

Despite its surface complexity, Olsen's high artifice is neither honed for its own sake, nor offered as a sufficient response to political and ethical urgencies. Her more direct and deliberate response to these urgencies comes by way of a formal and stylistic arsenal bolstered by the Situationist vocabulary of cultural critique through citation and détournement, a vocabulary that her peers in the UK have largely abandoned to their US counterparts. *Punk Faun* is Olsen's best work to date and represents a substantial advance from *Secure Portable Space* (although everyone should read the humorous rewriting of a portion of Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems*, called the "Minimaus Poems," in which she pours cold satirical water on the grand guru's flaming testosterone). These new poems are distinctively inventive—and rigorous. Beneath her several masks we discern an acute ethical sensibility that seeks to recover the past for the sake of the future of those for whom it seems bleakest.

Eric Powell

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Anne Waldman, *Jaguar Harmonics: Person Woven of Tesserae*.  
Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2014. 54pp. \$18

Throughout Anne Waldman's *Jaguar Harmonics: Person Woven of Tesserae*, a small graphic recurs. Ambiguously animal in black brushstrokes on nearly every page, it is a pivot for the book's core questions. What is a person? And what is a person made of? Continuing in the tradition of previous works like *Structure of the World Compared to a Bubble* (2004), *Manatee/Humanity* (2009), and *Gossamurmur* (2013), Waldman seeks out alternative personae and phenomena for inhabitation, in and through which to grow her poetics. *Jaguar Harmonics* is particularly attentive to the ethics of such a practice, using it to ply a new music that attempts to cross the sonic registers of the human voice and animal noise.

The collection opens with an epigraph from Angel Dominguez depicting a mythic species of jaguars as "keepers of the cosmos" under the influence of the psychedelic vine Yagé. Dominguez's jaguars, "eyes wide seeing...beyond the galaxy," suggest something of the "harmonic" mode that Waldman is after in her poems: a mode of perception that is at once deeply embodied and out of body, simultaneously of the human brain and of a decentered multiverse. Even the jaguar, a predator at the apex of the food chain, takes time out from hunting to stargaze, which raises Waldman's central ethical question: how can we be better keepers of the cosmos? Still, Waldman's jaguar is not a mute seer; it speaks to the problem of cruelty that becomes a refrain in the book: "Person woven of cruelty / and then again, of cruelty."

Loping along the world of the text, the jaguar nudges the limit of harmonics, challenging the classical opposition between harmony and melody by joining an ensemble of voices—human, animal, and vegetal—that gather in Waldman’s capacious but singular vatic utterance. The “savannah metrics” and “pliant harmonics” embodied in the jaguar urge more expandable (and more collapsible) definitions not only of rhythm and harmony but also of personhood and time, replacing the refrain of predatorial cruelty with one that dissolves the dualism of humans and animals by pitching both on an ecological scale: “Person woven of forest time and running.”

Reminiscent of Robert Duncan’s world-poem aspirations, *Jaguar Harmonics* reads as one long, looping poem, a tesserae of sounds and distinct spacings, rather than a collection of discrete lyrics. The jaguar/person graphic functions to divide, link, and ornament the book in lieu of titles or numbers, except for seven short “visions” in the final pages. The word “tinsel” follows the lumen-eyed jaguar of the epigraph. It is as though Waldman commences *Jaguar Harmonics* proper by distilling the sensitive perceptiveness of the animal’s eyes—or of luminosity in general—into a stand-alone article of glittery refractive power:

*of tinsel?  
 you want to say insulated  
 nary scold a child-woman made of  
 of what? of person!  
 nay nay go down all a hook of lumen  
 makes “of” and “woven of” seem light  
 person...and person what do you know of light?*

Subtly detaching “of” from its subject—just an extra flutter of the space bar—Waldman incorporates thoughtful hesitance into the oft overlooked equation: this is made of that. What happens if we hover for an extra moment at the point of “of”? In this case, the “keepers of the cosmos” of the epigraph is directly followed by the upward lilt “of tinsel?” which has the effect of transforming the epigraph about the composition of the cosmos into—possibly—tinsel. The next line drops the “t” and offers a rhyme: “you want to say insulated,” but “insulated” could just as easily sound like tinsel. The obsolete meanings of tinsel—loss, the bearing of harm, even perdition—glint in the back-and-forth between “tinsel” and “insulate.” Rather than determining “Person” to be an insulated concept, we could think of “Person woven of light.” The word “insulate,” too, has relevant originary meanings, as it denotes a state of detachment and isolation rather than a comfy bubble. By off-rhyming “insulate” and “tinsel,” Waldman invigorates a lost conceptual link in the etymological lineage. Perhaps a “Person woven of light” is a being at once insulated and tinsel-ated, bearing signs of harm and

detachment in concert with the capacity to form links. Waldman goes a step further, asking this person, “*what do you know of light?*” *Jaguar Harmonics* feels the unbearable lightness of prepositions: if “of” usually indicates a relation between part and whole, or between a scale and a value, then the question is, how far does your knowledge partake of light? More broadly, Waldman is asking what connects us to the cosmos, and when and how we know we are of it. In modern usage, tinsel means ornament, a chain of it, with the capacity to refract light. From loss to ornament, then, and from the sustaining of harm to the production of light, tinsel, like the Jaguar’s heady vines, provides a concrete example of the illuminating connective labor contained in the minuteness of “of”.

