AN APPRAISAL OF POSTS
AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EFFORT
by
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The bibliography appended to this summary report is the most tangible witness to the effectiveness and productivity of the POSTS program. It reflects a scope and quality that is in the best traditions of the Center, and I believe will be a source of gratification in response to any questions that might be posed about the value of the effort and of the investment that made it possible.

When POSTS was first proposed as a Center effort — a process in which I played some part together with many others — we may also have had a further range of expectations that have been met to varying degrees or in some cases rather poorly. Some of the ideological conflicts between the conception of organized group research on the one hand and the selection of individual scholars on the basis of isolated merit on the other have been compromised but never fully resolved. The Center has never understood its role to be that of a site of active, continued, focused research on a given topic nor does it have the facilities to do this except to the most limited extent with respect to the planning or to the digestion of data already accumulated. Under the best of circumstances, the term of residence, one year, might be barely sufficient to enable a long-term interdisciplinary research project to get well started at an institution that was fully committed to its long tenure. The Center has provided an excellent opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds, geographic and academic situations, and academic interests to get to know one another and to provide useful mutual criticism. This process of mutual acquaintance and indoctrination already takes a significant part of the year.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in the administration of POSTS, from my own perspective, was the implication that such broad-ranging interdisciplinary efforts could and should get their principal initiative from the Center as the site of solicitation. Yes, over a 10 or 15 year period of time this might indeed be workable, but we soon found that the process of negotiation with respect to a particular time and subject which is already complicated and uncertain with individual fellows becomes inordinately compounded when groups must be assembled.

I believe that we were fortunate to be able to produce a limited number of such effective groups but indeed the main thrust and value of the POSTS operation has come, as is true of most of the work of the Center today, from the efforts of particular individuals.

In my own academic work at Stanford I have been involved in several major interdisciplinary projects and believe that they can be proudly for-