In Praise and Defense of Graffiti: A Functional Review of Graffiti Literature

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ABSTRACT

The study of *graffiti* and/or *latrinalia* (graffiti on restroom/latrine walls) and the overall discipline of *Graffiti Studies* is relatively inchoate in the Philippines. An extensive review of literature shows that despite the abundance of graffiti and latrinalia in their many manifestations in our lived material spaces—either throughout the cities or the countryside—published studies on such topics deemed "trivial," "banal," "vandalistic," or "criminal," are scant and are still predominantly framed from Western experiences and perspectives. This is despite, I argue, the huge yet easily dismissed role that graffiti and latrinalia play in society. It is in this light that this review of literature surveys and synthesizes prior discussions on such marginal texts and graphs/grafts a *rhizome* that could help future Filipino researchers navigate and explore the rich yet disproportionately unstudied field. The review shows that the fundamental attributes of graffiti and latrinalia in Western discourse include their capacity to evoke the sentiments of the underclass imbricated in a class war, claim and reclaim spaces in the context of class struggle, and be of use in understanding issues of sex and gender among others.

Keywords: graffiti, graffiti literature, graffiti studies, latrinalia, latrinalia studies

The study of *graffiti* and/or *latrinalia*—evident in the etymology and epistemology of the words themselves—is largely Western and still inchoate in the Philippines. Coined by European and American settlers and scholars respectively,[1] much of the study's recognized dominant history, historicity, and historiography, privilege the Western subjective experience. Recent mainstream scholarly overviews of graffiti—such as the *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art* (2016), and the *Routledge Ancient Graffiti in Context* (2011)—that claim to be comprehensive still focus mainly on America and Europe. These books cover graffiti in New York (for which much research has been done), New Orleans, Montreal, London, Lisbon, Rome, Pompeii, Hong Kong, Egypt, and Beijing, with little to no attention given to the graffiti of Southeast Asia or even much of continental Africa.

As for the point of it being inchoate, despite the presence of graffiti and latrinalia in almost all parts of the world, the field of study is still relatively underdeveloped, more so locally. For instance, a survey of the top four Philippine universities'[2] online public access journals shows that no research on the subject is widely available.[3] The study of graffiti and latrinalia remains inchoate and underdeveloped, despite their ubiquitous presence especially in cities, and despite the various graffiti practices with different purposes in the country. This is because according to Jason Young in "Restroom Politics: Voices in the Stalls" (2013) which comments on private restroom graffiti but is applicable to public street graffiti in general, such ostracized texts are deemed "dirty and subversive" by society at large and are therefore easily dismissible (1). Furthermore, this seeming oversight by academia of graffiti is merely reflective, I argue, of the larger societal dismissal of, and even abject disgust for, such minoritarian texts—aggravated by the text's inherent material liminality and marginality.

Graffiti therefore has a contradictory nature of being everywhere yet at the same time being nowhere. This potent presence of graffiti which is always hidden until otherwise given attention to, which is always political until otherwise overtly 'politicized'—such as in its weaponization by the left during protests and mobilizations, choosing graffiti as a form with which to publicize peoples' concerns, and the concomitant defamations and denunciations it receives from certain sectors and even powers[4] in traditional and social media—all in all afford graffiti necessary theorizations in defense and even praise of it. Because ultimately, our judgment of graffiti being mere dirt and "vandalistic" destruction reveals more about us than about graffiti itself. As Mary Douglas reminds us, "dirt… exists in the eyes of the beholder," and what must be interrogated, politicized and historicized, therefore, are our perceptions of dirt (including graffiti), which are shaped by dominant values and modes of meaning-making sanctioned by the system, and by the powers ruling such system ("Introduction" 2).

It is in this light that this study surveys and synthesizes prior discussions on graffiti and latrinalia, and graphs/grafts a *rhizome* that could help future Filipino researchers navigate and further explore the "stems" of the rich yet disproportionately unstudied field. I use rhizome here after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea that a rhizome is a model of understanding and becoming without a center and with multiple branches (*A Thousand Plateaus* 3-25). What follows therefore is a broad outlining of articulations on graffiti—thematically arranged without necessarily having one focus—which readers could read akin to a map with multiple "entryways" and exit points, a functional guide for future explorations (*A Thousand Plateaus* 12-13). This study will have the following as branches of discussion: (1) graffiti histories, (2) functions and uses of graffiti, (3) capacities of graffiti to claim and reclaim spaces

and places, and (4) the politics of graffiti erasures. All of these serve to illustrate ultimately the place of graffiti in an ongoing class war. Particularly, the last section is where one class is seen to erase the liminal discourses of the other.

Transitioning from public to private graffiti—meaning from street graffiti to graffiti on bathroom or latrine walls—the second part of this study interrogates (1) the seminal latrinalia study, (2) issues of latrinalia location, and (3) gender-related discussions coming from studies of bathroom graffiti. After this I show the critical gaps in earlier Western graffiti and latrinalia studies. This opens possible ways by which the subject could now be viewed in light of more local, rigorous, and/or grounded materialist frameworks. Finally, I outline several recommendations on how one could possibly move forward within the broad, local, and developing field of graffiti and latrinalia studies.

On Graffiti Studies

Histories of Graffiti

Graffiti as a human phenomenon is an "idea without an era" (Stahl 6). This means that because graffiti has existed everywhere and at every time for as long as humans existed, to historicize it with a linear chronological unity, although certainly possible, would be difficult. This difficulty is compounded by the anonymous "authorship" of graffiti, its temporary presence in limited spaces, and its varying viewership. Graffiti also does not contain references to time and identity, as in the case of different *tags* or graffiti signatures found on the streets. Therefore, the histories of graffiti discussed in this paper are mere provisional reconstructions that are necessary and practical in understanding graffiti.

