



# Collaboration, Intimacy & Revolution: #EASA2014 Conference

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A sneak preview into the 13th EASA Biennial Conference organized at the Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University, Estonia 31st July - 3rd August, 2014 with the title [Collaboration, Intimacy & Revolution - innovation and continuity in an interconnected world](#)

We're inspired! And find nice connections with the forthcoming seminar [Probing The Intimate Workshop: Cross-Cultural Queries of Proximity and Beyond](#) organized at University of Cambridge 13-14 May 2014 - Intimacy is clearly becoming a hot topic for the moment!

Call for Panels: 14/10/2013-09/12/2013



The 2014 EASA conference, which also celebrates the 25th anniversary of EASA's inaugural meeting, coincides with a quarter-century since the end of the Cold War and the events that triggered dramatic changes around the world. The 14th EASA Biennial Conference will be held in a region that experienced first-hand the socio-political reconfigurations emerging around that time. This conference aptly revolves around the complex intimacies and collaborations at play in bringing about revolutionary change.

20th century social theory, which accounts for the majority of anthropology's professional history, was characterized, amongst other things, by the belief that anthropos was a selfish and competitive being. The new millennium has distinguished itself already by new forms of empirical data, conceptual innovation, cross-disciplinary theorising, and vanguard technologies, which acknowledge, even multiply, anthropos' potential for cooperation.

EASA 2014 is an invitation to explore new collaborative practices and data sets at various levels and in multiple directions. It is also an invitation to explore concepts of collaboration as a way out of certain theoretical and methodological deadlocks in which many anthropologists have found themselves in past decades: the iron cage of structural functionalism has been pried open, for example, by intentional and collaborating social actors, and some of the bottomless deconstructions of postmodernism have been overcome by attention to the collective and collaborative making of meaning. We also invite colleagues to think about collaboration as not just a technical affair, but as an intimate process. Approaching collaboration as relations of intimacy opens up conceptual spaces to explore the basic terms of our contemporary world, including social and political change, community, kinship, social networks, activism and digital media.

One thematic direction for this conference includes attention to the technologies of, and for, intimate collaboration, such as those proliferating on the Internet. Virtual communication has changed the flow of information and spurred new types of cooperation previously unknown or impossible, but participants are, of course, also invited to consider the many forms of intimate collaborations beyond



those related to new technology. Intimacy invokes emotion and the senses. The conference will pick up on the 'sensuous re-turn' in anthropology characterised by research practises that involve contextual, reflexive, ethnological and ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and thick description. Narrative, memory, ways of dealing with rapid and extreme social changes, the construction of self-identity in a globalising, inter-sensuous, and trans-subjective world, are all issues that EASA 2014 might consider. Such considerations are crucial in developing the conceptual tools and research practices which will help to maintain anthropology's standing as a discipline among other disciplines—especially at a time of concern for the discipline, when cultures of audit, speed and disposability impact on funding opportunities and what is valued in scholarship which, in turn, are blocking certain academic pathways.

Thinking of the intimacy of cooperation and collaboration may also change our perspective on the place of anthropos in the world. We might direct our attention to companion species for instance, or meshes, or networks, or thought nebula as agents in the terraforming of experience – in the attention paid to the 'noosphere' or the 'anthropocene'. We might think disaggregation of humanity along human/machine lines and its recombination in 'cyborg' anthropology, for example, or in our understandings of artificial intelligence. Further examples include the emergence of aggregate political subjects like Occupy or entities such as Anonymous.

Scrutinising the simultaneously mental and material processes of collaboration, we find that such processes are never constituted by smooth flows or unanimous connections alone. Rather, social and cultural worlds come into being through various, often disharmonious and conflicting modes and spheres of collaborating. Cooperation in all its forms is also frequently shot through with hierarchies and inequalities. Thinking in terms of intimate collaborations also necessitates asking about clashes, conflicts, and collusion (both tacit and explicit), which frequently go hand in hand with declarations of cooperation and partnership. Ethnographers, with their sharp eye for hidden dynamics, are in a unique position to highlight the complexities, nuances and contradictions of collaboration.



Politically, new forms of collaboration are especially topical in terms of recent post-colonial developments around the world, including those in West Africa and in the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring', as well as links forged, for example, between rioters in Brazil and Turkey. This conference provides an opportunity to discuss topics such as the relations between networking technologies and social change; there is also an invitation to critically analyse the 'revolutions' which they are understood to facilitate.

For our professional practice, focusing on the revolutionary dynamics of collaborative intimacies can help us rethink the production of knowledge which anthropologists are currently engaged with. As a researcher inevitably participates in creating a web of collaboration while conducting fieldwork, he or she may encounter various dilemmas related to the intimacy of these collaborations. What is the meaning of intimacy for an anthropologist in a variety of fieldwork situations? Furthermore, do different mediums such as written text, documentary film, or sound recordings enable the researcher to create a different level of collaboration with the field, producing more collaborative anthropological knowledge as a result? Who and what collaborates to produce ethnographic knowledge? With many anthropologists exploring dissemination through new media, does our networked world usher in the end of the lone ethnographer? What would be lost if it did?

It is fortuitous that a conference addressing these themes will take place in Tallinn. Along with other Baltic states, Estonia initiated the 'Singing Revolution' which has been credited a central role in the country's move towards independence and post-Soviet reformations. Today, Estonia is equally at the forefront of the digital revolution - a socio-technological complex which is likely to have impacts analogous to those of the printing press 500 years ago. Through a focus on Collaboration, Intimacy and Revolution we invite you to explore not only the manifold social, political and cultural transformations around the world, but also to re-think some of our taken-for-granted conceptual tools.