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Author: Professor Andrew Webber

Institution: Cambridge University, Department of German and Dutch

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In the years since reunification, Berlin has been a city in search of an identity, seeking to imagine a new role for itself as a cosmopolitan capital. Amongst other things, that identity has been associated with club culture (Berlin as international ‘Party-Hauptstadt’), but also with the particular material shapes and surfaces of the city – the city as thing, or as a collection of things. Another title that has been given to it is ‘Graffiti-Hauptstadt’, and this encapsulates a striking part of the city’s contemporary material culture. Graffiti is ubiquitous in the city, both in small-scale, illicit, autograph forms and in the shape of large-scale frescos commissioned for the ‘fire-walls’ that are a distinctive feature of the cityscape. The monumental ‘thing’, or more accurately part of a thing, in the image here is another kind of wall, a thing that exercised immense power over the lives of Berliners – and over the imagination, world-wide – during the Cold War years. Before the ‘fall’ of the Wall, a quarter of a century ago, it was a Janus-faced structure. On the Eastern side, it was blank and forbidding – potentially lethal; and on the Western side it was a huge canvas for the artwork, serious or scurrilous, of both informal daubers and international star artists – perhaps the biggest collaborative artwork on the globe. While most of the Wall has been removed, reduced to an easily overlooked line marked across the ground, a large section has been appropriated and maintained as the East Side Gallery (pictured here, in 2007). Today, it is one of Berlin’s most popular tourist destinations and – with its paintings, captions, slogans, and poems – a key site of memory for the city. It is under pressure, however, both from developers, who see its riverside location as prime ground for lucrative building, and from visitors, who feel the urge to add their own marks to the concrete canvas. What might be a suitable poem for this Berlin thing?