On Ancient Graffiti

In his introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art* (2016), Jeffrey Ian Ross alludes to scholar Carlo McCormick and claims that graffiti has existed "since the dawn of civilization" (Ross 62). Historians J.A. Baird and Claire Taylor, along with art curator Johannes Stahl, support this claim by saying that some of the earliest graffiti in history refer to the parietal art in caves, particularly to the "Palaeolithic images at Lascaux," for example, or to the pigmented silhouette of hands in the cave of Pech Merle (*Ancient Graffiti in Context* 1; *Street Art* 12). Here, the debate revolves around the issue of whether such cave drawings are "art" or, using the contemporary term for inscriptions on walls, "graffiti." Baird and Taylor demonstrate that prior to the epistemological construction of these categories, graffiti and art were one. They highlight how graffiti was not even "unusual" nor "undesirable" in the ancient world (4). This shows a gap in the study of graffiti:

if at one-point graffiti and art were one, where could one locate the start of a supposed divergence? When did the privileging of art, and the marginalization of graffiti begin? Here I am inclined to deduce that the historical rise of ownership, private property, and class differentiation, alongside the rise of several kinds of capital including cultural capital and symbolic capital, may have contributed to the privileging of certain artifacts and texts, and the deprecation of others, including graffiti.

Given this context, one sees further how only specific societies, particularly Ancient Greece and Rome, are highlighted in the dominant historicizing of graffiti. Graffiti studies on ancient times discuss the Grecian use of public markings not only as political messages surprisingly praising authority according to Baird and Taylor ("Ancient Graffiti" 21), but also as advertisements written by merchants, and as magical spells written by oracles, prophets and shamans ("Introduction" 4). This view of ancient graffiti is sustained by Johannes Hahn in his discussion of Roman/ Pompeian graffiti used in brothels as purposeful designs; as advertisements in support of Roman gladiators; and as texts used in other ways be they political, sexual, romantic, revolutionary or otherwise ("Graffiti" 2974; "Ancient Graffiti" 20).

From this point in history, articles on graffiti would then proceed to discuss urban graffiti during the modern times which are mostly American in context. This pattern of discussing ancient and modern graffiti appears in many articles and educational materials. While this can be read as an attempt to write a continuous history with no break in between, a closer examination of this historicizing reveals a glaring absence—an absent middle history. Examples of such studies with the aforesaid gap—from theses, to published articles, to scholarly anthologies, and picture books—include but are not limited to the ones surveyed below.

First, the gap is observable in Lindsay Bates' "Bombing, Tagging, Writing: An Analysis of the Significance of Graffiti and Street Art" (2014), which, after discussing much of "the graffiti of the Roman Empire," immediately skips to graffiti "throughout the city [of Paris] in the 1930's" (13). Likewise, Johannes Stahl shows the "mother of all pictures" at Pech Merle in France, written almost 25,000 years ago, and goes straight to mentioning 1730's graffiti research and discussing modern American graffiti writing in New York City (13-21). Ashanti White, in "From Primitive to Integral: The Evolution of Graffiti Art," (2014) also opens her history subsection with the many purposes and functions of graffiti in "ancient times," and mentions only in passing "Mayan, Viking, and Renaissance Cultures," before fully discussing modern graffiti (3). By doing so, she homogenizes into a single phrase three distinct cultures in an attempt to address a glaringly absent middle history. Finally, the landmark text *Routledge Handbook for Graffiti and Street Art* only has 6 articles[5] on societies

outside of America and Europe out of its 35 articles and has none on post-Ancient times up to the pre-Modern. Again, this illustrates an absent middle history and also an absent representation of other non-American and/or non-European societies ("About–Routledge").

On Medieval Graffiti

In supplementing the gap in graffiti studies, the research of British historian and archaeologist Matthew Champion concerning graffiti during the Middle Ages— most of which he found on the walls of preserved European old churches—is necessary. In "Medieval Graffiti"—also published as *Medieval Graffiti: The Lost Voices of England's Churches* (2017)—Champion posits that our limited imaginaries of European "princes and kings. . . knights and fair damsels in distress" along with enormous castles during the Middle Ages refer only to the top 5% of the time's population, and the unheard of 95% can now be studied using "new digital imaging technologies" that capture traces of their graffiti ("Medieval Graffiti"). The results of this show the following: a plethora of graffiti signifying "windmills, horses and geese," or the "fixtures of peasant," feudal, and agricultural life; images of faces, hands, angels, and demons, symbolizing the immense spirituality, and dominance of Christianity, among the population; and drawings of ships on the walls adjacent to where statues of saints once stood, signifying that once the people wished for the voyages of their loved ones to be safe. Champion's research shows real and lived situations of "people who sat in the dark, [and prayed] for the safety of a long-drowned ship," and because they felt they were fallible and ultimately limited, "etched their fear and demons into the walls" ("Medieval Graffiti").

Towards Modern Graffiti

Going past the Middle Ages, Stahl intervenes by claiming that the beginning of graffiti studies happened during the Renaissance back in 1731 when a man by the pseudonym of Hurlo Thrumbo started to systematically record the graffiti in restrooms around London (*Street Art* 24). Below is an example of a graffiti poem recorded by Thrumbo in the book *The Merry-Thought Part III* (1731/1983) showing a random persona enamored by a woman who might as well be a witch, along with a response by another graffiti writer:

> *Bath, on Harrison's Windows.*
> I kiss'd her standing,
> Kiss'd her lying,
> Kiss'd her in Health,
> And kiss'd her dying;
> And when she mounts the Skies,

> I'll kiss her flying.
> > *Underwritten.*
> > Well said, my Boy.

By recording what is now called *latrinalia* or latrine/bathroom writings, Thrumbo reframes graffiti as an object worth documenting and studying. As early as 1731, Thrumbo illustrates likewise how graffiti tended to be interactive or dialogic. In 1853, the term "graffiti" was widely adopted to refer to the "unofficial" markings on public surfaces. This conception can be attributed to "Raffaele Garrucci's account of the graffiti of [ancient] Pompeii," using the Italian word "graffiti" to refer to markings on surfaces, which the academe and the rest of the populace then picked up (Stahl 24). In 1935, Allen Walker Read published the first 'legitimate' scholarly work on graffiti, *Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraphy in Western North America: A Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary.* Read collected graffiti found in the stalls of public restrooms in the heart of North-West America and using folklorism, he analyzed these graffiti on the assumption "that these inscriptions are a form of folk-lore that should be made the subject of a scholarly study" (17).

