

Mount Baldy

by Ari Ross

The most beautiful possible thing is to deprive all places of their meanings. The meanings don't belong to the places, anyway. The meanings are little more than personal associations with certain places.

Let me give you an example. That mountain over there, about 2,000 kilometers northeast, Mount Baldy, one of so so many, is, from here, a constellation of beautiful properties, its sinuous and amorphic flow, its peak leveled far and wide by snow, its majestic geometry, all of it culminating in a sense of depth, purpose, and place, a warm continuity with all that's within and beyond the reach of sight. And that's a fucking meaning: infinite purpose and connection with all extant things.

But then, take that mountain again. You're still standing here right now. But eight years ago, you saw Mount Baldy, said 'I love you Mount Baldy,' and you climbed Mount Baldy. You got to the top of Mount Baldy, looked out over everything in the valley below Mount Baldy, and all the strident peaks and ridges rounding up the valley below, each of them competing with you for closest to God. You took it all in, you won, and you started down. You started towards Earth's surface, a cosmic, lonely, returning hero, but it was okay that no one knew, the Universe would know.

And as you took that first step, it felt so climatic, and when you took that second step, it all descended into rocks and darkness, rolling in a straight line down, stopped only by a tree, at which point you remember how for however-many-seconds before the rocks didn't forgive you but instead took your skin like a kleptomaniac in an unattended surplus store. Everything went black and you woke not breathing, not hearing, and then, like a punch to the chest (or was it in fact a punch to the chest?), you breathe painfully, and slowly feel what you know has happened, where the gouges are, the missing chunks of definitely dead skin, and you lean back to not even think of it, just let the sound drown away from you. You heal

and move on, everything is good as new, and life whizzes into a new millennium of possible experiences, away from all of what happened, until one day you're going from Point A to Point C at 100 km/h and you pull it over when you get back to this spot and again see Mount Baldy, there closer than the horizon, a good 2,000 kilometers away, towering over the valley, asking for your attention in the cover of the light sun and smearing sky.

Now tell me: what does Mount Baldy mean to you?

