

ery. It welled over in the satire of a Grosz, and in the acid criticism of a Kurt Tucholsky. It brought to film directors the possibility of converting the public to a new vision of the future. In the moral sphere it upset middle-class convention by a shift in sexual mores the like of which was not to be seen again until today. In all its streams the upheaval broadly paralleled the Soviet one—prior, that is, to Stalinist repression and Russia's return to cultural orthodoxy. Berlin held on to its beleaguered enlightenment a bit longer, unconstrained by the tyrant's whip until 1933.

Willett offers a minutely well-informed report on the personnel of Weimar's memorable breakthrough. The il-

lustrations—212 photos, posters, paintings, title pages, and the like—are often rare enough to have required diligent mining. The "New Sobriety," in Willett's portrayal, is the conjunction of a serious, objective art with meaningful political purpose. He demonstrates that when freely operative, as in Weimar, this marriage can produce landmarks of artistic progress far beyond the drudge-horse socialist realism later imposed in some countries. Rosa Luxemburg, Weimar's most distinguished revolutionary martyr, had taught, in opposition to Lenin, that revolution must be rooted in the spontaneity of the masses—not in élitist parties. Weimar's artistic Left, at least, seems to have heeded her, with lively creations bubbling up in the

stream of practical political involvement. Of course this creativity rested on shaky foundations. National Socialism was hammering toward power from the Right, and in the midst of Weimar's flowering Stalin delivered a painful blow by clamping down on Moscow's avant-garde, previously a vital example to Western cultural rebels. For a while, however, even Hitler's threat and Stalin's reaction fed Weimar's song of defiance. As a philistinism of unimaginable barbarity was about to set in, Weimar gave the world a final view of an impressive artistic ferment paradoxically fueled by the threat of doom. John Willett has recalled that unique cultural event sympathetically, carefully, and with justifiable nostalgia. **WV**

Terrorist Chic: An Exploration of Violence in the Seventies by Michael Selzer.

(Hawthorn Books; xvi + 206 pp.; \$9.95)

Halbert Weidner

Terrorist Chic is a bizarrely written book about bizarre topics: punk rock, sadomasochism, terrorism. Mr. Selzer's thesis is roughly that these three phenomena are trends promoted by a psychic collusion of jaded pace setters and terrorists. I say roughly because both the statement of the position and its demonstration make a hazardous road for his conclusions.

His first rough spot is geography. He gets most of his trends in New York City: the windows of Bendel's, Studio 54, the *New York Post*, *Times*, and *Daily News*, and Christopher Street. For a book purporting to have the entire United States as a frame of reference, a little more footwork would have helped. The myopia is best illustrated when he interviews and blithely quotes Richard Condon to the effect that the United States has never fought a war on its own soil and that one is not only bound to come, but most likely would be a civil war! Selzer never thinks to ask Condon what happened in the U.S. between 1861 and 1865. Perhaps he would have if General Lee had burnt New York City to the ground.

Even granted the restricted geography, it is hard to tell if there is a real trend. The best S-M club, Le Chateau 19, is as tepid an affair for the middle class as is Studio 54 for the affluent. Business is slack at a Christopher Street S-M store. The window dressers, photographers, and authors trotted out as examples of terrorist chic are now doing something else. There are sadomasochistic concerts, but Helen Wheels, a punk prima donna, is a strange example, since she is portrayed as insane and too fragile to collude with anyone in setting a fashion. In fact, most of the people who are interviewed are either cynics trying to make a buck off of voyeurs or people with a marginal relationship with reality to begin with. They are hardly the stuff from which to extrapolate a social theory.

But if Selzer's thesis is to make its way to a conclusion, extrapolation seems to be its only fuel. There are three kinds of people whom he says are involved in terrorist chic. There are the deviants (a minority) and the entrepreneurs. But the "largest group," the one most "directly responsible for establish-

ing Terrorist Chic as a fashionable pose"—no, not the public—is described as follows: "Many in this group had been active in the peace movement in the 1960s or had been VISTA volunteers or had entered the Catholic novitiate." That is a very small group to write a book about. So tiny is it that it is hard to find them even in the text. True, there is an ex-seminarian VISTA volunteer, another ex-seminarian who used a discipline (called a cat-o'-nine-tails here), and one fellow who took pictures for VISTA. But there is also a list that doesn't fit the categories. It is headed by a Vietnam veteran and concludes with others of nondescript politics.

Selzer also extrapolates about terrorists. They are feeble and spoiled and inept in the United States, and so they must be elsewhere too. He doesn't grant them their successes, organization, or practical use by wealthy groups who sponsor and manipulate them in the field while taking more moderate positions at the bargaining table. He doesn't see behind the terrorists to the politicians who need them, feed them, and rise to power with these moralistic, vio-

lent Nathan Hales as part of the package.

He is also strangely restrained in applying his concept of terrorism to senseless violence directed toward non-combatants. Not one question is raised about nuclear war. Was dropping the atomic bomb on civilians an act of terrorism? If so, it was the greatest such act, using the United States as a frame of reference, and could certainly be construed as preparing a new era of unthinkable violence. For all the talk about modernity, the great fact of this age—nuclear weaponry—is ignored.

The enemy for Mr. Selzer is the modern psyche, which has lost the capacity for experience because it can no longer

commit itself to anything. There is no explanation of how this came about, but there is a prediction about where it will lead. A group suppressing its aggression in flower power has moved into punk and will move on to something new. Then watch out. War is next.

Mr. Selzer is trying to write an apocalypse without reference to politics. Neither the Book of Daniel nor Revelation did that, but then they are part of a sensibility that sees the demonic in law and order as well as in decadence. Mr. Selzer is hypnotized by the whirl and underestimates the source of terror. The punk rock symbols of broken cross and black shirt were once the uniforms of officers of the state. 

Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America by Robert S. Ellwood, Jr. (University of Chicago Press; xiii + 192 pp.; \$12.95)

James S. Tinney

With the events of Jonestown and Senator Robert Dole's hearings on cults in the background, it is refreshing to read *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America*. This, the latest in the Chicago History of American Religion Series edited by Martin E. Marty, sets the "cults" within the continuum of American religion. Unlike sociological models that view cults as a beginning formation along the road from "sect" to "denomination" to "church," Ellwood sees the cults as permanent fixtures. Nonnormative religion, he believes, has always existed as a separate category alongside the other evolving sects. It is misunderstood and is outside the usual Western models of "movement" phenomena because its way of acting and thinking is Eastern in essence and derivation.

Nonnormative faith forms (Pentecostalism, neo-Evangelicalism, neo-Paganism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Zen, "I-Am," New Thought, and self-realization movements such as Est) are described as excursus religion, since they embark on a journey into unknown or unfamiliar symbols or rituals. Excursus religion usually is a withdrawal group, is

mystical, is charismatic in leadership, elevates the feminine principle, employs trance or meditation, utilizes pilgrimages, and presumes some gnostic wisdom.

The book is roughly divided into two sections. Separate chapters treat the history of Spiritualism in the 1840's and 50's, Theosophy in the later 1800's, and Zen from 1950 onward. These are the strongest parts of the book, tracing the historical connections between these and other forms of nonnormative faith. The book jacket promises that the theoretical chapters and epilogue will "draw carefully upon psychology and sociology," but they do not. Not only is there little discussion of classical or modern theories relating to excursus religion, but the author fails to consider the normal sociological and political questions that are raised by the existence of these groups. This leads to confusing and sometimes contradictory conclusions. In one place he claims that these groups reflect a single class or ethnic minority; yet he later stresses that they combine adherents from limited as well as advantaged educational and economic backgrounds, without distinction. (To

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