Many similar academic studies hence followed, most notably Jack Lindsay's landmark study *The Writing on the Wall: An Account of Pompeii in Its Last Days* (1966) which further explores ancient graffiti. Other examples of such studies include Sylvia Ann Grider's "Con Safos: Mexican-Americans, Names and Graffiti" (1973), which follows the linguistic forms of the *con safos*[6] graffiti by Mexican-Americans; Edward Bruner and Jane Paige Kelso's "Gender Differences in Graffiti: A Semiotic Perspective" (1980), which identifies the differences in gendered identities based on graffiti; and David Robinson's *Soho Walls: Beyond Graffiti* (1990), which analyzes graffiti art found in the SoHo district of New York by connecting it to the larger significations of hip-hop. The practice of writing nicknames via graffiti, or *tagging*, in the 1970s, according to Ashanti White, might have been pioneered by a young man named Darryl McCray, alias "Cornbread," who wrote his nickname all around his high school in Philadelphia and then on an elephant at Philadelphia Zoo. While McCray's intention for tagging/signing walls was to impress a young woman, his practice evolved into a protest against "social inequities and police [brutalities] in [their] minority communities" ("From Primitive" 4-5). Since then, he has been regarded by some as arguably the "Father of Modern Graffiti" (White 5). Meanwhile, Ljiljana Radosevic in "Graffiti, Street Art, Urban Art" (2013) historicizes the events that followed McCray and shows that the trend of writing tags moved from Philadelphia to the state of New York, where it thrived and was superseded by "larger and more elaborate" inscriptions which became more mural-like, characterized ultimately by more intricate designs. These were then called *pieces*, short for graffiti masterpieces (2). Through its bold design and counter-normative attitudes, graffiti became the aesthetic logic or the "visual language" of the emerging hip-hop culture (White 6).

According to Radosevic, the "spreading of graffiti" in most of the United States took place in the 1980s, and by the 1990s, graffiti supposedly reached "global impact" (5). Subways, trains, and railways became places for graffiti artists to write their tags. On the street walls of different downtown districts, "elaborated murals" became the "new standard" (5). Despite its status as a subculture, graffiti gradually became a staple text in the urban landscape, until New York City, in 1994, imposed a strict zero-tolerance policy on graffiti as an underground act. This shifted the supposed "creative center" of graffiti from most of the United States to "Europe and Latin America" by the year 2000 (6). The "illegality" of writing graffiti however did not deter graffiti writers and artists. As a reaction, graffiti artists developed ways of making the inscribing of graffiti much quicker, through the use of stencils, for instance. Because of stricter state interventions, graffiti had to become more aesthetically and politically engaging to the populace, hence, the beginning of *street art* (6).

Since the early 2000s, graffiti has been perceived in a polarized way. On the one hand graffiti is deemed illegal, dirty, and subversive, so much so that in most places graffiti has to be erased. On the other hand, and quite ironically, graffiti is also displayed, coopted, and legitimized in the museum halls of elite art institutions such as the "Tate Modern in London, MOCA in Los Angeles, or Fondation Cartier in Paris" (Radosevic 7). This is in addition to some graffiti art being commodified, auctioned, and sold by powerful cultural establishments. It is in this complex web of circumstances and issues where artist-cum-provocateur Banksy—who also finds his counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist, and anti-war street art both coopted and commodified—locates himself.

Functions and Uses of Graffiti

Graffiti's social functions may include but are not limited to the following: as an indicator of the emotional consensus of the people; as a signifier of the people's multilingual positionings; and as a tool for swaying public opinion, given that graffiti has affective elements.

D.L. Peiris and Kalansooriya Jayantha show how graffiti may articulate the people's emotional consensus in their quantification of 93 graffiti found in the Mahara Jogging Path in Sri Lanka, categorizing these texts into different emotions. Results reveal that out of the 93 collected samples, 92% or 52 inscriptions are "happy," 4% are "angry," 2% are "sad," and 2%, "others" (i.e., other emotions) ("A Case Study"). Here, one sees an elementary yet possible approach to mapping the emotional consensus of a given population in a limited location using graffiti, even at the risk of homogenizing and/or reducing the population's complex affective states and processual becomings into simple and static categories such as "happy," "angry," "sad," or worse, "others." Compared to Peiris and Jayantha's, Anoop Nayak's article is

more complex in this regard as it uses graffiti to map the flows of pain and hate received by people of color in a predominantly white English suburbia. Nayak's analysis shows how graffiti does not merely represent the immanence of hate in a given location, but also how such graffiti transcend their textual nature as they reinforce and echo the community's hateful performances and racial performativities ("Race, affect, and emotion"). Nayak illustrates this using an ethnographic approach. His observations showed manifestations of racist language and "occasional violent assaults" associated with graffiti. Nayak argues that these racist graffiti, along with racist performances, secure comfort for the white man who feels "marginalized" and victimized by an ongoing trend of multiculturalism. Nayak's article therefore reads graffiti in order to understand "the emotional politics of race" (2389).

Graffiti is also a good indicator of a people's multilingual and multilinguistic positionings. Using lexical pragmatics, Ong'ayo Francis Onyango discusses graffiti in his university in Kenya and observes that these graffiti echo the orality of their writers. According to Onyango, these graffiti's use of "short words," "fragmented sentences," and a "reduced syntactic complexity" defy conventional "grammatical expressions" which use necessary evocations of "subject," "object," and predicate, and which are further elevated to a systematized structure of thought using "punctuation marks" (4). In addition to this, Onyango also describes how graffiti in his university highlighted its multiple writers' positions of being in a spatial threshold, being culturally hybrid and multilingual, which were concretely depicted by their graffiti's code-switching.

One may compare Onyango's study to that of Giovanni Depau who has similar insights on graffiti. Depau also analyzes the graffiti he found in Italy as signifiers of a multilingual people's liminality ("How Graffiti Provide"). For Depau, the orality of the people in Cagliari pointed at the space they straddled between two languages and, consequently, two modalities of living. Working with Italian, which is the prescribed, legislated, and standardized national language of the country, and that of Sardinian, the de facto regional language, considerably now a minority language without legitimization from the state, Depau's article demonstrates how graffiti becomes a tool to subvert hegemonic impositions on language by cultural establishments. Like Onyango who shows how graffiti can subvert normative "grammatical expressions," Depau traces how graffiti in Sardinia, which use specific "graphic choices" in their grapheme such as diacritical marks, trigraphs, and multiple differential phonemes, suggest a "conscious adoption" of Sardinian in its local variety. Depau concludes that this "deviation from the standard norms" is an act of resisting the prescription of an orthographic norm by state power (186-190). Similar to Onyango, Depau discusses how graffiti provide the graphic realization of a people's orality. This is different from the graphic realization or fixity of a people's orality transcribed in

written academic or standardized texts, where notions of orthographic criteria are already established and prescribed. Graffiti therefore becomes a viable indicator of a place's sense of collective identity, as its mobile, immediate and unimpeded nature translates to a community's more "authentic" sense of self (Depau 190).

