Words by N. H. Pritchard in *The Matrix* — first published in 1970 by Doubleday and co-published again in 2021 by Primary Information & Ugly Duckling Press — are meant to be read, seen, heard, and experienced. The collection is ultra-visual, a singing arrangement of offerings that has eyes of its own, old eyes that gaze at us from source, unblinking, revealing nothing (and everything).

All of the poems in *The Matrix* which can be read aloud should be. *Feelings in the mouth*, they’re rich on the tongue and teeth, slow in the throat, absurdly natural on the breath. Try this verse:
Weary was when coming on a stream
in hidden mist the amber adornment
of fall’s birth
here near edge
a rippling soundless
leaves and eddy eyes
with trickling forest thighs
in widening
youthful nippling
scenic creakless...

The consonants attack and sustain while the vowels set the tone, each one precisely placed in the sound matrix — a new jazz of velars, plosives, and fricatives, instruments sounding for certain deeper realms of the psyche. But with each page, the poems grow both more uncanny and possibly ridiculous. A line of brackets along the bottom of the page? And on the next page, a twin line of brackets? Small letters, big sounds, nonsense and invented words, a final entry that screams — perhaps with a violent desperation — to fill space with peace. Or so I read.

Or so I read.

New readers like me will find The Matrix fresh. As with the best avant-garde art, its explorations challenge the conventions of its genre just as much as they break down our habitual methods of perception (expanding our perceptive capacity — or maybe just boiling us alive in a great big pot, for the sake of the soundscape).

Implicitly, reading The Matrix is an act of asking. What’s the reality of our meaning-making? What is its process? On an infinite loop of evolution and revolution, the collection invites us to explore such mysteries. Its republication is an excavation which asks us, now, to put the collection to the test. I wonder what we’ll make of it.

Great works of art can poke and pinch at us, offending us at worst and opening a doorway to the sublime at best. The Matrix, if we let it, will deliver on connection, the primary promise of human communication. In other words, if we’re open to the meaning of the thing, we will find that it is there — gazing at us with anticipation. Wise readers won’t look away.

To read more information about both The Matrix and N. H. Pritchard and to acquire a copy, click here or here (free excerpt available).

— Samantha Martin