



Call for papers for an *ephemera* conference and special issue on:

## Whither emergence?

**Conference organizers:** Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Konstantin Stoborod  
and Keti Chukhrov at NCCA Moscow, Russia, 6-7 May 2015

The very first *ephemera* conference, ‘Web of capturing the moving mind’, which took place on a Trans-Siberian train, had Moscow as its starting point. 10 years later, *ephemera* is happy to announce it is going back to Moscow, so as to make our minds move again and cross all sorts of boundaries that constitute us and the worlds we inhabit.

We are going to a country that is often referred to as ‘emerging’, and, perhaps surprisingly, it is exactly this seemingly commonsensical reference that has inspired the conference theme. What does it mean – we thought – and (how) can it be mobilized to mean something else?

When we speak of an ‘emerging’ country/market/economy, ‘emerging’ – a politically correct version of what previously was called ‘lesser developed’ – refers to an entity that has supposedly opened its doors to growth-oriented capitalism and is catching up with the ‘developed’ countries of this world. Such ‘emergence’ is problematic in at least two ways.

First, it creates divisions and maintains a hierarchy between them – ‘developed’ vs ‘emerging’, where the latter is positioned as lagging behind. Be it some mainstream business magazine or a critical left-wing journal, such divisions are constantly reproduced: developed – developing, First World – (ex-)Second/Third World, North – South, West – East. There are, of course,

geo-political and cultural differences that have implications for analysing certain areas separately (e.g. Alcadipani et al., 2012; Gorbach and Samanyuk, 2014), as well as for epistemologies to do this from, without succumbing to the global coloniality of knowledge (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Castro-Gómez, 2007; Tlostanova, 2012). However, ‘the “West” [‘developed’, ‘First World’, ‘North’] – that damned word! – names this disjunction’ (Badiou, 2008: 60), suggesting the replication of and aspiration towards the path it has taken as the only possible option for humanity. At this conference we propose to problematize these divisions and explore how they have come to be instituted.

Second, the meaning of ‘emergence’ here functions as capitalist teleology. However, facing ecological, economic, social and political crises, the ‘vanguard’ countries of this world seem to have an unpredictable vector. While more and more vitality is squeezed out from human lives, austerity, rising precarity (Standing, 2011) and inequality (Piketty, 2014) are given in return. The countries that have stepped on the path of such emergence, having adopted some forms of neoliberalism locally, are not necessarily in bloom either (Dale, 2011). Furthermore, it is no secret that such emergence takes place at the expense of certain localities and groups of people (Escobar, 1995; Badiou, 2008).

Ironically, one of the crucial issues arising in the world that has ‘emerged’ in such a way is whether there are any alternatives to it. However, even though ‘anti-emergence’ (similarly to ‘anti-development’) seems to be the only response to ‘emergence’ in capitalist terms, we do not want to discharge the word itself. Perhaps the notion of emergence – if understood differently – can help us (re-)imagine alternatives.

Emergence – coming from Latin *e-* ‘out, forth’ + *mergere* ‘to dip’ – suggests openness, undecidedness and multiple potentialities. For example, it may be defined as ‘the process of becoming visible after being concealed’ (Oxford dictionary, online). This opens a myriad of ways to think about emergence, which is exactly what we would like to invite the conference participants to do. As a philosophical notion ‘emergence’ can actually prevent the division between the social world and the world of nature (e.g. Gare, 2002; Pueyo, 2014), which characterises the dominant ways of knowing. Or Agamben’s (2005) elaboration of Benjamin’s (2003) concept of a ‘real state of emergency’ might be used to ‘expose, demystify and unwork the mystical foundations of authority, freeing human beings to be what they are and do what they will’ (McQuillan, 2011: 97).

Alternative understandings of emergence can be searched within both places that have ‘emerged’ in capitalist terms and places that are ‘emerging’, having not yet become as locked into the modern ‘iron cages’ of capitalism. Or can they? Should these be searched for within or outside the political? Another way to explore the meanings of emergence would be to ask what modes of thought and forms of organizing are not emerging or not allowed to emerge in the world of growth-oriented capitalism. What did not emerge in the past

(e.g. Gare, 1993; Shubin, 2006)? Alternatively, it is precisely utopia(nism) and its representations (for example, in art and literature) where inspiration for another understanding of ‘emergence’ – not constrained by the crude realities of our lives – could be sought.

In short, at this conference, we call for problematization of all sorts of divisions of the world and exploration of how they come to be instituted. We also suggest to reclaim the notion of ‘emergence’ by thinking what it might mean if detached from the aims of capitalist renewal and how it can be mobilized to (re-)imagine a world that is worth striving for.

Possible topics include, but are by no means limited to the following:

- Problematization of all sorts of divisions – geographical or epistemic
- Institutionalization of geographical and epistemic divisions
- Problematization and meanings of the notion of ‘emergence’
- Genealogy of the notion of ‘emergence’
- (Non-)emerging forms of being and organizing
- (Non-)emerging modes of thought
- (Past) failed attempts of emergence
- The politics of (non-)emergence
- (Real) state(s) of emergency
- Emergence and utopia
- Emergence in art and literature

## **Deadlines and further information**

The conference is co-organized by *ephemera* and NCCA Moscow and will take place at the NCCA, 6-7 May 2015.

*ephemera* encourages contributions in a variety of formats including articles, notes, photo essays and any experimental modes of representation.

The deadline for submitting abstracts is 31 December 2014. The abstracts, of no more than 500 words, should be submitted in the format of a Pages/Word document to Ekaterina Chertkovskaya ([ekaterina.chertkovskaya@fek.lu.se](mailto:ekaterina.chertkovskaya@fek.lu.se)) or Konstantin Stoborod ([ks302@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:ks302@leicester.ac.uk)). Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 15 February 2015.

The conference will be free to all participants. NCCA will provide invitations for participants (who need visas) to smoothen the visa application process.

We also encourage conference participants to submit their contributions to the special issue on ‘Whither emergence?’, which is expected to be published

in 2017.

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