

## **New Challenges for the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of São Paulo**

...not a graduate school, training men in the known and to some extent in methods of research, but an institute where everyone – faculty and members – took for granted what was known and published, and in their individual ways endeavored to advance the frontiers of knowledge.  
– Abraham Flexner, *An autobiography*, 1960

In keeping with their history, genealogy and experience, the Institutes for Advanced Study provide not only a unique dimension for formulation, research and exchange within various scholarly fields, but also a propitious environment for interaction, dialogue, communication, and the production and dissemination of new or renewed forms of interpretation and knowledge of phenomena, things, processes, societies and their own epistemologies.<sup>1</sup> Maintaining a critical dialogue within their contemporary settings, these institutions also aim to clarify, culturally and scientifically, a significant portion of future challenges, offering both critique and interdependence with the established and regulated tenets of science, culture and art. Due to their novel status and mission, this distinctive configuration within the academic structure is, by nature, anachronistic, eccentric, and heterodox, and, therefore, liable to be simultaneously (in)consequent, (in)different, (un)imaginative, and (un)usual.

Essentially and metaphorically, the Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA) is the ideal space for abstraction; it does not belong to any specific field of knowledge or expertise, nor does it abide by any ideology or trend. As such, it is a veritable common ground for scientists, thinkers, intellectuals, and artists, a place where, in principle, everything is possible and imaginable: a locus of ideation, of poetics, of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

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<sup>1</sup> See “IEAS: Ciência e Sociedade,” *Revista Estudos Avançados*, v.25, n.73, São Paulo, 2011.  
<[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420110003&lng=pt&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420110003&lng=pt&nrm=iso)>.

With each *application*, however, the IEA must adjust to its new position, becoming itself a *milieu*, contextualizing its universality and abstraction.<sup>2</sup> As *milieu*, the Institute becomes a hybrid creature, operating as an interface open to risk, new ideas, novel encounters, untried admixtures, and to the odd and surprising. This has been so in the case of the IEA of the University of Sao Paulo since it was founded in 1986, driven by the democratic opening in Brazil and by intellectuals engaged in shaping a new society.<sup>3</sup> Its mission, defined at that time and expressed in its charter, is “*to research and to discuss—comprehensively—fundamental issues of science, technology, the arts and other areas of knowledge, stimulating the generation of new ideas and contributing to the analysis of social issues and the development of public policies.*”

On the occasion of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, new challenges confront the Institute. The local, national and global contexts are entirely different from those immediately following the Brazilian dictatorship. Brazil, the “dormant giant,” as it was proclaimed by the military in the 1970s, is now awakening, anamorphously. This raises various questions, but it is also indicative of the country’s new and prominent role in the global economy, politics, and culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not to mention other geopolitical elements in the process of consolidation, driven in part by the new dynamics induced by the BRIC. Yet, at the same time, recent regional demands, e.g., for a renewed “Latin America,” are now requiring priority attention. In diplomacy, and certainly for global businesses, great metropolises like São Paulo are often as important as countries – perhaps even more so. A new nature, shaped by biopolitics, biotechnology, genetics, virtuality, and post-human capabilities, is clearly being

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<sup>2</sup> *Milieu* was defined by French philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem as a relational and variable system that, in the eighteenth century, moved from physics to biology, during the nineteenth century to sociology, geography, and finally, at the turn of the twentieth century, to urban planning. In this notion of *milieu*, Canguilhem brings together space and society in a state of mutual influence and adaptation.

<sup>3</sup> At the time, Professor José Goldemberg was the Vice-Chancellor of the University of São Paulo.

imposed upon both the original Nature (the one given to us) and the artificially constructed one, namely, the city. Our immersion in information, the networked world, multidimensional environments and so on indicates substantial changes are taking place in contemporary lifestyles.

What is and what will be the response of the University of São Paulo, Brazil's foremost institution of higher education, to these ongoing transformations? What strategies and tactics are being considered and developed to maintain its leadership position in the worlds of science, knowledge, and scholarship? How does the university situate itself before current events, and what will be its position in the new local, regional, and global order? These are all crucial macro-issues, but they are no less important than those imposed by our micro-reality. How can we bring the University of São Paulo closer to society at large, to the cities that host its campuses, and above all, to its own community?

In order to promote critical, open and accessible debates on issues pertaining to contemporary society and to the University of São Paulo, a renewed IEA must operate as a *multimedia agora*, fostering networked efforts in contextual partnerships with teaching units, integration and support agencies, and local and international institutions outside the university. To achieve this, the IEA must update its *operating system*, and concomitantly build a *new hardware*, i.e., its new building, a bold and innovative piece of architecture worthy of the Institute's activities and mission. Improving the operating system must include state-of-the-art technologies, such as the Internet2 network, which will enable not only real-time discussions with specialists around the world broadcast to the entire planet, but also virtual study groups and virtual residence programs.<sup>4</sup> The use of leading information and communication

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<sup>4</sup> An extremely high-speed Internet controlled in Brazil by the federal government through the RNP (Rede Nacional de Ensino e Pesquisa = National Education and Research Network. See <[www.rnp.br](http://www.rnp.br)>) with the participation of major agencies that provide support to universities (including the University of São Paulo) and of regional networks such as NARA.

technologies will also help to diversify the Institute's editorial policy, and to expand its scholars-in-residence programs. In addition to inviting renowned scientists, the IEA will have much to gain by encouraging the participation of artists and thinkers who are eccentric to the academic structure, for contact with other cosmologies is always enriching. Curatorial processes developed to orchestrate these new programs, capable of pluralistically reaching out to society, are likewise needed, inasmuch as they simultaneously address the creation, production, and exhibition of the problems that are under analysis and discussion.

