Mere Graffiti:

The Pedagogical Implications—and Potential—of Latrinalia Research

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Abstract

This article argues that latrinalia is an important and potentially beneficial source of public writing deserving of educators' and researchers' attention. I start by comprehensively reviewing the research record of latrinalia in order to demonstrate its status as a legitimate academic field while surfacing the major trends, questions, and fault lines of latrinalic scholarship. Then, after outlining how most research on latrinalia takes place on college campuses, I trace recent work on spatial practice which implicitly advocates for public discourses like latrinalia in order to make the case that bathroom graffiti is an important but often neglected source of public writing and rhetoric that aligns with contemporary conceptions of composition theory and holds pedagogic potential for the teaching of writing. Lastly, I discuss the limitations and unresolved questions of the field of latrinalia before sketching future directions for research.

"The slight scratching of many of the Maeshowe Runes, and the consequent irregularity and want of precision in the forms… of what, it must be remembered, are mere graffiti." (D. Wilson, *Britanno— Roman Inscriptions: With Critical Notes*, 1863)

Introduction

Bathroom graffiti is an importantly situated source of public writing. Public rhetorics writ large draw vast attention. Graffiti, in general, has an extensive record of scholarship and has been continually researched by a wide range of disciplines. Yet graffiti specific to lavatories— latrinalia—has been studied from much more limited perspectives often with inconsistent methods, non-aggregable findings, and indecisive or even conflicting results (Haslem 2014; Marine et al. 2021). As a result of the methodological inconsistencies used to appraise its phenomenological occurrence along with a scattered disciplinary conception of its analytic value and import, latrinalia has remained a fringe object of study, and yet one that aligns not only with prevailing theories of public rhetorics but so too calls to account for the spatial aspects of pedagogy—particularly in composition. If latrinalia is an interactive mode of public discourse with myriad psychosocial and communicative implications whose features remain accessible to students on college campuses—the argument goes—then what precludes the pedagogic potential of its observance as a handy and rhetorically authentic public discourse naturally inscribed in and onto the spaces in which students learn?

As it happens, an important feature of latrinalia's long history of scholarship are the consistent appeals for its integration into compositional pedagogy. A long list of scholars of bathroom graffiti have called for latrinalia to be accounted for by educators, administrators, and researchers in higher education (D'Angelo 1974, 1975; Anderson & Verplanck 1983; Nwoye, 1993; Mwangi

2012; Haslem 2014; Molloy 2013; Peary 2014;, Lively 2016; Marine et al. 2021). These studies all show that latrinalia is not only proliferate on college campuses, but that it is also a complex and interactive mode of public discourse which offers cultural insight into the space it abounds.

Owing, in part, to the affordances of anonymity, scholars of latrinalia have repeatedly contended that bathroom graffiti is a "sensitive social barometer" which offers a window into the social context in which it occurs (Gonos et al. 1976; Anderson and Verplanck 1983). And because of this social insight, scholars have also argued that latrinalia allows for an opportunity to "gain otherwise inaccessible insight into mechanisms for enhancing public writing pedagogies" through helping acculturate students to the rhetorical and stylistic features of real-life public discourse (D'Angelo 1974; Mwangi 2012; Molloy 2013). Latrinalia researchers have continually advocated for bathroom graffiti to be accounted for in pedagogy because its discourse surfaces otherwise suppressed and unheard rhetorics which help to shape the social context in which students learn. But researchers of bathroom graffiti are not the only scholars calling for the field to account for the environment and context in which writing takes place.

In recent years, a great deal of scholarship in composition has focused on spatial practice—in essence, theories of how our material learning environment affects our learning. Most prominently, Jeffrey Bacha (2016) argues that through attending to the rhetoric of their immediate physical surroundings, students can learn to construct arguments that better engage the public audiences they will commonly encounter, and discourse with, during their studies. Similarly, Kevin Roozen (2021) calls for "increased attention to people's engagements with inscriptions and inscriptional practices" (23), and Nancy Welch (2012) suggests an

expansion of "the direction of and audiences for a writing program's work" through attuning to real writing in the public rhetorical sphere (701). In parallel with Bacha, Roozen, and Welch's calls for more attention to the effect of material discourse on the educational spaces in and on which they are found, Gabriela Raquel Rios's (2015) asserts that we should "radically rethink what we teach as rhetoric… [because] the discourses we inhabit manifest materially as the literal spaces of the universities we inhabit" (80). And Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster (2012) have taken up the implications of materiality and spatiality in educational contexts by arguing that the features of our physical learning environment can reinforce patriarchal conceptions of our socially defined genders. What all of this work on spatial practice shares is a call for educators to account for the broader physical, social, and material milieu in which writing, and the teaching of writing, takes place.

