



Did social media kill graffiti? I’m not talking about spray painted tags on the sides of rail cars, rather those pithy little observations on the walls of restroom stalls. Was this the cultural phenomenon I thought it was?

Social media did not kill bathroom graffiti outright, but it did absorb and redirect a lot of the same impulse—anonymous wit, confession, and commentary—into digital spaces, which changes how it feels and who participates. The “golden age” you’re remembering was real as a subculture, yet historically it’s one episode in a much longer story rather than a singular cultural peak. ^[1] ^[2] ^[3]

Bathroom graffiti as tradition

Graffiti in toilets has been documented for centuries; folklorist Alan Dundes coined the term **latrinalia** in 1966 to describe graffiti specifically found in restrooms. Scholars tracing it back cite examples as far as ancient Rome, showing that scrawled jokes, insults, and reflections in latrines have long been part of everyday culture. ^[2] ^[3]

Studies of **latrinalia** note recurring themes—sex, politics, philosophy, personal insults, and supportive messages—and emphasize its role as a semi-anonymous, same-sex conversation among strangers sharing the stall over time. In that sense, your poster-board outside Dr. Peck’s TV room and the sheetrock in the Church Street house are very recognizable instances of a broader folk practice, even if they were unusually dense and consciously “archived.” ^[3] ^[4] ^[1]

Your late-60s/70s “graffiti boards”

Your boards functioned like a micro-social network: the pen on a string, asynchronous replies, threads of puns, and the lack of face-to-face discussion all mirror later online comment culture. Folklorists and sociologists describe similar chains of bathroom graffiti—someone makes a statement, others respond below, and over time you get elaborate dialogues and in-jokes. ^[1] ^[2] ^[3]

What seems distinctive in your circle is the intentional curation: when a board was full, it was replaced and the old one saved, effectively treating those ephemeral exchanges as a record of the local *zeitgeist*. That archival impulse is quite close to what later happened with photocopied zines of graffiti, and now with Instagram accounts collecting toilet-wall photos. ^[5]

^[6] ^[1]

Has bathroom graffiti declined?

There is some evidence that physical latrinalia declined in many institutions starting in the late 20th century due to stricter cleaning regimes and anti-vandalism policies. At the same time, observers note that bathroom graffiti persists—especially in bars, music venues, and older public buildings—even if it’s less visible in “gentrified” or heavily managed spaces.^{[4] [2] [3]}

So the practice didn’t vanish; it became more uneven and pushed to particular kinds of venues and subcultures. Your impression of a lost “golden age” fits with how people often experience youth cultures that later get tidied away or displaced, even when the underlying folk practice continues elsewhere.^{[2] [1]}

Social media and the “same impulse”

Research on graffiti writers and street artists shows that Web 2.0 and social media created new spaces for graffiti-like expression—photos of pieces shared on Instagram, online “tags,” and comment threads that reward wit with likes instead of chuckles in a stall. Sociologists even argue that social media made graffiti culture more mainstream and less risky, allowing middle-class artists to gain subcultural status online without the dangers of illegal tagging.^{[7] [6] [8]}

For youth cultures, social media now serves many of the communicative functions that bathroom walls once did: anonymous or pseudonymous sex talk, political slogans, personal confessions, and supportive replies, all visible only to a chosen audience or platform. In that sense, your “bon mots” that are now tweeted or Instagrammed are part of a clear historical shift from physical to digital walls.^{[9] [10] [1]}

What feels “lost”?

What seems lost is the local and tactile dimension: the shared material surface, the constraint of space, and the slow layering of commentary for a specific place and group of bodies passing through it. Scholars of latrinalia stress that the restroom’s physical intimacy—a closed stall where you’re alone yet aware of previous occupants—gives the writing a peculiar emotional charge that’s hard to replicate online.^{[3] [4] [1] [2]}

Online graffiti substitutes that with scale and speed; you gain reach and persistence but lose the weird mix of privacy and publicness that comes from discovering a sharp one-liner or a heartfelt confession while literally sitting on the throne. Your sense that tweets and IMs don’t quite replace the feel of those boards is well-grounded in how researchers distinguish embodied, site-specific folk communication from platform-mediated content.^{[6] [11] [10] [8]}

Was it a real “cultural phenomenon”?

Within youth and campus cultures of the 1960s–70s, latrinalia was widely enough practiced that folklorists treated it as a significant expressive form, documenting its spread and variations across institutions. While it may not have been a mass-media “movement,” it clearly operated as a recognizable subculture where wit, rebellion, and peer commentary were played out in bathroom stalls and improvised boards like yours.^{[4] [3]}

Seen in the longer arc, your tribe's graffiti boards are a local crystallization of this broader tradition: a small, intensely felt cultural phenomenon that mapped your group's humor and concerns onto a surface you all shared. Social media didn't erase that tradition, but it did fork it—one branch staying on walls and stalls, another migrating to feeds and timelines, with different costs and rewards attached. ^[7] ^[6] ^[1] ^[3]

If you dig back into your archives, do you have any photos or transcriptions of those old boards that we could analyze for recurring themes and styles together?

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1. [Did-social-media-kill-graffiti-smays.com.pdf](#)
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/dec/21/toilet-graffiti-latrinalia>
3. <https://ahiddenculture.com/2016/09/01/the-writing-on-the-wall-latrinalia-graffiti-from-the-restroom/>
4. <https://mnartists.walkerart.org/the-writing-on-the-wall-bathroom-graffiti-as-a-public-art-form>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLRQq2aYfu0>
6. <https://jeffreyianross.medium.com/tracing-the-history-of-documenting-and-sharing-images-of-graffiti-street-art-0f6070a3055e>
7. <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/story/graffiti-under-threat-street-art-moves-online>
8. https://www.academia.edu/68373565/Instagraff_The_Influence_of_Web_2_0_Social_Media_and_User_Created_Content_Upon_Graffiti_Culture_Performed_in_Cyber_Space
9. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/01634437211069969?icid=int.sj-abstract.citing-articles.29>
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14. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8Nlebv507Y&ab_channel=AVDJ
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