

Ritual:

A Book of Primitive Rites and Events

by Jerome Rothenberg



1966
A Great Bear Pamphlet
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Contents, Sources and Acknowledgments

Lily Events, Page 4

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.

Ritual, by Jerome Rothenberg

(3)

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.

Peacemaking Event, Page 10

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

Booger Event, Page 11

Adapted from Speck, op. cit., pp. 28-36.

Sea Water Event, Page 12

Adapted from Warner, op. cit., p. 337.

Further Sea Water Events, Page 12

Adapted from Warner, op. cit., pp. 409-11

Noise Event, Page 14

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.

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

Ritual, by Jerome Rothenberg

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.

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.

(14)

Further Sea Water Events

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