief systems expressed through many symbols and languages, were sometimes results of shifting dynamics of power that determined a certain authority over widely practised traditions in society and the iconographic representations of life sustaining that power's legitimacy.

Many portions of ancient history have been distorted with the passing of time and with the rise of new conquerors. It is essential now for a unified, independent development of the African continent, that a collective effort is made to correct the web of lies and falsehoods perpetuated during European colonialism, fundamentally concerning the immense contributions pre-historic and pre-colonial African history has had on the development of modern civilization itself.<sup>(25)</sup> How can we come close to achieving equality in the connected but apparently separated societies we live in today? It would be difficult to imagine that possibility, without also acknowledging that our ancestors who birthed primal concepts of human thought, planting the seeds which grew into the philosophical and mythological structures we still refer to today — had a skin that was rich in melanin.<sup>(26)</sup>

If the future of the planet is to be cared for, if humans can improve their ways of thinking and live in a more peaceful state, it is evident that having reached such uncertainty concerning our fate so far, we have come to know very little about ourselves. Realizing how much information must still be learned and unlearned from the past, can allow new directions to unfold which avoid repeating the same faults and consequently inflicting the same imbalances within nature. The invention of a superior kind of being and the participation in such false entitlement have caused a living nightmare for too many generations on Earth, since the diversity and exchange essential to our evolution as a species has been denied. By heightening the value of diversity, tolerance is encouraged not only towards others but also towards ourselves — through the acceptance of our own self truths and those that define others, a general respect for uncountable individual ways of being is maintained. The awareness of our own self truth is a condition that allows the possibility of liberation to be extended. Accepting our own individual differences from others, is participating in a process of mutual care that gives expression to the range of qualities present in living things.

Being alive, we are each given possibilities to fulfill an experience on Earth, according to how we are made and how we are able to perceive ourselves. The activation of this potential is most urgent for those individuals who cannot see themselves in the dominant representations of human life, and therefore must discover and define the value of their existence through new perceptions of reality. Forgotten, misunderstood areas of knowledge and human experience be-

come more available while circular patterns of time unfold, revealing the limits of what we know and take for granted. The stories that usually have been left behind in the known recollections of history, can offer further insights and lead to paths that have yet to be trodden on. Uncharted territories of thought found beneath, in between and outside of typical standards of social behavior, can be entered in those moments in which the past, present and future intersect through an awareness of the senses — allowing the ability to magically describe aspects of the underlying realities around us in ways that were previously unseen and unheard.

\*

In front of a beautiful scenery I can help you remember and project the light, the textures and shapes you see. Your imagination stains the many leaves I offer for your contemplation. With ink, pigment or soft metals, your memories are imprinted on paper again and again and as time passes you will require another place to put them. When that moment comes, it is very natural to replace me and acquire another space for your future thoughts but you can still keep me around to look inside the pages of your past. If you prefer you can also let go of the old markings I used to hold and use my outer body for other purposes. Without leaves, my skeleton is flexible and can be transformed into a variety of geometric forms, as the two halves open and close offering a corner of empty space or a flat rigid surface.

What am I?

A notebook.