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Paper

“Go get a job right after you take a bath”: Occupy Wall Street as Matter Out of Place

Matthew Bolton, Stephen Froese, Alex Jeffrey

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Abstract

Anthropological studies of purity reveal how notions of cleanliness influence political and social life. During its 2011 Zuccotti Park occupation in Lower Manhattan, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) contested spatial and symbolic manifestations of neoliberalism by re-inserting Otherness into sanitized and privatized space. But the demonstration provoked reactions from politicians and news media that entwined discourses of cleanliness and productivity (such as Newt Gingrich's riposte to the protestors: “Go get a job right after you take a bath”). This ethnographic study argues that such representations had spatial and political effects. In particular, our account illuminates the plural agency of Occupiers, where resistance to depictions of dirt and idleness existed alongside the use of such discourses to discipline each other. We trace a discursive legacy of these events as notions of productivity and cleanliness have circulated within activist responses to 2012's Superstorm Sandy and the 2014 Flood Wall Street mobilization.

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