

Selma

Ritual:

A Book of Primitive Rites and Events

by Jerome Rothenberg



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A Great Bear Pamphlet
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Adapted from *A Black Civilization*, Illustrated, Revised Edition, by W. Lloyd Warner. Copyright 1937 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Copyright© 1958 by W. Lloyd Warner. Page 419. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Garbage Event, Page 4

Adapted from *Nine Dayak Nights*, by W. R. Geddes, Oxford University Press, 1957, 1961. Pp. 19-20.

Beard Event, Page 5

Adapted from Warner, op. cit., p. 333.

Stone Fire Event, Page 5

Adapted from Warner, op. cit., p. 318.

Walking Lamas Event, Page 5

Alexandra David-Neel, in *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, University Books, 1958, describes lamas walking in a trance: "The man did not run. He seemed to lift himself from the ground, proceeding by leaps . . ." and concludes: "To walk for twenty-four hours consecutively cannot be considered a record by the hillmen of Tibet who are wonderful walkers. Lama Yongden and I, during our journey from China to Lhasa, have sometimes tramped for fully nineteen hours, without stopping or refreshing ourselves in any way."

Gift Event I, Page 6

This is a very abbreviated version of the "Kula" described throughout *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, by Bronislaw Malinowski, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922.

Gift Event II, Page 6

Assembled from statements by Indians in "The Amiable Side of Kwakiutl Life: The Potlatch and the Play Potlatch," by Helen Codere, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56, No. 2, April 1956.

Friendship Dance, Page 7

Adapted from *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, by Frank G. Speck, University of California Press, 1951. Pp. 65-67.

Language Event I, Page 8

Adapted from *An Account of the Abipones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay*, by Martin Dobrizhofer, translated by Sara Coleridge. John Murray, London, 1822. Passim.

Language Event II, Page 8

Selected Writings, by Edward Sapir, University of California Press, 1944.
Pp. 180-81.

Grease Feast Event, Page 8

Adapted from "The Social Organization and Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians," by Franz Boas, in *Reports of the U.S. National Museum Under the Direction of the Smithsonian Institution for the Year Ending June 30, 1895*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1897. Pp. 355-56.

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The Andaman Islanders, by Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown. Cambridge University Press, 1922, 1933. Pp. 134-35.

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Book of Psalms.

Lily Events

- (1) A man and woman looking for lilies.
- (2) All the people going down to look for lilies.
- (3) Mud taken up looking for lilies.
- (4) Washing the lilies in the water to remove the mud.
- (5) Washing themselves off after the mud has got on them.
- (6) Lilies in a basket.
- (7) Walking from the lily place "to go look for a dry place to sit down."

Garbage Event

- (1) Pigs and chickens feed on the grass in an inhabited area until it is bare of grass.
- (2) Garbage is added to the area.
- (3) The participants defend the "abandoned beauty" and "town-quality" of the environment against all critics.

Sample Defense:

Critic: This place is dirty.

Answer: It is filthy.

Critic: Why don't you clean it up?

Answer: We like it the way it is.

Critic: Garbage is unhealthy.

Answer: The pigs feed better in it.

Critic: It breeds mosquitoes.

Answer: There are more mosquitoes in a jungle.

Beard Event

The men shave and fashion Van Dyke beards. The women paint.

Stone Fire Event

The old men build a stone fire and the men inhale the smoke and squat over the fire in order to allow the smoke to enter their anuses.

Further directions: All the men divide into groups around the various stone fires the old men have made. The women dance around them. All the men hold their heads over the fires and inhale the smoke and heat. They also squat over the fire to allow the smoke to enter the anal opening. Men, women and young boys then paint themselves with red ocher and kangaroo grease.

Walking Lamas Event

The participants walk for twenty-four hours consecutively without stopping or refreshing themselves in any way. They proceed by leaping.

Gift Event I

Bestow a gift on someone, to be repaid by an equivalent counter-gift after a lapse of time. Let as much as a year elapse between payments.

Gift Event II

Start by giving away different colored glass bowls.

Have everyone give everyone else a glass bowl.

Give away handkerchiefs and soap and things like that.

Give away a sack of clams and a roll of toilet paper.

Give away teddybear candies, apples, suckers and oranges.

Give away pigs and geese and chickens, or pretend to do so.

Pretend to be different things.

Have the women pretend to be crows, have the men pretend to be something else.

Talk Chinese or something.

Make a narrow place at the entrance of a house and put a line at the end of it that you have to stoop under to get in.

Hang the line with all sorts of pots and pans to make a big noise.

Give away frying pans while saying things like "Here is this frying pan worth \$100 and this one worth \$200."

Give everyone a new name.

Give a name to a grandchild or think of something and go and get everything.

Friendship Dance

Preparation: Men participants form a single file and are joined by women who dance in front of them as partners. During the song they dance counterclockwise with a shuffling trot, and in the intervals walk in a circle. At the song, when the leader begins to insert words suggestive of intimacy (see below), the humorous gestures and acts of the pantomime begin.