In response to this call, I want to argue that the writing taking place *outside* of the classroom, yet within the larger cultural context of the campus community, sets the stage for learning *inside* of the classroom. And that studying local underprivileged genres, or more primitive, less technical discourse forms, commonplace to the college campus—like latrinalia— provides an accessible entry point for novice writers to learn about writing, rhetoric, and communicative exigencies. This is because there is no more accessible (and understudied) writing happening on college campuses today, written by college writers, than bathroom graffiti.

Graffiti, and particularly latrinalia, is a live, ever-evolving site of composition, participation, and political expression. Recognizing composition pedagogy's increasing attendance to place-based writing, I assert that the widespread occurrence of latrinalia on

college campuses is an important, influential, and potentially beneficial source of public writing and rhetoric deserving of teachers, educators, and researcher's serious, renewed attention. In the following section, I will review the historical record of scholarship on latrinalia in order to establish its legitimacy as an academic object of study before turning to scholarship on spatial practice in order to demonstrate how theories of place-based writing implicitly advocate for the use of often neglected public discourses *like* latrinalia in compositional pedagogies.

Graffiti and the Emergence of Latrinalia

While Sumerian cuneiform is widely recognized as the first prehistoric writing system, graffiti (plural for 'graffito'), Italian for "a scratch," predates all known systems of writing (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). And graffiti writ large has been continually studied for more than a hundred years from a wide variety of cultural perspectives and contexts (for a review, see Ross et al. 2017). Yet graffiti *specific to lavatories* has been approached from a somewhat more limited, largely Western, set of disciplinary perspectives. The first examples of bathroom graffiti date back at least to ancient Greece and Rome. Lang et al. (1988) in *Graffiti in the Athenian Agora* shares several often-colorful examples of the "rich record of wall scratchings" of that era which, although they were certainly not exclusive to lavatories, suggest that "latrinalia was a feature of Roman life" by about AD 101 (116).

Publications dedicated to latrinalia did not emerge until the late 20th century. Hurlo Thrumbo's *The Merry-Thought: or, The Glass-Window and Bog-House Miscellany* is the first work focused on the collection and dissemination of graffiti specific to bathrooms and an important early foray into the collection of authentic examples of latrinalia (Reisner 1974, viii). True academic scholarship on

latrinalia first surfaced in 1923 in *Anthropophyteia*, a series of sexual folkloric surveys conducted annually by Croatian-Austrian ethnographer and folklorist Fredrich S. Krauss, which "scoured the historical record and contemporary lavatories for examples of latrinalia" before shuttering under threat of prosecution for obscenity laws even though Sigmund Freud personally advocated for the journal's merit (Haslem 2014, 117). The cancellation of *Anthropophyteia* is instructive in that it demonstrates the type of disregard which latrinalia has been commonly held, and, what's worse, the persecution of those who have tried to study it. In making the case for educators and researchers to attend to the phenomenon of latrinalia more seriously—which I might point out, is even now regarded by many as a deviant, subaltern discourse which doesn't merit consideration as a valid context in which to meaningfully engage with others (Cavallaro 2015)—it bears reminding that less than a hundred years ago the study of latrinalia was illegal. As a result, in part, of this dismissive regard, the study of bathroom graffiti would take until the mid-twenty-first century to garner sustained attention from scholars.

In 1953, Alfred Kinsey and a team of researchers sponsored by the National Research Council and The Rockefeller Foundation published a book entitled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in which they surveyed the walls of over three-hundred male and female public bathrooms. They argued, among other findings, that men not only produced more inscriptions, but also that those inscriptions were far more erotic: 86% of male inscriptions contained erotic content compared to only 25% of women's (Kinsey et al. 1953). It cannot be understated how much this belief—that men produce more bathroom graffiti and more sexualized and salacious graffiti than women—has remained a prevailing assumption of, and question about, latrinalia scholarship that hangs over the field to this day.

While latrinalia has been commonplace for centuries, if not millennia, the first academic scholarship focused *solely* on graffiti specific to bathrooms was folklorist Alan Dundes's landmark 1966 article from the *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* entitled "Here I Sit: A Study of American Latrinalia." It was Dundes who first coined the term "latrinalia," lamenting that the term "graffiti" was too broad (Dundes 1966, 92). Proclaiming that "the study of latrinalia is clearly a legitimate area of inquiry," Dundes's work remains the first major step forward into the specific examination of latrinalia as a phenomenon with deep psychosocial value and the first explicit academic argument for its legitimacy (91, 94, 104).