Not only does *Jaguar Harmonics* draw our attention to graphical and grammatical ligatures (the interspersed visual figures, the focus on “of”), it asks us to consider ourselves as similarly syndetic:

*we’re all in debt to one’s wonder,  
signals of the medicine world  
come down to the same root word or caesura,  
to the comma and the littler increments and we will  
be the seeds they are, and be the green ornaments they are*

This is more than a we-are-all-made-of-stars sensibility, however: *Jaguar Harmonics* dwells in the spectrum from personification to anthropomorphism. Along this spectrum runs the “stitch stitch” that forms relations between things or posits their full-on similitude—“so real I so real real phantom woven.” Waldman’s oft-capitalized “Person” is variously woven “of glimmer,” “of Morse code,” “of pivots,” “of floral language,” “of deeds doing and undoing cruelty,” “of all the others down here,” and each time, the extra space after the “of” inserts hesitance or speculation about the ontology of “Person,” exploring, on the level of syntax, the differing extents to which we are constituted by others—other beings, concepts, acts, phenomena, and so on. Waldman traces the ways in which persons are “seamless and seamless” and rewrites the question of “How are you?” or “How many are you?” as “many figments are you?” making multiplicity—tesserae—an assumed rather than an optional basis for identity.

Tessera meant watchword or password in the earliest English usage. It also referred, as it still does, to a usually cubical part of a mosaic. Broken and coherent at once, the person woven of tesserae is, literally and figuratively, all persons—human, plant, and animal. This ecology of personhood includes, for instance, the “gaunt gal with broken held-together-vertebrae,” “a being lay back on her back, jaguar spine,” and the “I” isolated/connected by hyphens: “dreaming alone person alone, curandero wasn’t singing your vision in / Pleiades wasn’t singing it in I— I—I / sending it in *aye-aye-aye*.” That words in

sequence are (like) vertebrae gets at the fragility of being on this earth; the being that “lay[s] back on her back, jaguar spine” gives us a lithe metapoetic image of *Jaguar Harmonics*, open to the world.

Notably, in a book teeming with persons, there are only several instances of brains. Waldman uses the rare word “entopic” to describe a “one thousand four hundred cubic centimeter brain” that hosts the “gestation of pliant harmonics.” Entopic evokes the Greek *entopos* (in a place) and *entoptik* (vision from within). Waldman’s image of an “entopic brain” suggests a vision from within that is neither autocatalytic nor solitary but rather a contextualized response to what is without. Whether you’re a jaguar in a jungle or driving your Jag in an urban metropolis, you move as parts of a larger brain—or brane—that encompasses all life existing now and in the future. In *Jaguar Harmonics*, Waldman commits to seeing inwardly and outwardly towards a *poethics* that is a kinetics, too—a theory of movement that incorporates lacunae of stillness and stargazing, like the jaguar. She also commits to hearing harmony as a sort of sonic plenitude filling out the silence it’s founded on: the sound first of the absence of cruelty, then of the relational existence possible in a world where brains communicate beyond the ordinary limits of the human. Cruelty, after all, may be a woefully human invention. The jaguar, for one, isn’t cruel in its predations, moving instead like a sound wave, announcing itself in musical hisses: “whuzzzzzssssshhhhhhhhhist awhoo awhoo.”

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Peter O’Leary, *Phosphorescence of Thought*. Brooklyn: The Cultural Society, 2013. 72pp. \$17

In his 2006 volume *Depth Theology*, Peter O’Leary gave himself the task of poetically attaining what he calls a “religious knowledge of the unconscious.” In *Phosphorescence of Thought*, O’Leary’s fourth collection, the poet continues that project by putting aside the suppressed and exploring the wonder of sentient life, depicting landscapes as if seen from the sovereign confines of some distant sphere. If his shuttling back and forth between a wildlife preserve on the outskirts of Chicago and a roving outpost in outer space seem at first like nonconvergent ends, O’Leary’s magic is in his careful handling of perception. While the speaker vies for a capacious, global perspective, he avoids the impulse to bracket out his own experience of the physical world. Rather he delves more intensely into whatever matter is at hand, more deeply into one fold of its finite manifestation. Interiority for O’Leary thrives amongst the territories, and consciousness manifests itself in the transitory desire for new experience.