**Picturing Division: Sign Values, Simulacrums and Global Flows at the Berlin Wall**

Dr. Bree Hocking, The Open University

As sections of the East Side Gallery were removed in spring 2013 to make way for 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 Berlin Wall, located between the Spree River and the Muhlenstrasse in Friedrichshain. By most accounts, it was a peculiar phenomenon – namely, that people were taking to the streets to demand that the former emblem of East-West division and communist oppression stay up rather than be torn down.

First painted by 118 international artists at the end of the Cold War as an expression of peaceful revolt and exuberant celebration, the street art gallery has undergone numerous renovations and reconstructions in the years since it was first unveiled in September 1990. Nevertheless, it remains a high-profile site of symbolic and economic import to global art markets, touristic flows and urban restructuring projects. Against a backdrop of ongoing flux, this paper traces the circulation of the East Side Gallery’s sign value as a synecdoche of Western triumph in the Cold War. It assesses the gallery, a listed monument, as a simulacrum of a simulacrum, existing as it does within a nexus of transnational cultural production, movement and spatial negotiation. Indeed, such is the power of the gallery’s sign that the highly staged and inauthentic artifact was recently fenced off to protect parts of it from further desecration by the hordes of selfie-seeking tourists aiming to leave their mark on the wall.

Drawing on ethnographic interviews with artists, tourists and activists, this paper considers the value of the gallery to a range of stakeholders and audiences, shedding light on the multiple visions of how this staged landmark is framed, interpreted and experienced, both in and out of context, and, in the process, inhabiting roles ranging from fine art marketing platform, branding device and accidental gentrifier to historical marker and global cultural signifier. Far from a static monument, the gallery manifests here as a Gellian “system of action” whose reach spans physical and virtual space but whose sign value risks destabilization by the very freedom it claims to celebrate.

**Bree Hocking** is a research associate at The Open University, working on the Belfast Mobility Project, an interdisciplinary study of activity space segregation in North Belfast. A former staff writer for the Congressional newspaper Roll Call, she has also served as assistant editor for Opinion at *U.S. News and World Report* in Washington, D.C. Hocking received a Ph.D. from Queen’s University Belfast, and in 2013 was the recipient of an Irmgard Coninx Foundation fellowship to carry out research related to the artistic transformation of the Berlin Wall. She is the author of *The Great Reimagining: Public Art, Urban Space, and the Symbolic Landscapes of a ‘New’ Northern Ireland* (Berghahn Books, 2015).