Song and Pantomime: A free rendering of the song is as follows: "Ha!-Ha! I am called an old man [poor and ugly] but I am not this. I am going to take this woman home with me, as I did not know that there was such a good shell-shaker, none like her. I'll take her home to my town."

During the song the leader may raise his hands, palms in, to shoulder height, at times turning halfway to the left and moving sideways. Throughout he is imitated by the men. Toward the end, the leader reaches the climax of his humor in the following phrase, "Ha!-Ha! We are going to touch each other's privates"; the men, holding their partners' hands, suit actions to words.

Movement (Sequence of Intimacy):

- (1) Greeting, holding hands facing.
- (2) Side by side, holding hands crossed.
- (3) Facing, putting palms upon partners' palms.
- (4) Placing hands on partners' shoulders while facing.
- (5) Placing arms over partners' shoulders while side by side.
- (6) Placing hats on women partners' heads while facing.
- (7) Stroking partners under chin while facing.
- (8) Putting hands on female partners' breasts while side by side.
- (9) Touching the clothing over the partners' genitals while side by side.

Language Event I

Abolish words bearing any affinities with the names of the participants, and substitute new ones in their stead.

Language Event II

Imply in speech some physical characteristic of the person addressed or spoken of, partly by means of suffixed elements, partly by means of "consonantal play."* The physical classes indicated by these methods may include children, unusually fat or heavy people, unusually short adults, those suffering from some defect of the eye, hunchbacks, those that are lame, left-handed persons, and circumcised males.

Grease Feast Event

A great fire is lighted in the center of the host's house. The flames leap up to the roof and the guests are almost scorched by the heat, but they do not stir, else the host's fire has conquered them. Even when the roof begins to burn and the fire attacks the rafters, they must appear unconcerned. The host

*Consonantal play consists either in altering certain consonants of a word to other consonants that are phonetically related to them, or in inserting meaningless consonants or consonant clusters in the body of the word

alone has the right to send a man up to the roof to put out the fire. While the feast is in progress the host sings a scathing song ridiculing his rival and praising himself. Then the grease is filled in large spoons and passed to the guests first. If a person thinks he has given a greater grease feast than that offered by the host, he refuses the spoon. Then he runs out of the house to fetch a copper plate "to squelch with it the fire." The host proceeds at once to tie a copper plate to each of his house posts. If he should not do so, the person who refused the spoon would, on returning, strike the posts with the copper plate, which is considered equal to striking the host's face. Then the man who went to fetch his plate breaks it and gives it to the host. This is called "squelching the host's fire."

Squelching song:

- (1) I thought another one was causing the smoky weather. I am the only one on earth — the only one in the world who makes thick smoke rise from the beginning of the year to the end.
- (2) What will my rival say now — that "spider woman"; what will he pretend to do next? The words of that "spider woman" do not go a straight way. Will he not brag that he is going to give away canoes, that he is going to break coppers, that he is going to give a grease feast? Such will be the words of the "spider woman," and therefore your face is dry and mouldy, you who are standing in front of the stomachs of your guests.
- (3) Nothing will satisfy you; but sometimes I treated you so roughly that you begged for mercy. Do you know what you will be like? You will be like an old dog, and you will spread your legs before me when I get excited. This I throw into your face, you whom I always tried to vanquish; whom I have mistreated; who does not dare to stand erect when I am eating.

Peacemaking Event

Preparations: An open area of ground is set aside, and across it is erected what is called a *korocop*. Posts are put up in a line, to the tops of these is attached a length of strong cane, and from the cane are suspended bundles of shredded palm leaf (*kororo*). The "visitors" are the forgiving party, while the home party consists of those who have committed the last act of hostility.

Movements: The visitors enter dancing, the step being that of the ordinary dance. The women of the home party mark the time by clapping their hands on their thighs. The visitors dance forward in front of the men standing at the *korocop*, and then, still dancing all the time, pass backwards and forwards between the standing men, bending their heads as they pass beneath the suspended cane. The visitors may make threatening gestures at the men standing at the *korocop*, and every now and then break into a shrill shout. The men at the *kororo* stand silent and motionless.

After dancing thus for a little time, the leader of the visitors approaches the man at one end of the *kororo* and, taking him by the shoulders from the front, leaps vigorously up and down to the time of the dance, thus giving the man he holds a good shaking. The leader then passes on to the next man in the row while another of the visitors goes through the same performance with the first man. This is continued until each of the dancers has "shaken" each of the standing men. The dancers then pass under the *kororo* and shake their enemies in the same manner from the back. After a little more shaking the dancers retire, and the women of the visiting group come forward and dance in much the same way, each woman giving each man of the other group a good shaking.

When the women have been through their dance the two parties of men and women sit down and weep together.

Booger Event

Participants: A company of four to ten or more masked men (called "boogers"), occasionally a couple of women companions. Each dancer is given a personal name, usually obscene; for example:

Black Man

Black Ass

Frenchie

Big Balls

Asshole

Rusty Asshole

Burster (penis)

Swollen Pussy

Long Prick

Sweet Prick

Piercer

Fat Ass

Long Haired Pussy

(et cetera)

Prelude: The dancers enter. The audience and the dancers break wind.

