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WILBUR ZELINSKY

Whether they are aware of it or not, I suspect that what has motivated the instigators of this special issue of the *Geographical Review* is no slight nervousness over the intellectual respectability of fieldwork within the geographical discipline. Well might they worry, at least in the short term, for the quantifiable facts are hardly comforting. But I must insist on taking the long view—indeed, an exceedingly long view—in reporting that the prognosis is not all that bleak.

I base my argument on the uniqueness of the human creature. *Homo sapiens* is a mammal, but of a most special sort, being the only species with the capability of uttering fully developed languages. And the human brain that can engage in verbal wizardry can also devise an endless series of devices to separate us farther from the remainder of the animal kingdom. Unlike other creatures, which are inextricably tied to the here and now, to their immediate surroundings, human beings can transport themselves anywhere and anywhen mentally; and in physical terms they can sequester themselves within artificial or even “virtual” settings, shut off from the outer world.

This duality of our existence, dwelling as we do in our own mental and material cocoons but also ultimately linked, like all other organisms, to the actualities of our planet, is what lies behind the current plight of the advocate of geographical fieldwork. At the moment, it is the fashionableness of the cerebral and the mechanical that puts the field-worker on the defensive. Eventually, however, we have no choice but to maintain awareness of our environs even as we invent new ways to rise above and beyond them, no choice but to accept that neither life nor scholarship can be satisfactory unless we reconcile the human superstructure in our legacy with the generic mammalian substructure.

Well, then, just what is the status of fieldwork within the ranks of professional geographers today? How does it rate as a topic for serious cogitation, research, or pedagogy? The sad and simple answer is: Pretty much fallen off the screen. For a once-vaunted venture to spiral into such a lowly estate is a radical departure from days of yore. During the first centuries of the Modern Age, the heroic phase of West-

✪ DR. ZELINSKY is a professor emeritus of geography at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802.