



The Aesthetics of Division: Sign Values, Global Flows, and Contested Spatial Imaginaries at the East Side Gallery

Invitation

Dr. Bree T. Hocking

Tuesday, 17th June, 2014
5 p.m., Room B 002/03

As sections of the East Side Gallery were removed in spring 2013 to accommodate a luxury residential development, protestors rallied to demand their right to “experience” the cultural heritage represented by this aesthetically enhanced, 1.3-km strip of the former Berlin Wall. First painted by 118 international artists at the end of the Cold War as an emblem of peaceful revolution, the often-renovated street art gallery has become in the intervening years a high-profile site of symbolic and economic competition with particular resonance for art worlds, touristic flows and the urban restructuring of so-called ‘new’ Berlin. Against a backdrop of ongoing contestation, this paper traces the East Side Gallery’s sign value within a nexus of transnational cultural production, population movement and spatial negotiation. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with artists, tourists and activists, it considers the social and economic meaning of the gallery to a range of stakeholders and audiences, and, in the process, sheds light on the multiple visions of how this landmark is experienced and utilized. Far from static monument, the gallery manifests here as a “system of action” whose reach spans physical and virtual space but whose sign value is perpetually in danger of destabilization by the very reedom it purports to celebrate.

Bree Hocking is a former staff writer for the U.S. Congressional newspaper Roll Call. She received her Ph.D. in Irish Studies from Queen’s University Belfast. In Autumn 2013, she was a visiting researcher of the Irmgard Coninx Stiftung based at the WZB. Her book, *The Great Reimagining: Public Art, Urban Space, and the Symbolic Landscapes of a ‘New’ Northern Ireland* will be published by Berghahn in March 2015.

To register, please reply by 16th June, 2014, to Chris Reinelt: chris@wzb.eu

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