Finally, Neil Verrall and Richard Clay's "Life Imitating Art, and Art Influencing Life" (2016) combines the functions of graffiti in terms of both affect and language. Verrall and Clay begin their article with a historical survey of graffiti and its use in early conflicts—from the time of the Romans under Tiberius Gracchus in the 2nd century BCE to the time of two French Revolutions under different monarchs in 1789 and 1848, and ultimately during the Second World War when the Nazi regime led by Adolf Hitler held Europe. According to Verrall and Clay, the commonality between the three historical junctures lies in the affective presence of graffiti written in public in plebeian language, thereby influencing, shaping, and reinforcing public opinion. Graffiti helped sway public opinion and shape state policies; in its most potent form, graffiti was strong enough to help overthrow the state itself (65). In the case of Tiberius Gracchus, King Louis XVI, and King Louis Philippe I, graffiti allegedly prefigured in their eventual removal from power with the second monarch even being guillotined. As for the case of Nazi regime usurping much of Europe, graffiti contributed to dispelling the fascist third-Reich's symbolic and ideologic hold. In a curious and modern case of a continental-wide and uniquely coordinated strategic use of graffiti, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), along with the British government launched a psychological campaign against the Nazi regime by encouraging people all over the continent to inscribe the letter 'V' in public places. This grapheme, which referred to the first letter of the word "Victory," signified the anticipated victory by the Allies against the Axis. Interestingly, the letter 'V' in much of Europe is also the first letter for the variants of the word *victory* in European languages, but not in German, where the word victory starts with an 'S' as in *Sieg*. This helped create the impression that the rest of Europe had something in common that the Nazi regime did not have and could not take. Moreover, the popularization and prevalence of the letter 'V' in Nazi-usurped places suggested that the hegemonic regime was losing control of public spaces, and more importantly, of "public opinion" (65-66). Here, the notion of *authenticity* is important. The perception that the public inscribed the "V" graffiti themselves—its reproductions and visual iterations included—was important because such authenticity of origins added potency to the sign. It evoked the impression that the signs themselves were coming from down below and across huge sections of society, bearing popular support from the people.[7] All of these are in contrast to graffiti being purposefully manufactured by institutions of power, using state apparatuses to write graffiti in public places in an attempt to manipulate public opinion.

Verrall and Clay likewise expound on this idea of *authenticity* and mention how the tactic of manufacturing "authentic" graffiti would be problematized later on by the American empire. Faced with an onslaught of anti-American graffiti in cities like Baghdad and Fallujah following the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States tried to counter such texts by "sticking posters over graffiti written by insurgents," and by stenciling graffiti of their own (67). Here, American psychological operatives took note of the "influencing potential of graffiti" during war, even making sure that their pro-American graffiti in Iraqi cities would appear authentic, or 'of and by the people' (67-68). They did this by employing indigenous Iraqi operatives to write the graffiti, hiring "cultural advisers" to test "potential slogans," and making sure that such graffiti look haphazardly written to appear real (68). The perceived authenticity in this regard is important for locals to identify with the graffiti, and/or to claim manufactured graffiti as their own.

Verrall and Clay finally also note that because of social media, the proliferation of photos of graffiti on the virtual web makes graffiti "ever-striking" and more powerful, having a wider, global reach. This, however, runs counter to the stance of Anindya Raychaudhuri who posits that once graffiti is reproduced for example online, and thus cut off from the wall, the graffiti is also "effectively castrate[d], leaving it powerless" ("Just as good" 56). In sustaining this position, Nicholas Alden Riggle likewise argues that the wall and/or the street in which graffiti is inscribed is more than just a platform; it is a context integral to the graffiti's meaning ("Street Art" 248). Removing graffiti therefore from its place in the public sphere, which ironically gives it both its powers and limitations, makes it ultimately untethered, devoid of its original material context. Weighing in on this debate regarding the reproduction of graffiti, I argue that while Raychaudhuri and Riggle may be both correct in saying that the online mechanical reproduction, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, of graffiti strips it of its aura and contextual meaning ("The Work of Art" 221-224), they err in considering as absolute the "powerlessness" of graffiti within this process of reproduction. Regardless of where graffiti is seen, whether on the original wall where it was created or online as a digital image, there is an inherently affective dimension to graffiti that is ultimately conveyed through its visual and visceral language.

Capacities of Graffiti to Claim and Reclaim Spaces and Places

In this section of the review and rhizome, I outline the powers and capacities of graffiti to claim and reclaim spaces. The review shows that graffiti works in the following ways: first, it turns space into place by its presence; second, it transforms place into a common public place; and lastly, it reclaims art from the monopoly of elite cultural institutions.

To begin, an elucidation of the difference between space and place is necessary. According to philosopher and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, *space* refers to the field of common experience best characterized by its "openness, freedom," and where "movement" is inherent and even inextricable; *place* on the other hand is space where "security and stability" have been established, and where "pause" from movement means an entrenchment of the self that "we get to know [the field] better" thereby "endow[ing] it with value" (6). In Visconti et al., this view on the difference between space and place is sustained when they refer to space as "something anonymous," and something arguably without character, while place is distinct as it "accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site," i.e., a "consumed space" ("Street Art, Sweet Art" 2-3).

Visconti et al. also explain how graffiti transforms space into place. An example they provide is a seemingly homogenized city where buildings evoke the impression of uniformity and absence of character. Despite preliminary notions of these buildings being in themselves already consumed spaces, the "impression that [a dweller's] life is the same as thousands of [other's] lives" leads one to think that meaning is fleeting. On the other hand, graffiti and street art—in their ability to evoke affect and a sense of shared visual ownership of a site—make urban spaces more inclusive, historicized, and, consequently, transgressive of modern life's monolithic edifications. This meaning-giving and subversive capacity of graffiti are rearticulated and furthered by Anindya Raychaudhuri, who focuses on the famous yet anonymous street artist Banksy and his reclamation of the "public" in public space. Both Visconti et al. and Raychaudhuri agree that graffiti is a necessary tool to counteract the privatization of public and urban landscapes.