First action: The masked men are systematically malignant. They act mad, fall on the floor, hit at the spectators, push the men spectators as though to get at their wives and daughters.

Second action: The boogers demand "girls." They may also try to fight and dance. If they do, the audience tries to divert them.

Third action: Booger Dance Song. The name given to the booger should be taken as the first word of the song. This is repeated any number of times, while the owner of the name dances a solo, performing as awkward and grotesque steps as he possibly can. The audience applauds each mention of the name, while the other dancers indulge in exhibitionism, e.g. thrusting their buttocks out and occasionally displaying

toward the women in the audience large phalli concealed under their clothing. These phalli may contain water, which is then released as a spray.

Interlude: Everyone smokes.

Fourth action: A number of women dancers, equaling the number of boogers, enter the line as partners. As soon as they do, the boogers begin their sexual exhibitions. They may close upon the women from the rear, performing body motions in pseudo-intercourse; as before, some may protrude their large phalli and thrust these toward their partners with appropriate gestures and body motions.

Postlude: The rest of the performance consists of miscellaneous events chosen by the audience.

Sea Water Event

The tides of the ocean and the floods are danced; certain birds and animals are included.

Further Sea Water Events

1. An island far out in the sea.
2. Lightning that strikes out in the middle ocean and in the east.
3. Black cloud.
4. A wind coming in from the sea.

5. Calm sea water.
6. Heavy waves on the surface of the sea.
7. A small bird that dives into the sea for fish.
8. Kingfish.
9. A flat white fish.
10. Whale.
11. Diamond fish.
12. Crocodile.*
13. A plank floating on the tide and coming toward the shore.
14. A hollow log floating on the incoming tide.
15. A small oyster found on the plank.
16. Coconuts floating on an incoming tide.
17. The country where the coconut, hollow log and plank come from.
18. The back of a turtle (near land).
19. The head of a tortoise-shell turtle.
20. People where the coconuts come from.
21. Paddle.
22. Canoe.
23. Noise the paddle makes on the gunwale.
24. A small bird crying out on the beach when it sees the people coming in.
25. Paddle.
26. The paddles being thrown on the beach.
27. Canoe rolling about on the beach with the sea hitting against it.
28. Men walking along on the beach.
29. Men looking for turtle eggs in the sand beach.
30. Men following the tracks of turtles going toward the nest.
31. The turtle nest.
32. Turtle eggs.
The men are drinking the white of the turtle eggs.
33. Basket.
The men are putting the eggs in the basket.
34. Putting the basket on the shoulder and carrying it down to the shade.
35. Putting the eggs down in the shade.

*Further directions: "The crocodile sings lightning when it comes in the east and that's when the crocodile lays his eggs and that's when the sting ray gets fat and good to eat. When that lightning comes and the rain comes that makes the sting ray fat, that makes the crocodile lay his eggs."

36. Walking fast down the large path to the well.
37. Cleaning the dirt and refuse out of the well.
38. Washing oneself with the water because of the dirt on the body from cleaning out the well.
39. Taking off ornaments and drying them on the well.
40. Going back to the turtle beach, cleaning off dirt under the big trees.
41. Gathering wood for a fire.
42. Fire burning.
43. Coals of a fire smoking.
44. People are sleepy and they sleep.
45. Waking up.
46. Smoking a cigarette.
47. Red cloud.

Noise Event

1. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.
2. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.
3. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord.
4. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
5. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together.

Jerome Rothenberg

describes himself as "populist in politics, atheist in religion, sacralist in art." He was born December 11th, 1931, in New York City, the second son of an apostate Yeshiva student (Slabodka Yeshiva, Slabodka, Lithuania) who was then working in a shoe factory and selling insurance, and a verse-writing mother ("Queen Esther") who won a prize for gymnastics in Ostrowia, Poland, circa 1916. Rothenberg claims to have inherited "unconscious memories of Polish 'Happenings': gypsy costumes, picnics in the woods, etc."

He was educated in New York City public schools, College of the City of New York, and the University of Michigan, and spent a year and a half with the U.S. Army in Germany. He married Diane Brodatz in 1952, and they have a son, Matthew, born in 1965.

Rothenberg founded Hawk's Well Press in 1958, edited the *Poems from the Floating World* series (1961-64) and is co-editor of the semi-annual *some / thing*. His own published works include *New Young German Poets* (City Lights Books, 1959), *White Sun Black Sun* (Hawk's Well Press, 1960), *The Seven Hells of the Jigoku Zoshi* (Trobar Books, 1962), *Sightings I-IX* (Hawk's Well Press, 1964), the American playing version of Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (Samuel French, 1965), *The Gorky Poems* (El Corno Emplumado, 1966), *Between: Poems 1960-1963* (Fulcrum Press, 1966) and *An Anthology of Primitive and Archaic Poetry*, to be published by Doubleday & Co.

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