Work and pleasure. From musicians to street cleaners

Whilst working with artists (musicians, dancers and choreographers) for several years, I was struck by the discrepancy between the daily workload and work-related anxieties that I had witnessed over the years of fieldwork as well as our formal or informal discussions, and the fact that they often felt obliged to fight against the presupposition that, because they were enjoying what they were doing, it could not be considered “real work”. This situation forced me to question the inadequacy of thinking in terms of a duality between work and pleasure, not only for artistic work but also in every work situation. I have therefore decided to attempt a comparison between professions usually perceived as “pleasurable” and those more commonly thought of as “unbearable”, hence exploring the two ends of a continuum constituted by stereotypes of what one considers to be the most and least pleasurable professions. As a result, I am currently conducting participant ethnography with French cantonniers (street cleaners). This talk will explore draw from various work situations to explore further the articulation between work and pleasure.

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