"Public" in this sense refers to the "realm in which people define themselves as publics, through ongoing communications, definition, and negotiation over their shared concerns" (Sargeson qtd. in Visconti et al. 2). When capitalists and the neoliberal state become complicit in privatizing urban land, public interests and concerns are transgressed and violated, thereby effacing the "public" element from the very public places themselves—the very people such spaces first and foremost intended to serve. According to Visconti et al., examples of this kind of privatization include the very conception of civic law and civic theory where performances of every day, especially people's engagements in and towards public spaces, become regulated and restricted. This is compounded by inception of urban designs where spaces prefigure in the symbolic othering and actual disenfranchisement of peoples. Raychaudhuri also adds that spatial privatization may also manifest as corporate advertisements in public spaces which the masses are forced to consume endlessly, without consent (e.g. an ad by McDonald's in a public park) ("Just as good" 53). Privatization also manifests itself finally when the monopolizing hold of elite "art

institutions"—on the ontology, epistemology, and exhibition of art itself—takes art away from the people and takes away art's endowment of meaning and value to the public space and sphere, confining art inside exhibit halls, consequently putting people off with the "price of admission" (53). More than just privatizing public places, the supposed possible meaning existing in such places is also removed. Privatization becomes doubly violent in that it disenfranchises people both of the urban space and the meanings such space could hold.

Turning to the capacity of graffiti to reclaim the "public" in privatized public spaces, Visconti et al. explain how graffiti writing of any form may be one of the most authentic civilian engagements in and towards the city because in its making, normative obstructions for access to city processes such as an exclusivist civic jargon and bureaucracy do not matter; the only material needed to engage with the city via graffiti is a pen and a city surface (2). In disrupting private urban design, graffiti reclaims city spaces by means of a "creative destruction," that is, by making the already "built environment" a canvas to be "overwritten" and actively engaged with (5). Therefore, the dominant discourses inscribed in such spaces are actively altered by the people. Finally, in response to Raychaudhuri's concern about forced advertisement, Visconti et al. forward the notion of *stenciling*, which mimics the advertising world's ease in mechanical reproduction (3). Stenciling in this regard becomes a modality that helps graffiti writers or artists such as Banksy in copying, critiquing, mimicking, and mocking advertisements, and the process of mechanical reproduction (53). Examples of such depictions of ads—which are counter-assaults and deconstructions of their originals—include a graffiti on Burger King and McDonald's, seen in a published book by Banksy himself titled *Wall and Piece*, featuring printed reproductions of actual street graffiti. The said graffiti illustrate a famished child wearing a crown from Burger King (Banksy 159), and the iconic Napalm Girl holding hands with Mickey Mouse and Ronald McDonald (Banksy 163). Both stand potently and ultimately as critiques of global capitalism and its inherent structural violence.

When it comes to reclaiming art from elite cultural institutions, Raychaudhuri argues that "graffiti art" "[ridicules]" and at the same time despises the "mainstream art world" which, ironically, it supposedly cannot do without (51). Here graffiti art by being an *other* posits "their own version of [an] infrastructure" separate from dominant artistic categories (51). Similarly, Riggle reinforces Raychaudhuri's position and adds that graffiti art becomes a critique of and an answer to museum culture's focus on the sanctity of form, that is, of aesthetic standards without context. In graffiti, as a counterpoint, context or location is everything; it is integral to graffiti's meaning.

All in all, the studies discussed in this section fail to problematize how the symbolic reclamations of space by graffiti is possible only when the graffiti in question still exists. The moment private interests and/or the state erase such graffiti, urban space is reclaimed once again. The process therefore of territorialization, reterritorialization, and deterritorialization of urban space becomes a cycle that continues ad infinitum, and ad nauseam, until a break in the flow of capitalist spatial ownership and neoliberal urban reproduction takes place. Therefore, inasmuch as graffiti becomes integral and indispensible in people's movements for spatial reclamations, much is still to be done.

Politics of Erasures

Given the histories, functions, and capacities of graffiti outlined above, what follows is a discussion on the politics of the systematic erasure of graffiti.

In understanding why graffiti is erased, Visconti et al., Raychaudhuri, and Riggle remind us that it is primarily because graffiti is pervasive and is able to reclaim spaces for the public, that it assaults the dominant system. Furthermore, as Verrall and Clay note, graffiti also influences meaning-making processes in public spaces, thereby shaping public opinion. These in themselves are sufficient reasons for the removal of graffiti for even the slightest indication of subversion against status quo, even evocations of class consciousness for that matter, could possibly erode the sociopolitical order. Graffiti therefore must be erased at all cost.

In relation to this, a criminological theory concerning graffiti emerged, which illustrates a displacement of fear from the upper echelons of society down to the bottom. In *Wall and Piece*, Banksy explains that this theory—referred to as *broken windows theory* as per originator James Wilson and George Kelling—elucidates that when a broken window and other signs of disorder, such as graffiti, are not immediately fixed, more broken windows would appear in time and cause further disorder and criminality (20). Kees Keizer et al. reiterate this point. While they see the theory's lack of "strong empirical support" and lack of "[clarity] [as to] what constitutes disorder and what may make it spread," they agree nonetheless that the broken windows theory may have some truth to it judging from the results of their field experiments (1681). Their experiment consisted of two scenarios: the first took place where everything was in order or according to societal norm, while the other served as a foil and where something was astray. In the alleyway in the first set-up, a "No Littering" sign was placed adjacent to a "No Graffiti" sign, which people followed, thereby "observing proper order." In the second set-up where a handful of graffiti displayed a disregard for the "No Graffiti" sign, the majority of people chose not to follow the "No Littering" sign as well. Here a "cross-norm" mentality is seen to have taken place: when small "rules" are disobeyed, it is read as an opportunity to

transgress other norms as well. The article affirms that the broken windows theory might be true to a certain extent, thus justifying the erasure of graffiti.