The 1970's signaled a serious uptick in research on latrinalia. Robert Reisner's (1974) *Encyclopedia of Graffiti* makes an important early observation that latrinalia often provokes a response which "may even inspire another and thus set off a whole chain of dialogue" (v). And Gonos et al.'s 1976 work, "Anonymous Expression: A Structural View of Graffiti," convincingly argues that graffiti is an expressive outlet that, by way of its anonymity, affords insight into the broader culture in which it issituated. The work of Dundes, Reisner, and Gonos drew attention to the hidden complexity of what was then regarded (and to an extent still is) as nothing more than an act of vandalism.

Latrinalia on College Campuses

The 1970's also marked the emergence of the study of latrinalia on college campuses. Two articles in *College Composition and Communication* by noted rhetorical theorist Frank D'Angelo (1974, 1975), entitled "Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburgers: The Rhetoric of Graffiti" and "Oscar Mayer Ads Are Pure Baloney: The Graffitist as Critic of Advertising," offer a taxonomy of categories

for the common rhetorical appeals found written on bathroom stalls before making the case that graffiti can "be used to teach students stylistic features which are common to certain kinds of writing today" (1974, 173). D'Angelo's recognition of the pedagogical potential of latrinalia for educators began a tradition of collecting latrinalic data from college campuses that remains a pervasive feature of research on bathroom graffiti.

In fact, *most* studies of latrinalia occur on college campuses, including S.J. Anderson and W. Verplanck's notable 1983 article in *Psychological Reports* entitled "When Walls Speak, What Do They Say?" This work marks an important moment for the cross-disciplinary expansion of the study of latrinalia as well as a massive leap forward in the methodological rigor of data collection and analysis. Contending that graffiti are a "more sensitive barometer of social events than had been thought," Anderson and Verplanck's demonstrate how the space or environment in which graffiti is inscribed is significantly influenced by the "different (student) populations" which inhabit that environment. The work of these scholars contributed to expanded conceptions of the psychosocial import of bathroom graffiti as well as a focus on latrinalia research on college campuses.

The most in-depth and rigorous analysis of graffiti specific to university lavatories of the 21st century is a 1993 study by Onuigbo G. Nwoye. In this wide-ranging and important analysis, 235 instances of graffiti were collected and transcribed from two large buildings at the center of the University of Benin's campus and taken from the men's lavatories (and some stairways), making it the largest corpus of latrinalia collected to that time. Nwoye's analysis is largely predicated on a well-sculpted coding protocol which divided graffiti into themes and subthemes. He concluded that graffiti is an "expressive mode adopted by subgroups that have

been denied other avenues of self-expression" and that it "covers many topics and issues... that are of immediate interest to student welfare" (438-439). While Nwoye's paper focuses very intently on social and political campus-based issues specific to Nigerian culture, the clarity of the research methods and coding protocol were a notable step forward for subsequent researchers in their efforts to systematically collect and analyze latrinalia on college campuses.

Even more importantly, however, Nwoye (1993) advances an important parlaying of two important contentions underlying latrinalic research writ large; namely, that if bathroom graffiti affords socio-psychological insight (put reductively), and if a great deal of latrinalia can be routinely found on college campuses, then it follows that the graffiti found in these educational contexts might have import for "student welfare," as Nwoye puts it. And many, if not most, studies of latrinalia since that time, in one form or another, have been implicitly predicated on, if not modeled after, the same conditional presumptions and central inquiries as Nwoye's 1993 study.

Sex, Gender, and Latrinalia

The influence of gender roles (and gendered space) on latrinalia has remained a point of at times intense disagreement, largely because many early researchers strongly contended that male bathrooms contain more instances of graffiti (Kinsley et al. 1954; Landy & Steele 1967; Peretti et al. 1977). While a myriad of studies since then have since taken up the division between graffiti found in male and female bathrooms, particularly in specific cultural contexts (Teixeira et al. 2003; Matthews et al. 2012; Fisher & Radtke 2014), there has nonetheless been little movement toward scholarly

consensus, with some articles arguing there is little difference (Schreer & Strichartz 1997; Bartholome 2004), or that the gap Kinsley observed is narrowing (Haslem 2014), or that female bathrooms actually produce more graffiti (Ahmed 1981; Bates & Martin 1980; Lively 2006; Wales & Brewer 1976).

The fact that the field of latrinalia research hasn't reached scholarly consensus regarding the role of gendered space in the occurrence of bathroom graffiti, in concert with its notorious academic emergence and persistent dismissal as a valid, meaningful mode of public discourse has—I believe—contributed to the lack of uptake of the formal academic study of latrinalia in Writing Studies and Composition. As a site of writing inquiry that is at once private and public, intimate and distant, expressive and dialogic—a place where everyone goes, if not everyone writes—then latrinalia is certainly an underprivileged genre with enormous pedagogical implications.

