

Aquarium Drunkard Book Club :: Chapter Eight

: 8/12/2021

The Matrix: Poems: 1960-1970, N.H. Pritchard

There's a particular linguistic alchemy at play in *The Matrix*. Norman Pritchard reduces language to its barest elements, then recasts it into raw energy. Alongside fellow visionaries like Ishmael Reed, Cecil Taylor and Archie Shepp, Pritchard was affiliated with Umbra, a collective dedicated to experimental Black writing based in NYC's Lower East Side during the 1960s. It was during this time that Pritchard composed the poems that comprise *The Matrix*, forging a radical new literary culture that coincided with the blossoming 'New Thing' and free jazz scenes. In addition to the reissue of Pritchard's second and final collection *EECCHHOOEESS* (Daba Press, 2021), *The Matrix* allows readers to reencounter a poetic imagination that remains as fiercely innovative today as it was five decades ago.

The Matrix radiates with its own rhythms and syncopations, like the most enlightening, free-blowing ESP Disk session imaginable turned into pure language. To call his work concrete poetry' is a disservice because it's anything but; it's some of the most inventive visual poetry ever committed to the page. Pritchard's poems move with rare beauty and force, uprooting traditional notions of typography and syntax to a point that facilitates a new kind of reading, one that considers the feeling and appearance of words as much as their meaning.