As a *multimedia agora*, the IEA will assume its strategic role in the ongoing process of scientific, cultural, and academic leadership that the University of São Paulo has exercised since its inception.

### **THE PROJECT (2012-2017)**

The IEA is going through a moment of generational transition. Previous administrations were committed to a more modernist model of institute, reinforced by great scientists and scholars who helped to establish the main areas of knowledge in modern Brazil. Since then, the production of knowledge and the geopolitical contexts have undergone significant transformations. It is now time to strengthen the IEA's commitment to fostering critical discussions of current state of affairs and to motivating prospective actions. In this sense, it has become necessary to promote an institutional critique of the scope and mission of the University of São Paulo. The same critical mindset must turn to the state of education in Brazil, to new personnel training in various areas of knowledge, to geopolitics and the ensuing conceptions of modernity, and most certainly to interdisciplinary action, the driving force of this institution. It is up to the IEA to develop a more complex, interdisciplinary series of actions, with an eye to

transdisciplinarity. This is viable because the Institute, in keeping with the genealogy of this type of organization, operates as a metalinguistic platform.

The IEA should restore the format of its major debates by handpicking comprehensive and prospective contemporary issues; this will facilitate not only the organization of its programs but also suggest how they are disseminated and received. We propose implementing this proposal by means of what we call “metacuratorships,” a concept still in development. **Metacuratorships** are an outgrowth of the curatorial concepts designed by the institutional program that was put into practice during my tenure at the Centro Cultural São Paulo (2006-2010) and by the cultural mediation of the Permanent Forum platform: “Art Museums, between the Public and Private.”<sup>5</sup> This very same notion, as applied to the IEA, would establish metalinguistic and metacritical curatorships, involving the interdisciplinary work of several specialists and their respective coordinators – at least two or more leading scholars from different fields of knowledge. Among other goals, this collective coordination would seek to motivate the formation of networks and to minimize the primacy of individual authorship.

We suggest the creation of four metacuratorships:

1. **Commons.** Will deal with the issue of access, i.e., of a possible and desirable culture of accessibility, well-being, democracy, human rights, social justice, and the establishment of sociocultural ambiances/interfaces/*milieus*, among other things.
2. **Transformational.** Will approach education not only from the viewpoint of training and development, but also from that of transformation, laying claim to the mission of transforming society, much like 20<sup>th</sup> century art aimed to do. Within this framework, the transformational metacuratorship will explore the frailness of the government’s educational policies since the beginning of the redemocratization process in Brazil in the 1980s, the lack of a national consensus necessary to establish such government

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<sup>5</sup> See <<http://www.forumpermanente.org>>.

policies, the inadequacy of the current educational/pedagogical structure in face of social inequality, the new sensibilities, and the new forms of producing and accessing knowledge made possible by technological innovation, among other issues.

**3. Glocal.** Will explore the paradoxes, contradictions, inequalities, impropriety, and the relevance of this neologism formed by the polarization/simultaneity of globalness and localness. Focused on ongoing geopolitical changes, it will also investigate the shift from internationality to globalization, and, thus, the changes inherent in the concept of modernity. The glocal metacuratorship will also consider and describe bilateral and transnational processes that involve Brazil, providing critical analyses of the internationalization of the University of São Paulo

**4. Abstraction.** An instance of pure, undiluted free thinking: new and renewed indicators of thought without borders (trends, ideas and concepts still in the pre-application stage), and the creative act in philosophy, in the arts and in science (a desirable equivalency).

In addition to facilitate the communication with society, the metacuratorships will renew the Institute's current operating system by considering, among other things, the implementation of courses in an eventual "**IEA Academy**" and the release of new publications and other formats of knowledge output, abetting a new dynamics for the Institute.

Beyond the metacuratorships and in alignment with the IEA trajectory, we propose setting up a group of "**Higher Advanced Directed Studies**," aimed at the creation of a new "application": a new institute at the University of São Paulo at the juncture of areas such as Engineering, Architecture, Design, Arts, and Culture. In principle, its central motif would be the new technologies and their potential to solve problems. Perhaps we could also establish a working group in this area, inspired by models such as MIT's, in the United States, for example.

To conclude, the **Internet2**. I took part in the implementation of Internet1 at the University of São Paulo. The idea here is for the IEA to establish a new intercontinental debate forum using Internet2. The format is inspired by the TED Conferences, a program that invites representative individuals of the “glocal” society to go onstage and talk for 15-20 minutes on the subject of their choice <sup>6</sup>. Reinforcing the idea of networking – and, thus, of exchange, ambiance, and interface – the project for this Institute involves a virtual/presential agora in partnership with other university-based institutes for advanced study (UBIAS<sup>7</sup>), other universities, and other academic and cultural institutions. One possibility, for example, would be to have a moderator and a guest on stage here in São Paulo, who would interact with the virtual presence of other experts from around the world. All participants would be co-present (or, rather, “telepresent”) to discuss issues raised by the metacuratorships. The conferences in the *virtual agora* should not be restrictive, but critical and broadening.

This project is based on an understanding that has been gaining strength over time, namely, that the IEA is a platform for institutional critique, i.e., the leading edge within a conservative system – the university.

Martin Grossmann  
Director  
São Paulo, June 25, 2012

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<sup>6</sup> See <[www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)>.

<sup>7</sup> The UBIA network was initiated in 2010, when representatives from 32 research institutes worldwide met at the conference entitled “University-Based Institutes for Advanced Study in a Global Perspective: Promises, Challenges, New Frontiers”, hosted by the Freiburg Institute of Advanced Studies, Germany. The founding of the first UBIA dates back 40 years, however, the last 10 years have seen an upsurge in the establishment of such institutes across the world.  
<http://www.ubias.net/>