To deny latrinalia's educational and scholarly import is to deny a class of writers constitutive of the larger campus community, and to dismiss what can be known and taught through examining a unique form of social, cultural, and political discourse in a specific gendered space. Further, to discharge its significance as immaterial perpetuates the inaccessibility and disenfranchisement inextricably linked to genre hegemony, or the act of ascribing as most valuable, and worthy of study, those highly stylized technical discourses that more often exclude than include. Finally, as most latrinalia research has taken place on college campuses, it is particularly fit for use in composition pedagogy, as it is a form of authentic public discourse which naturally abounds the spaces in which students in higher education are quite literally learning to write.

Campus Latrinalia as a Site of Pedagogical Insight

From its early origins in psychosexual analysis (Kinsey), anthropology (Dundes), and psychology (Anderson & Verplanck) up through the examination of college campus latrinalia by D'Angelo in 1974 and '75, and Nwoye's return to college campuses in 1993, the study of latrinalia has firmly established its phenomenological existence, socio-psychological import, and proliferate occurrence as one of the everyday public discourses a student is likely to encounter on campus. If latrinalia is a part of the college campus environment, and if we are to believe that latrinalia is a naturally occurring phenomenon on college campuses the world over, and that, as Dundes opined in 1966, "one must not forget that it is humans who write on bathroom walls and humans who read these writings" (92), how are we as educators to account for and adapt to the privately scrawled, publicly viewed, multi-authored and as yet unread novels of modern college campuses?

Having established, I hope, that latrinalia is a legitimate object of academic inquiry, and that, further, most latrinalia research occurs on college campuses combined with the fact that a great deal of research on bathroom graffiti has advocated for its import to and uptake by educators, in the remainder of this essay I will turn my attention to adjacent pedagogical theories in composition which indirectly implicate latrinalia through calls for spatial practice—the study of how our learning environment affects our learning. How might we embed pedagogy in the material and social context in which composition is taking place?

Latrinalia as Writing Social Action (and Educational Policy)

Anonymous public speech has the power to persuade, inform, organize, and antagonize. And anonymous expressive writing, like latrinalia, has the power to unite the disenfranchised by calling for consensus, if not for action. Further, it allows for expression to a public without the need to account for the consequences of those speech acts, ones that may be controversial or otherwise subject to sanction or censorship. This anonymous expressive potential was taken up by Francis G. Mwangi in his 2012 work which examined how latrinalia can mobilize social action. Mwangi, by scouring the male and female bathrooms of ten secondary schools in Kenya, sampled some 200 instances of graffiti from his corpus of over 1,000 items, finding that students used graffiti as a means to express their needs to the school administration (18).

Mwangi's (2012) findings also suggest that "graffiti writing [should] be recognized by school administrations as an important communicative strategy" which lays bare student issues of "hatred, conflict and dissatisfaction with the school administration [that need to] be addressed to avoid strikes or unrests in schools" (126). Mwangi also reports that some administrators found graffiti a nuisance while others view it as an important conduit for communication (128). He concludes, ultimately, that like it or not these latrinalic voices cannot be simply painted away—they can, and should, be accounted for by educators in part because of the freedom afforded to graffitists through anonymity and its liberation of the impulse to speak out. Put another way, Mwangi believes that the "sensitive social barometer" derived from anonymity has potentially beneficial implications for educational professionals and policy, and "may contribute to the study of sociolinguistics in

general and communication in schools in particular" (18). Mwangi's work helped to establish not just the occurrence of latrinalia, but also the potential for its use in educational policy and pedagogy.

Other scholars have made similar arguments about writing outside of the classroom and its influence on social action. In Cathryn Molloy's 2013 article, she seeks to explicate the rhetorical strategies utilized in bathroom graffiti with an explicit eye toward informing compositional instruction, arguing that "we might gain otherwise inaccessible insight into mechanisms for enhancing public writing pedagogies from studying… bathroom graffiti" (19). Alexandria Peary (2014) contends that "text and physical space can be a permeable, mutually shaping force" and that the walls of the classroom and wider campus environment "are constructed from the very words of the learners and teacher" (43). And other scholarship advocates for more sophisticated conceptions of what makes for valuable public discourse, such as Shannon Carter and James H. Conrad's 2012 article, in which they argue for greater access to and a wider definition of what counts as researchable writing because boundaries between data that is and is not worthy of research have never been properly defined by the field of composition—and that what rules have been established have not proven advantageous (96).

Molloy, Peary, and Carter and Conrad are concerned here with the attention that is given to, or denied from, the educational environment which shapes what counts as writing worthy of teaching and how naturally occurring public discourses shape, and reinforce, institutionalized agency. All of these studies extend D'Angelo and Mwangi's earlier efforts to broker a space for the consideration of the established import of graffiti by researchers, educators, and teachers of writing. Yet, much as research on graffiti and latrinalia has called for pedagogical attention, one might

wonder how has education, composition, and rhetoric called back? And how is the gap between latrinalia and pedagogy to be bridged?