On the other hand, Randall Shelden critiques the broken windows theory by pointing out that it has no theoretical or scientific basis. He further criticizes the use of the word "disorder," which, according to him, is not clearly defined by Wilson and Kelling, thereby conflating the differences between physical and social disorder, and more so, of serious crime. Physical disorder, for instance, may merely refer to broken buildings, scattered trash, graffiti, rats on alleyways, and the like (3). Social disorder on the other hand refers to disruptions concerning people's actions, such as catcalling, public drinking, prostitution, and things of the same magnitude. Serious crime, finally, includes theft, rape, or murder. Shelden maintains that the indiscriminate use of the word "disorder" homogenizes multiple social phenomena into one intolerable word. Such is a slippery slope for one can easily take a piece of trash on the street as a suggestion of imminent more heinous crime. This line of thinking also obscures the structural roots of crime. For example, instead of addressing the root causes of theft—which may relate to economic inequality, poverty, or precarity—the careless use of the word 'disorder' puts the blame on dirt and even graffiti instead. Ultimately, this evolves (or devolves) into producing a "zero tolerance" city (Shelden 2). Indeed, the danger with the broken windows theory is that it was used, for instance, by local councilors all around the United States as a basis for what is called the Broken Windows Policy. This in turn formed the basis for New York's infamous "War on Graffiti" from the 1970s up to the 1990s.

Kurt Iveson traces how, aside from the broken windows theory, the "war on graffiti" was justified by former US President Lyndon Johnson's articulation of different "wars" in the social sphere such as a "war on poverty" ("The Wars on Graffiti" 116). This *war metaphor* would be sustained by President Nixon's "war on drugs" in 1972 and by other New York City mayors such as John Lindsay and Rudolph Giulani. In this light, one sees that contemporary wars are being shifted more and more from wars involving nation-states, to wars directed towards citizens and peoples. Iveson notes how the erasure of graffiti and the usage of the term "war" are indicative of the "creeping militarization of everyday life" (115). The urban streetscape becomes a site for militaristic state practices, where people are no longer seen as people, but rather as elements that need to be curtailed and neutralized so as to maintain a constructed balance, a "clean" and homogenous sense of space. Whereas power desires homogeneity, graffiti offers heterogeneity. Iveson then proposes that graffiti can counter the creeping militarization of everyday urban life. Graffiti could countermap the city and identify power's spatial vulnerabilities. It could pose, I further argue, alternative narratives from below that are counter-hegemonic and could furthermore promote a liberatory kind of politics among the populace.

From public graffiti, I now turn to private graffiti or graffiti on latrines, henceforth referred to as *latrinalia*, the study of which is called latrinalia studies. Private graffiti here refers to graffiti found inside buildings and enclosed stalls, where visibility is limited to a certain number of people at a given point in time (Rodriguez and Clair 2).

On Latrinalia Studies

The Seminal Latrinalia Study

Much of the beginning of latrinalia studies is attributed to American folklorist Alan Dundes. In his article "Here I Sit—A Study of American Latrinalia," he criticizes the disregard for bathroom graffiti as a social scientist's object of study. Here Dundes rationalizes that this may be due partly to modern latrinalia's focus on being "in the now," or not concerning itself with ancient artefacts that anthropologists and archaeologists for instance are predisposed to study. In addition to this, Dundes expounds on latrinalia being in the same location as human wastes or excretions, thereby making it immediately repulsive for most researchers.

Using psychoanalysis, Dundes documented latrinalia from bathrooms of American universities and colleges and hypothesized that the "primitive smearing impulse," originally posited by Ernest Jones, may be a reason for leaving behind such texts in these spaces. Specifically, the hypothesis states that the writings on the walls and stalls in bathrooms are brought about by people's infantile regression, supposedly compensating for the lack of fecal handling and smearing one supposedly desired as a child, prohibited largely by the gaze, authority, and presence of parents (101). Having said this, one allegedly compensates as an adult by smearing ink on bathroom walls instead, hence, the existence of bathroom graffiti or latrinalia.

As for the question of why latrinalia appears mostly in male restrooms, Dundes supposes that this is a manifestation of "pregnancy envy," coined originally by Bruno Bettelheim, following Freud's psychoanalytic tradition. This theory states that men feel the need to create more using their bodily fluids as a way of filling an empirical lack as opposed to the natural life-giving bodily capacities of women (102-03).

Suffice to say that Dundes's article deserves credit despite its absurd theorizing, which Dundes himself was quite self-reflexive about. He maintains that alternative theories are important in order to build upon and deconstruct pre-existing modes of knowledge. Despite Dundes's contentious reduction of everything into Oedipal tendencies, by retrieving graffiti from the margins and making it the center of serious and insightful research, Dundes's article is important as it paved the way for more bathroom graffiti studies, for modern latrinalia research.

Locations of Latrinalia

According to Jason Young, private graffiti such as latrinalia is a more privileged conduit for self-expression than public graffiti because it is written in privacy, anonymity, and within the protection of restroom stalls ("Restroom Politics" 2). In this regard, cubicles and restrooms are seen as "sanctuaries," where one could stay as long as they can, writing graffiti without intervention or surveillance. One could therefore write graffiti of any kind, which could either be "profane," "nonsensical," "political," "philosophical," sexual, or poetic, and in getting out of the enclosed space of the stall, act as if nothing happened (Young 2). Citing Margaret Kohn, Young explains that experiential space has three different elements that determine if it is public, private, or somewhere in between. The first element is *accessibility*: the higher the number of people moving in the area, the more public it is. The second element is ownership: if a space is owned by the government, it is for the people and therefore public; space is considered private if it is owned by corporations. This of course is a simple and functional view of ownership which does not take into account prevalent symbioses of governments and corporations. Finally, the element of *intersubjectivity*: the more controlled and sanctioned the interactions of people are, the more private the location is. Based on these elements, Young concludes that the restrooms in his study are "semi-public" spaces inasmuch as they are fairly accessible, still more or less privately owned, and productive of a culture of interaction by means of dialogic latrinalia. Young notes that intersubjectivity still applies to restrooms even though actual social communication is not easily seen inside such spaces where people avoid each other's gazes. Young ends his article by emphasizing graffiti's ability to incite intersubjectivity and to transgress the way architectures tend to contain and limit people.

