

Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)

Volume 15 *Volume 15 (2017)*

Article 29

3-15-2017

Mud and a Metaphor

David Goldblatt
goldblatt@denison.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics



Part of the [Aesthetics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goldblatt, David (2017) "Mud and a Metaphor," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 15 , Article 29.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol15/iss1/29

This Short Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts Division at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive) by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact mpompeli@risd.edu.

David Goldblatt

I should like to offer a few brief comments on the Short Note, "Thoughts on an Aesthetics of Mud," that may help display its relevance to the philosophy of the arts and to suggest possible room for further work.

A relatively recent theme in the field of aesthetics has been writing on everyday aesthetics. Among those who have brought this area to the light of aesthetic inquiry is the associate editor of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Yuriko Saito, and a member of this journal's editorial board, Thomas Leddy. Philosophical attention brought to bear on the vernacular raises issues as to what might count as objects of philosophical attention, just as essays about junkyards, street art, and anonymous architecture have proven to be generators of a host of questions, some of which remain problematic. Mud, being more or less a found object, can launch a discussion of whether and how everyday aesthetics can enter the realm of environmental aesthetics.

In the attention paid to mud in the Short Note, questions of context and the ideal observer go hand in hand. Mud has devastated entire villages when storms along stripped hillsides create slides. Mud seems to be the core of swamps and quicksand, where mosquitoes breed with sometimes deadly results. Beauty, among other qualities in these contexts, drops out. The note, "Thoughts on an Aesthetics of Mud," has emphasized a context where aesthetic sensitivity, even to an overlooked substance like mud, is a location for the beautiful without yet entering the area of philosophy of the arts. What remains is how the move from sensitive attention to detail and the admiration of an otherwise ignored substance can be transposed into an artwork, as an aesthetic response and our response to artworks may overlap but are logically independent.

And, to go further, there are metaphors here suitable for explication from continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, the latter tracing metaphor throughout the history of philosophy. Sometimes their work is clear as mud. For a writer of a certain imagination, such as the author of "Thoughts on an Aesthetics of Mud," he might do well to turn his attention to the history of the many metaphors associated with mud, some of them having become stale or frozen, and so more or less literal, thus riding the line between the conceptual and the poetic. In any case, metaphor is not simply a poetic device but an idea in and of itself. Mud, for example, had been the name of opium before it was prepared for smoking. Mud shows or mud operas were the names of travelling circuses, and we know that mud in your eye is about coffee and slinging mud refers to dirty politics. As a mere suggestion, any one of these metaphorical mud-associations contains the seeds of attitudes and analogies that may bear fruit for a certain style of aesthetics and even for writing on mud, itself.

David Goldblatt
goldblatt@denison.edu

Published March 15, 2017.

[About CA](#)

[Journal](#)

[Contact CA](#)

[Links](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Search Journal](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Permission to Reprint](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Publisher](#)

[Webmaster](#)