Spatial Practice as Adjacent to Campus Latrinalia

The Physical Mundane

One such framework for designing and embedding pedagogic interventions within the students' social context is offered by Jeffrey A. Bacha (2016) in his work on material mundanity. Bacha outlines his idea for "an invention tactic designed to help students understand how mundane features of everyday dwelling places have significant impacts on their educational experiences" (266). While Bacha allows that "a usability perspective may seem too technical or out of place for the composition classroom," he still holds that a stronger model of humanistic usability is necessary so that educators "can help students in a composition course view the physical structures included in a college campus as a university—sponsored product" (267). That is to say, Bacha wants students to think of their physical campus as a part of the broader composition—an extension, if you will—of the school and community as a whole. Learning, social interactions, school events and services, alumni, sports, the cafeteria, the parking lot, and even public restrooms are all bound by the physical materiality of the broader amalgamated educational environment which students inhabit.

And because the educational environment impacts and facilitates educational experiences, Bacha's (2016) uptake of the need for a better understanding of the relationship between place and space and writing and pedagogy falls squarely on the shoulders of

teachers, who he contends should encourage "students to analyze a college campus as a university-sponsored product [so as to afford themselves] the opportunity to explore a very familiar (and "real," to use the words of my students) rhetorical situation" (267); to take up the space in which they live and learn in *as a part of* what they write; their writing an inchoate materiality waiting to create, and to be created, by the broader world of the physical campus. Bacha suggests that his point is confluent with rhetorical history by arguing that the physical setting and features of a college campus are, from an Aristotelian point of view, a type of argumentative 'topos'—quite literally a topical material to be used to fuel communicative persuasion much as latrinalia might fuel student's writing (267).

Bacha (2016) asks his students to become active observers and researchers of their environment, recording—whether through note taking, photographing, or video—the problems, features, and reflections found in the physical materiality of their education ecology. Bacha explains,

> "...[s]tudents are specifically asked during this activity to... notice the subtleties of the everyday landscape surrounding their travels and how the physical structures supporting, hindering, or controlling their on-campus travels relate to their overall learning experiences." (277)

And as latrinalia form an exclusively compositional material element of the physical setting of a college campus, it is clear—though he might not refer to graffiti explicitly—that Bacha's (2016) argument situates mundane, unnoticed, or underprivileged writing *like* graffiti as an inroad for developing students' broader rhetorical awareness. For when the physicality of the educational ecology is accounted for, "encouraging students to analyze a college campus as a university-sponsored product offers opportunities for

becoming situated within rhetorical discourse as other stakeholders remind them that their own on-campus experiences are shared experience[s]" (268). These moments of shared student understanding wrought from the physically immediate often "produce an effective rhetorical response to their engagement with the physical" because they require an examination of the public, if sometimes mundane, rhetoric surrounding the physical structures they frequently encounter (268). By attending to the unnoticed, and by making their experience on campus an element of their writing, students are processing the materiality of the broader educational environment into the materiality of their own compositions, thereby accounting for and shaping their arguments to the milieu, social or otherwise, in which their words will go on to exist.

Through attending to the "rhetoric surrounding the physical structures they study" students can better appreciate "how the discourses they produce often need to be tailored in order to engage the various stakeholders who have a vested interest in the university" (Bacha 206, 269). The rhetor tailors their argument to the audience in their surrounding environment much as the graffitist must tailor their message to *their* public audience, some materially evident through a previous graffito, others silent, interloping, but always present. And attending to the educational environment and accounting for the material elements of their learning experiences supports student's ability to understand and shape their arguments to their audience, who are themselves a constituent element of the larger college-campus-cum-ecosystem.

In other words, by centering student writing experiences in the educational environment, Bacha (2016) argues, these shared experiences can anchor and bolster student rapport and understanding among and within classes by helping students to

view their positionality within the broader context of shared experience (285). This revolving door of fresh encounters with and attention to the physical and material elements of the educational environment, for Bacha and his students, is a generative loop of common experience built with fellow members of the community to form a rich latticework of altruism—and one that supports the type of empathy and emotional intelligence which research increasingly indicates is a stronger predictor of long-term personal success than academic achievement itself (Rogers 2018).

Bacha (2016) concludes that demarcating the physical structures of a college campus "as a shared space of discovery and argumentative inspiration" will encourage students "to increase their own perceptions of rhetorical agency and how they view their own position inside rhetorical work" (286). Put differently, by first attending to the physical environment of their education and then attending to other's perceptions of the same phenomena, students can heighten their awareness of their own egocentrism and account for the concerns of the audience of their rhetorical environment. Bacha's powerful defense of the import of the physically mundane, that which we see every day but rarely notice—like latrinalia—implicitly advocates for students to be purposefully exposed and sensitively guided by teachers through their experiences with the tangible and material elements of the educational context they inhabit. Bacha's plea to account for the mundane material aspects of the campus environment in composition is a prime example of how the pedagogy of place aligns with the study of latrinalia. Yet, other scholars have also taken up for the import and impact of the physical features of the learning environment in the teaching of writing and compositional pedagogy.