Adam Trahan and Sam Whiting et al. echo Young's ideas on the dialogic and interdiscursive nature of latrinalia in their respective studies ("Identity and Ideology" 2011; "Dialogues in Solitude" 2007). Meaghan Sawka also highlights how proxemics affects the individual and dialogic nature of latrinalia produced in the women's restrooms of the University of Winnipeg. Sawka points out how the farthest cubicles from the entrance almost always have the most graffiti. By using Edward Hall's theory of affective "proxemics," she theorizes that by being farther away from the entrance, i.e., farther away from the immanent and imminent presence of others, "the perception of solitude and anonymity" among graffiti writers becomes stronger, making the writing of graffiti easier as the site becomes more comfortable ("This is weird" 20).

The studies of Young, Trahan, Whiting et al., and Sawka are all important in starting to theorize the material location of latrinalia. However, it can also be noted that

Young, Sawka, and Dundes, studied the latrinalia from their university campuses only. Way back in 1969, Sechrest and Flores already pointed out that colleges and universities as locations of objects of research in the field of latrinalia studies were already "overrepresented" ("Homosexuality" 4). Hence, there is a need to expand the scholarship on latrinalia, outside the considerable ambits of scholarly and middle class spaces, to widen the scope of the field.

Discussions on Gender

Finally, in this last part of the review, I turn to latrinalia studies that use gender-related lenses as a springboard for discussion. Here what becomes immediately evident is the prevalence of masculine-feminine essentialisms in most papers which use the gender binary as an unquestioned assumption in viewing latrinalia. The apparent pattern in the discussions start with differentiating the two genders and then proceed to formulate insights on human behavior and human condition based on such difference. In retrospect, however, this has merely contributed to existing forms of heteronormative relations. The first part of this section will discuss men and masculinity as seen in male restroom writing studies. Then, I turn to notions of womanhood and femininity as highlighted in female latrinalia studies. Beyond this, most researchers failed to consider societal power relations that may have constructed these differences in gender, thereby accepting present conditions as natural and permanent. It is important to note however that such studies were products of their time and researchers now would have the benefit of hindsight.

In Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* in 1953, he notes that 86% of the male bathroom graffiti he and his colleagues documented are highly erotic and sexual, with 75% of the said figure, even homoerotic in nature (3). By contrast, only 25% of women's latrinalia are explicitly sexual, with an even fewer number of texts pertaining to homosexuality. Kinsey also shows that there is an abundance instead in topics such as intimacy, relationship, and love in women's latrinalia (3). Jo-Ann Farr and Carol Gordon support Kinsey's observations in "A Partial Replication of Kinsey's Study" (1975) and even point out a slight increase in erotic women's writing by 1975. Though nuanced in important ways, most studies on latrinalia have the same observation: male graffiti insult other males and evoke hypersexuality, carnality, and territoriality, while female graffiti usually evoke intimacy, relationship, and love. Examples of these studies include Pamela Leong's article "American Graffiti: Deconstructing Gendered Communication Patterns in Bathroom Stalls" (2015) where she explains that male latrinalia are "replete with sexual content[,] insults," competitions, and vulgarity; female latrinalia on the other hand, are "supportive[,] relationship-focused," and even at most times philosophical (1; 7-10). Here Leong interjects that the masculine or feminine expressions of

identity are thus "lived experiences" of people transcribed on the wall in the form of graffiti, and that the bathroom as a segregating space amplifies the normativity of such a masculine-feminine binary. Meanwhile, Maryanne Fisher and Sarah Radtke's article "Sex Differences in the Topics of Bathroom Graffiti" (2014), also shows that men's latrinalia evoke competition, sexual behavior, and status imposition done via tagging or graffiti signatures. In contrast, women's latrinalia contain themes of love, support or alliances, slight competition, and some depictions of heterosexual and homosexual behaviors (74-75). From this, discussions now invoke the supposed inherent and innate characteristics of men and women as is dictated by evolutionary processes. Here, tagging is seen as a man's evolutionary and essential need to claim territories, perhaps for survival, while women's prevalent evocations of love and intimacy are seen as evolutionary and expressive of motherly instincts.

This being so, homosexuality for instance which is recognized by evolutionary science as natural is not given enough representation by Fisher and Radtke, and is thus silenced, more so non-existent. Furthermore, what is not accounted for is the unfurling of gender differences shown as being dynamic or changing over time. Their hypothesis of gender differences being more or less static because of epochal evolution does not take into account observable changes in gender norms happening only within a span of years and/or decades. Instances of these observable changes are found in the 1996 study of Emma Otta and Paulo Santana which shows that the tendencies of latrinalia of the 1950s and the 1970s are already different from those of the late 1990s ("Musa Latrinalis" 872). Otta and Santana observed that men's latrinalia coming from Brazilian students showed a high degree of hypersexuality, while women's latrinalia remained largely romantic and intimate; what they found different, however, is that women's latrinalia started to get sexual as well, thereby leading to the conclusion that the differences in genders are not essentially or evolutionarily static, but is dynamic and quickly changing. Specifically, Otta and Santana's observations may be due to the sexual liberation movements in the United States that began during the 1960s.

Other studies that take note of these heteronormative differences include those of Arluke and Lanny et al. (1987), Magno et al. (1978), and Pe (1987), just to name a few.

Interestingly, in the Philippines, undergraduate student Valerie Borja wrote a study detailing the thematic commonalities of women's latrinalia at the University of the Philippines Diliman campus, specifically in Palma Hall. In "The Secret Life of the Iska ng Bayan: Graffiti in the Girls' Bathrooms" (2014) she explains that the latrinalia in Palma Hall reveal how female undergraduate students circa 2014, coming from a variety of disciplines, were all talking about "love, politics, and academics" (14).

All in all, the articles discussed in this section show that latrinalia is often read using essentialist gender dualisms and heteronormative frameworks. This paper therefore recommends a more systematic reading of latrinalia, especially in the Philippine context, by interrogating articulations and performances of gender as dynamic constructions brought about by ever-changing power relations, struggle, and negotiations.

Graffiti, Latrinalia, and the Philippine Experience: Moving Forward

The study of graffiti and/or latrinalia is largely Western and, in so being, still inchoate especially in the Philippines. It is Western, in the sense that the very etymologies and epistemologies of the words themselves come from Western subjective experiences, and that much of published scholarly resources on graffiti are primarily from the West. It is inchoate—as this paper has shown through a rhizomatic reconstruction of prior discussions—as there is a lacuna in how we relate to graffiti as an *othered* text in our everyday material realities. Further research is therefore needed to document such local manifestations, both in the past and present, and to reconstruct useful narratives via graffiti as an alternative people's history from below.

