

## Jerry Estrin on: "Ketjak"

"Waking in the dark now, more so each day, the year's slide. Numbers, Mind and Body. The partial function in the connective touch. You come at last into the realization as into a banquet room, domed perhaps but with chandeliers, that a lush ordering of events is no different than any other so that one might as well eat squid as tripe or plums, dressed in the regalia of tennis, the perceiving in the punchbowl reflection a costume as clownish as it is offensive. What is here. Red eye. The light has no right. Notational process, musical juncture."

Does your orientation invert through the suppression of the verb from "Numbers, Mind and Body"? You look around for a connection, producing scattered if waking notes. Perhaps you've been given a diary note, a fragmented perception of passing time, perhaps an assertion of progress: "more so each day", etc. Such connotations seem quite literal, a report of condition. "Numbers" as in reference to the sentence prosody, the "Numbers" which indicate where the sentences would appear -- so that the positive allusion plus the jingle of "Numbers" could tie in the calculated response to the time of the writing to time (in general? which time?), a proclaimed organization of time which tunes up the "Body" and the "Mind". Or perhaps "Numbers, Mind, and Body" can be read as ironic public relations. "The partial function" stands isolate, announcing itself, rejecting the connection with "Body" and "Mind", or the naming of such processes. Or perhaps it works as a unit in a list with no logical linking. Has a myth of continuity just been critiqued? The cluster of so many abstract nominals appear to refocus the argument, moving from the general to the specific. You expect some sort of resolution, and the writing appears to be gesturing in that direction, yet none occurs. So perhaps you can read this section as a mockery of finitude. But how did "You" get into a "banquet room"? How did the writer? -- perhaps by the "The partial function in the connective touch" which has been stationed in apposition, so that "You come at last" with its shifter pointing either at the reader or the writer seems to be there as a reward. The complete sentence coming after the noun phrase pulls the fragments into an articulated position, however convoluted by the intersecting metaphors, so that your dilemma ("Rhythm section of the Horns of the Dilemma" as Ron Silliman will write near the end of *Ketjak*) or language's openness or void is again labelled by the interrogative, "What is here" (or is it a question?), setting up the expectation of an answer which "Red eye" partially satisfies, both in its rhythmical relief, and in its anaphoric employment, throwing your mind back to "perceiving" -- as does "The light has no right", the assertion of consonance in "red" and "right", the semantic train set up by "reflection" "perceiving" "costume" all seeming to progress vertically toward "light", yet the negation coupled with the rhyme which focuses and isolates the physical properties of the words, cancels any closure: "The light has no right." etc.

From "Exorcise Your Monkey": Reading *Ketjak*. From *The Difficulties* (1985).

## **Criticism Target:**

Ron Silliman [2]

## **Poem:**

Ketjak [3]

## **Tags:**

numbers [4]

body [5]

mind [6]

connotation [7]

general [8]

specific [9]

metaphor [10]

connection [11]

reader [12]

writer [13]

---

**Source URL:** <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/jerry-estrin-ketjak>

## **Links**

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/ron-silliman>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/ketjak>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/numbers>

[5] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/body>

[6] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/mind>

[7] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/connotation>

[8] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/general>

[9] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/specific>

[10] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/metaphor>

[11] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/connection>

[12] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/reader>

[13] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/writer>