Installing Feminism

It is hard to deny the gender politics of latrinalia—the physical segregation of the sexes reinforces the gender binary, a construct which scholars across a number of fields have sought to interrogate. Writing Studies, led by a number of prominent feminist rhetors, has taken great strides toward deconstructing and dismantling Western hegemonic epistemologies, particularly patriarchy which seeks to classify and ascribe value on the basis of sex and gender identity. Feminist scholars Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster (2010), in "Feminist Rhetorical Practice: In Search of Excellence," draw on the interconnectedness of "critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and social circulation," in feminist rhetorical inquiry to dismantle "historical patterns of exclusivity" by decentering the "focus on men as rhetorical subject" and the "attention centered on power elites, by class, race, and gender" (640-41).

Examination of campus latrinalia from a feminist perspective allows for students to critically engage with how the imposed gender divide, and its discourses, informs and perpetuates certain hegemonic epistemologies. Further, Kirsch and Royster note contemporary feminist rhetorical practices have shifted from "attention directed toward public domains ... that is, arenas in which white males have dominated historically, rather than in what we refer to currently as counter-public arenas that draw from social and political networks that have not been shaped or controlled by power elites" (641). In keeping with this movement, the surfacing of latrinalia from a feminist rhetorical perspective as a site of study, and for shaping instructional schematics, uncovers a counter-public arena where dismissed discourses, underprivileged writing, and, often, oppressed points of view find public expression.

By further unpacking the implications of bathroom graffiti and the gender binary, several studies of latrinalia have compared findings between the discourses of the "Men's Room" and the "Women's Room." And yet a definitive analysis of gender-based differences in latrinalia has yet to emerge—and further still there is little scholarly analysis that takes up how the circulation of writing and discourse in gendered spaces either deconstructs or reinforces patriarchal conceptions of identity. But beyond this scholarly debate, latrinalia offers one of the few modern-day entry points for analyzing such discourses in gendered spaces as well as opening up the possibility for interrogating socio-cultural assumptions and further investigating the rhetorical features of gender ideologies.

Regardless, latrinalia demonstrates how the physical environment can reinforce the narrow, even patriarchal, conceptions of our sexually and socially defined genders. Indeed, the bathroom is one of the few places where writing reflects and instructs a discourse dichotomized by gender. And by illustrating how latrinalia functions through the inspection of place-based discourses, highly abstract constructs (e.g., how the material circulation of discourses can create and perpetuate inequality) are grounded in immediate relevancy and thereby become intellectually accessible. As an "invention tactic," as Bacha (2016) might say, this pedagogical approach provides the conceptual scaffolding that might allow students to incorporate a new rhetorical paradigm and thus improve their potential for utilizing new scholarly heuristics across the more technical academic rhetorical situations they will encounter as they navigate the academy.

Writing the Self

Writing the academic self is a long intensive process of adaptation to foreign rhetorical ecologies. Colleges and universities are

complex systems of interconnected *ways of knowing* with highly particular, and often occluded, signals, semiotic exchanges, and discourses that demonstrate affiliation with discrete *communities of knowing.* Beyond achieving disciplinary acculturation in the strictest academic sense, successful university students must adapt to a network of sociopolitical cultural norms—norms that often preclude access to disciplinary knowledge. In short, to learn, they must first belong.

Over the last decade, in recognizing the symbiotic relationship between student learning and sites of learning, the field of Writing Studies has called on instructors to bridge that gap—to design courses, develop assignments, and draw on theories of learning that instantiate students as members of campus communities at those sites where acculturation takes place. It is now recognized that learning outside of the classroom is as important as learning inside of the classroom. The educational environment of a college campus is a dynamic, networked constellation of activity where "public rhetorical work" is born by community clusters bound spatiotemporally. In other words, *learning takes place where learning takes place.* And indeed, researchers of the teaching of writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy have in recent years paid increased attention to the environment in which instruction and learning occur. They argue that place and space matter while attempting to account for the institutional demands which shape what counts as writing in the academy and beyond.

Drawing on the public rhetorical conception of writing as social, Nancy Welch (2012) argues that "public rhetorical work can result in substantive, even transformational change" and expand "the direction of and audiences for a writing program's work" through attuning more purposefully to examples of discourse in the public-rhetorical sphere (701). Welch urges the field to rethink the

approach to democratic participation writ large by checking in with lived events and reassessing academic ideas (701). The writing taking place in the larger cultural context of the campus community implicates the learning taking place within it. By studying these less technical genres, we can provide purchase to student writers as they try to acclimate to the demands of the academy and offer guidance to composition programs who increasingly desire engagement with the local community.

