

# Testimony



# 25 years of IEA\*

*ALFREDO BOSI*

WHEN THE board of the Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA) began to plan the celebration of the institution's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I could not avoid being somewhat surprised. Celebrating 25 years, only a quarter of a century, in essence the coming of youth, barely out of the teens... Would it not be too early for that? Could it be because we are a young country and our institutions cannot compare with those in the Old World, whose universities and institutions are counted in hundreds and hundreds of years?

Then, however, I put my initial surprise into perspective. Yes, we are a new country, but the time we live is remarkably fast. Everything comes and goes quickly and the excess of information and signs is such that, contrary to the long and slowly cumulative times of Europe, we must commit to memory what fades away due to the speed of our daily lives. We must fight against oblivion, the evil that surrounds us daily, while in ancient cultures one needs to get rid of the smothering weight of memory which, because of its ubiquitous nature, leaves no gaps for thinking about the future, for believing in the future.

HISTORY, which in countries like Germany, Italy and certainly Spain and Portugal can become a nightmare and a prison, to us is a vertiginous process that we have to save by remembering, studying, understanding. And although the term is overrated and already causes some impatience, we feel that rescuing becomes a duty. One rescues a prisoner friend by paying the enemy the price of the friend's freedom. The price we pay the past, even the most recent past, is to remember it, in the etymological sense of keeping it in the heart before it gets lost in the deep waters of the Lethe, which to the Greeks was both the river of forgetfulness and the lethal and lethargic current of death.

So it makes sense for one of the new institutions of this University, the Institute of Advanced Study, to remember, remind and celebrate its fleeting quarter of a century. And to think about what has been, what is, what can be.

In hindsight, from the point of view limited by my personal experience, I can not but recall with joy the time when the IEA was founded. It was the mid-1980s. It was in the hopeful context of democratization started with the end of the military dictatorship that a group of teachers from Adusp decided to establish a climate of resistance to fragmentation that the University Reform was producing, because of the division of our alma mater, the School of Philoso-

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phy, into several specialized institutes. The division had become a rational and modern tribute to scientific and humanistic specialization. But the conviviality between faculty and students had been lost, and the risk of atrophying atomization should be averted. But how to do it if the institutional spaces had been separated from each other? The idea of a community university had become an empty figure of speech. It was necessary to give it new life by bringing together again men of science, culture, art, basic and applied disciplines. Democracy also means coexistence, dialogue and civilized confrontation between parties that believe they have opposing interests.

This context of values gave life to the project of a *locus* that cultivated interdisciplinarity, something that a few tenacious dreamers, lost in their departments, could not do alone. Rocha Barros, a physicist of broad humanistic culture and strong political commitment was one of them. I believe that this combination of historical forces and individual wills is the engine that keeps the universities running.

We know that the political will of Prof. Goldemberg, then dean of the university, was one of those engines. And the fact that the IEA does not have a fixed body of researchers and is supported by a modest though functional infrastructure and a small collegiate board, has certainly contributed to leverage that sensitive and complex project.

What came later, what happened in these 25 years, ratifies the program to interrelate different areas of science and culture. Study groups in which biologists exchanged ideas with physicists and chemists; academics and educators coexisted with philosophers and men of letters and arts; economists and business administrators discussed with political and social scientists; geographers, geologists, botanists and zoologists produced research that would lead to what is now called sustainable development; in short, everyone endeavored to *give substance to the ideal of transdisciplinarity* through meetings, seminars, conferences of the month. And a very reduced dedicated staff never failed us in the sometimes difficult moments of such an innovative program.

The IEA has grown and survived under the different leaderships of a historian attentive to the past and the present (Carlos Guilherme Mota), an outstanding administrator and economist (Jacques Marcovitch), a geologist without borders (Umberto Cordani), a literature professor somewhat lost amidst such competent brains, an eminent biologist (Gerhard Malnic), an astronomer who looked at the sky without taking his feet off the ground (John Steiner), and a psychologist that doubled as ethologist (César Ades). Even in the ascendancy of its leaders the very Brazilian vocation of galvanizing different ethnicities was fulfilled.

So far, I have emphasized the plan to articulate areas generally far astray from knowledge as a priority of an institute that ambitiously calls itself advanced.

But there was another component of the initial project that ultimately

gave the IEA a unique dimension. Those who were coming out of twenty years of political censorship imposed on a nation that had experienced the hope of the 1960s reforms could not escape the historical responsibility of cheerfully resuming their objectives of knowing their land, their people that are called Brazil. The IEA never stopped, in any of the administrations I have mentioned, to think of Brazil in its enormous natural and cultural diversity and its structural deficiencies. However, without resorting to the heavy and obsolete jargon that condemned us to backwardness and to an eternally peripheral condition. We turned our backs on the paralyzing pessimism filled with pseudo-Marxist determinism. Periphery is a spatial term, but not an ontological or eternal term. We are not tied to backwardness, as believed by the Eurocentric interpreters that frozen into a barren skepticism. We have advanced, stumbled, fallen back, advanced again, because we are always on the go and we face the risk of change.

Therefore, the IEA devised an extraordinary reforestation plan, Project Floram, of which Prof. Ab'Saber was one of the helmsmen. Therefore, we have created Citizenship and Education groups, the Capital and Labor Forum, the vision of Brazil in the era of globalization with projections in various sectors, Brazil in Latin America, the Brazil of Afro-descendants, of Indigenous peoples, of multiple religions, of regions, of the Amazon, of the Northeast, of the city of São Paulo; the Brazil of the agrarian issue and rural development, of polluting and non-polluting forms of energy, of food security and epidemics, of human rights, of migrants; Brazil in full international financial crisis; the Brazil of the theater, cinema and poetry; the Brazil of popular culture. How many Brazils in one single Brazil; how many dilemmas and challenges have been the object of studies, seminars, debates over these 25 years!

And by highlighting these two vectors - the meeting of sciences and the knowledge of Brazil, I realize that by speaking of the IEA I have also spoken of the *Advanced Studies* journal, which I have the honor of publishing, and whose seventy-third issue is being released today. The journal has mirrored all the hard cultural and activist work of the Institute. The journal has disseminated the IEA, with its 15 million online accesses, and from the IEA it has received nourishment and encouragement.

In this issue, which is being released today, the IEA's area of interest circumvents the borders of our University in pursuit of its peers, embracing national and international institutes in a horizon that stretches from the Americas to China. Many IEA will have more resources than ours; few, however, will have the same determination and, mainly, the same openness to the burning issues of a changing world.

Definitely, the concepts of center and periphery merit a balanced review that surpasses the basic Manichaeism that has been with us for at least half a century.

But this issue does not include only sister entities spread around Brazil and

the world. It is also at USP that the journal recognizes its partners: in this case, the four museums that house true treasures in their collections and act as outstanding centers of research and cultural extension. To you, our gratitude and our tribute to the Museum of Contemporary Art, in the person of its director, Tadeu Chiarelli; to the Paulista Museum, in the person of its director, Cecilia Helena Lorenzini de Salles Oliveira; to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, in the person of its director Maria Beatriz Florenzano Borba; and to the Museum of Zoology, in the person of its director, Maria Isabel Landim. And our special thanks to Prof. Adilson Avansi Abreu for the preface to the testimonies of the museums' directors.

Therefore, the party is for everyone who has something to remember and who turn this memory into the purest reason for us to continue the good fight and hope for a future that starts here and now.

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### **Erratum**

In issue 73, p.118, the name of Dr. Gerald Forbes failed to be mentioned as IEA Counselor.

Editorial staff