I have also yet to encounter studies that extend officially this history of what counts as graffiti to the parietal arts in caves found in the Philippines or Southeast Asia. There is also a gap in studies on how graffiti may have been called in local languages, or how graffiti manifested itself in pre-hispanic, Spanish colonial, and American imperial times, especially in their respective towns, pueblos, and cities. Penultimately, there seems to be traces still of old graffiti on colonial churches, dams, and bridges in the archipelago which need further documentation and exploration, similar to what Champion's research did. The role of graffiti in Philippine urban studies, particularly in the territorialization and reclamation of spaces, needs to be further studied as well.

This paper finally recommends studying graffiti and latrinalia outside the ambit of academic journals as sites of critical scholarship, which this paper has done admittedly as a necessary step in exploring Philippine graffiti and latrinalia studies. Furthermore, sporadic studies outside of journals such as those appearing in student theses, blogs, social media, and news articles must also be explored to supplement the gaps in this paper.

NOTES

1. The signifying word **graffiti** for instance is based on the Italian cognates *graffito* and *graphein*, meaning "to scratch, draw, or write"; graffiti therefore as a word which refers to writings, engravings, and other signs on facades or walls is evidently European in origin (Baird and Taylor 3; Harper). **Latrinalia,** on the other hand—as proposed by American folklorist Alan Dundes in "Here I Sit—A Study of American Latrinalia"—is a compound combination of the English root word "latrine," meaning toilet, and the suffix "–alia," meaning that which is a body of things (in this case, scribbles or writings). Dundes here apparently preferred this term over the folk term "shithouse poetry," as not all the recorded bathroom graffiti during his time were in verse (92). **Vandalism** or *vandalisme*, finally, comes from the word *Vandal* which was the name of a Germanic tribe during 165-536 AD "regarded," under certain perspectives, "as violent agents in the fall of the Roman Empire" (Merrills 157). Vandalism in this regard, more than mere writings on walls, already denotes a certain degree of destruction of private or public property. Here, I argue that graffiti as a term is, therefore, more neutral in that it objectively refers to signs on walls, while vandalism is more historically loaded and reveals in each utterance negative value judgments. This explains ultimately my conscious use of graffiti more than vandalism.

2. The four Philippine Universities mentioned here are the De La Salle University (DLSU), the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD), the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), and the University of Santo Tomas (UST). The modifier "top" is based on the international QS World University Rankings as of 2016 (Hegina) and is used here only as a practical basis for delimiting the scope of this survey and research.

3. In this study, the journals surveyed include the *Malay* journal of the De La Salle University-Manila, which—out of 397 published and internationally-refereed articles on Philippine languages, literature, mass media, and cultures from 1981 to 2017—has little to no available studies on graffiti and latrinalia (De La Salle). Articles from volumes 14 and 18 of the journal were not included because they were not accessible digitally online and in print. Such is the same with other locally published internationally-refereed journals such as the *Kritika Kultura,* journal of the Ateneo de Manila University which—despite having a massive count of 582 articles published from 2002 to 2020—has yet to engage with graffiti as a cultural text ("Kritika Kultura"). *Social Transformations* (out of 78 double-blind peer-reviewed articles on the Global South from 2013 to 2018), *Katipunan* journal (out of 49 double-blind peer-reviewed articles on Philippine

languages, arts, and culture from 2016 to 2019), and even the long-running *Philippine Studies* journal (out of 67 volumes spread out in 252 individual editions, with each edition containing more or less 10 articles concerning Philippine histories and social realities from 1953 to 2018), all by Ateneo de Manila University, share the same lack of both preliminary or sustained engagement with graffiti. *Humanities Diliman* (out of 285 internationally-refereed articles from 2000 to 2019), *Philippine Humanities Review* (out of 151 accessible peer-reviewed articles, from its 9th volume in 2007 up to the 19th in 2017), *Kasarinlan* journal (out of 927 internationally-refereed articles from 1985 up to 2017, concerning different facets of being 'third-world'), *Social Science Diliman* (out of 257 internationally-refereed articles from 2000 to 2018), *Philippine Social Sciences Review* (out of 197 peer-reviewed articles from 1984), and *Daluyan* journal (out of 179 accessible peer-reviewed articles on Filipino, Humanities, and Philippine Studies from its 15th volume in 2009 up to its 23rd in 2017)—all of which come from the University of the Philippines Diliman— pretty much have the same gap. Finally, *Unitas* (out of 91 volumes from 1922 to 2018, containing more than a thousand articles), the multilingual journal on the humanities and social sciences of the University of Santo Tomas, one of the oldest extant academic publications locally, has likewise not yet touched upon the topic. All of these are surveyed here and cataloged as a basis for the need to study graffiti and latrinalia more rigorously.

4. See former Philippine president's son Paolo "Pulong" Duterte and commentator Susan Quimpo's remarks deeming graffiti as mere destruction of public property. This they said as student activists "vandalized" the gate of a government agency on higher education amidst an impending rise in tuition fees in 2018 and 2019 (Quimpo; "Pulong Duterte"). Likewise, see former Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso publicly chastising graffiti writers writing protest statements on the street walls of Manila in 2019 (Edera; "Isko Moreno on arrest of 'vandals'").

5. Four out of these six articles are about Asia: one on Japan, one on Palestine, and two on China. The other two articles are from Chile and Egypt, representing Latin America and Africa respectively. What is observable in the landmark anthology containing 35 articles from contributors is the disproportion between articles coming from the Global North and the Global South.

6. The *con safos* graffiti are named as such because Mexican-Americans in the United States sign their graffiti with the label "con safos," meaning "with respect," or "with safety"; this signifies that the writers of the graffiti have refused to accept normative racial backlash (Grider qtd. in Gadsby).

7. In the case of the Philippines by the 1970s, renowned Philippine art scholar, critic, and historian Alice Guillermo would recount as well how Filipino activists used graffiti to fight the Marcos fascist dictatorship and sway public opinion from the ground-up (Protest and Revolutionary Art 13, 51-52; Social Realism 7-9). This is similar to the rationale behind the people's graffiti against fascism as illustrated by Verrall and Clay. A separate study is likewise needed to fully historicize and explore local graffiti and its usages in times of dictatorship and fascism in the Philippines, building on to what Guillermo has already started.

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