Speaking to her own struggle to acclimate to the demands of the academy as a first-generation indigenous scholar, Gabriela Raquel Rios (2015) contends that "the discourses we inhabit manifest materially as the literal spaces of the universities we inhabit" (80). Because of this material manifestation of discourse, Rios argues that we must "consider the social production of space alongside the embodiment of social space" (80). Further still, she suggests that the move toward spatial practice "also necessitates a move to service learning and civic engagement" (81).

In a field like composition which continues to call for community engagement (Accardi 2017; Bay & Atherton 2021), Rios, much like Bacha (2016), Kirsch & Royster (2010), and Welch (2012), recommends that academics attend to the implications of the socially constructed space on college campuses which is interwoven into the discourse which abounds it and the community of which it is a part. For all of these scholars, the social, rhetorical, and material contexts which are a part of the environment in which students learn to write have important implications for how students situate themselves in the broader educational environment in which they derive their sense of self, civic engagement, and service to their communities.

Latrinalic Applications of Pedagogy and Policy

In this essay, I have tried to survey research on latrinalia and the pedagogy of place in order to make an argument for the potential pedagogical value of latrinalia. In this section, I will discuss some potential examples of how latrinalia and latrinalia research can be conducted and applied in the classroom by drawing on the principles of the scholarship cited in this essay. It bears commenting, however, as an important caveat for beginning the discussion of how to integrate latrinalia into contemporary composition classrooms, that the disregard from which bathroom graffiti has suffered, commonly conceived of as a subaltern and unseemly discourse (or worse, mere vandalism), remains the foremost impediment to its consideration as a pedagogical tool. Simply put, much as we need firmer (and more data driven) examples of how to teach latrinalia and latrinalia research, we also need to destigmatize the reputation of bathroom graffiti and welcome it into the broader penumbra of valued public discourse of which it is a rightful part.

Once valued, students might be asked to discuss their experience with graffiti both on campus and in their everyday lives more generally with one another. What typifies graffiti in their experience? What types of topics, turns of phrase, or rhetorical strategies have they encountered in graffiti? And what types of graffiti commonly catch their attention on campus specifically? Where is it inscribed and to what end? Does graffiti on one part or building of and on campus differ from the other parts? Why might that be? All of these questions could help students to think more concertedly about connecting to the campus community of which they are a part, and in turn help, as Bacha (2012) argues, to "remind them that their own on-campus experiences are shared experiences" of community engagement (269). This type of

discussion might help students to not only bond over shared experiences but also challenge their preconceptions of the community and campus to which they belong. Further still, discussions of this kind might help students to think about how writing takes place in, interacts with, and augments the real world.

In a world of metastasizing digital complexity, Kevin Roozen (2021) has argued that literate activity is bound up in the broader "cultural forms of life saturated with textuality," and that we need to take the "full range of semiotic textualities and texts implicated in people's lives and their role in meaning-making" more seriously (23). Similarly, as Rios (2015) proclaimed, engagement with the social construction of material space on college campuses and its interanimating effect on public discourse can help us to "radically rethink what we teach as rhetoric" *and* "how knowledge is practiced and composed" in specific community contexts (83, 80). For all of these reasons, it is vitally important for students to be aware of the materially inscribed writing which is a concrete part of the environment in which they live, learn, and engage with their local campus communities, and the experiences *they already have* with graffiti and latrinalia are likely powerful enough to broker the discussion of its role in their lives, educations, and communities.

Teachers might also encourage students to seek out, observe, and analyze the latrinalic conversations already taking place on their own campus. Recent research (Marine et al. 2021) has shown the startling rhetorical complexity of the myriad latrinalic conversations taking place in campus restrooms, and the wide-ranging social, political, cultural topics which are commonly discussed through the comment and response format which bathroom graffiti conversation often take (Nwoye 1993; Schreer & Strichartz 1997). In doing so, students would be analyzing a real rhetorical situation of which they, both as an interloper viewing the

discourse and a member of the campus community, are a part. And while it may be questionable how much of the style and rhetoric of latrinalia might translate *directly* to college writing, it would still offer students the opportunity to understand, as D'Angelo (1974) contended, the "stylistic features which are common to certain kinds of writing today" (173). What's more, if Peary (2014) was right when she contended that "text and physical space can be a permeable, mutually shaping force" and that the walls of the classroom and wider campus environment "are constructed from the very words of the learners and teachers" (44), and I believe she is, then attending to the public discourse of latrinalia can help students to "locate" themselves in relation to the audiences they will commonly encounter as a part of their campus communities as they write. And as the development of a sense of writerly and academic identity is considered to be a vital part of the process of education, and especially college composition, acclimating themselves to a real-life "foreign rhetorical ecology" like latrinalia might also help students to grapple with their efforts to establish themselves as members of a campus community.

