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Navigating Ambivalence: Experiments in Creative Labour and Self-Organisation

Over the past decade, the labour conditions of workers in the creative and cultural fields has been capturing increasing attention, seen not only in the trajectories of radical political networks, but also in corporate and statist economic policies and reforms. Within the radical left, discourses around immaterial, cognitive and affective labour have saturated conceptualisations of contemporary capitalist systems, and the ambivalences of these labour forms as prevalent in the creative and cultural fields have been acutely thematised.

These ambivalences underpin biopolitical, economic, psycho-social and organisational tensions faced by workers in these fields, motivating struggles for strategies of antagonism and self-valorisation that can assist the negotiation of working conditions. This paper considers some of these ambivalences by examining different perspectives and strategies of self-organisation being theorised and practiced by creative and cultural workers in Europe and Asia. Drawing from qualitative and militant co-research, this paper explores the individual and collective articulation of desires and hope, points of exhaustion, conflict and delirium, transversing from the subjective to the organisational and the political to seek out responses by creative and cultural workers to their living and working conditions.