As the space in which latrinalia takes place also bears importantly on conceptions of community, identity, and gender, confronting the long history of preconceptions about the gender differences in latrinalia as evidenced throughout its long history of scholarship might position students to think about, as Kirsch & Royster (2010) have contended, how the features of our material learning environment can help to "reinforce patriarchal conceptions of our socially defined genders" (54). In a world increasingly typified by a patriarchal hegemony which seeks to classify and ascribe value on the basis of sex and gender identity, student discussion of gender as couched in the context of the discourse found in ostensibly gendered spaces might provoke a more purposeful approach to deconstructing and dismantling the Western hegemonic

epistemologies which undergird and reify not only our conceptions of gender, but also the constituent elements on which the social construction of gender is based, and in which are local communities are enmeshed.

Finally, as Mwangi (2012) argued quite bluntly, school administrators should recognize graffiti writing as an important window through which to access and assess issues of student conflict, political and social strife, and even potential dissatisfaction with school policies. The anonymous authorship afforded by bathroom graffiti has been consistently documented as allowing for a more forthright and transparent discussion of topics typically conceived of as taboo or which commonly meet with social disapproval (Anderson & Verplanck 1993; Schreer & Strichartz 1997). In other words, how students and their fellow community members actually feel—for better and for worse.

A recent news article focused on teenage cancel culture written by Elizabeth Weil (2022) and published in *The Cut* reported on the fallout from a list of "boys to look out for" written on the wall of a high school bathroom which set off a series of student suspensions, protests, school walkouts, administrative resignations, and Title IX lawsuits. Weil's article demonstrates quite clearly the important implications which latrinalia can and often does have for school and administrative policy. And it is with all of these examples in mind that school administrators might reconsider the many policies which respond to graffiti by only seeking to erase or paint over it. In Weil's article, she points out that while the school tried to control the situation by locking the girls' bathroom and repainting the wall, "it hardly mattered" because "photos were already bouncing around social media." One might ask why, exactly, student's right to express themselves in a public forum like the walls of the buildings on campus has been disallowed for so long in the first

place. Of course, graffiti can be defacement of school property. But it is also a valuable outlet for students to be heard, and disregarding or erasing it, as the administrators in Weil's account chose to, does little to ebb its reoccurrence or the many potentially powerful social ramifications of its existence.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is far past time for scholars and teachers of composition to recognize the potential for place-based discourses like latrinalia to support student's development as novice writers attempting to acclimate themselves, and their writing, to the academic institutions which they attend. Put simply, the writing taking place *around* the classroom matters *in* the classroom. By studying the local often-ignored genres which abound college campuses, students will find an accessible entry point into a live evolving site of composition from which they can derive their own understanding of how to shape their communications to provoke the reactions and responses they desire from the audiences of their own writing. Research on bathroom graffiti indicates that latrinalia likely abounds every college campus in our country and world. In the long history of writing, there may not be another genre of written language of the sheer scope and scale of latrinalia which has remained so conspicuously understudied. Notorious origins, opaque methodologies, and scholarly disagreement about the role of gendered space on graffiti should not remain impediments to the study of latrinalia so much as spur a continued, intensified commitment to the central inquires which have, and remain, the animating forces which undergird the academic investigation of latrinalia's phenomenological occurrence.

Conclusion

The writing is on the wall. As we turn our support towards a place-based spatial conception of educational practice, one prominently featuring the local environment as a source of knowledge, we must also reconsider what types of community writing are worthy of consideration. Latrinalia is simply one illustration of a number of hidden discourses that permeate our environment and shape our understanding. Bathroom graffiti is situated on the liminality between public and private, rife with commentary on political, social, and local issues, all shaped by culture in a gendered space. I call on the field of Writing Studies to observe and understand the communicative strategies utilized for latrinalia's expression in order to leverage this knowledge to enhance public writing pedagogies by accounting for the voices of the otherwise unheard who, even in an increasingly digital world, continue to make their views known through inscription, and in doing so, shape the local, material, and pedagogical environments in which the teaching of writing takes place.

With every indication of latrinalia's proliferous presence on college campuses, with a rich history of study, and because of researchers and educators repeated cries to account for the environment in which learning—and writing—takes place, it is time for the serious, renewed attention of scholars of composition to a wider spectrum of what counts as writing on the college campuses—including "mere graffiti"—where the voices of their students are waiting to be heard, read, and responded to… until they are painted over, only to be rewritten again; a novel of student experience written, read, experienced, and erased all in deafening institutional silence.

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