

Dr. Stephan Ehrig: Modernist gazing: The Neubau City and the Child Flâneur in „Der tapfere Schulschwänzer“ (1967)

My paper will look at child mobility and the modernist rebuilding of East Berlin's city centre through the example of Winfried Junge's 1967 feature film „Der tapfere Schulschwänzer“. Like other films of the Au>au period, Junge's film showcases a temporal euphoria about how the prominently staged modernist architecture marks the arrival of a glorious future amidst the ruins and leftover buildings of the perceived problematic past, represented through a boy's curious walk and gazing on the new urban environments. Similarly, the film foregrounds the post-Stalin shift after 1956 towards modernist architecture, and *Schulschwänzer* is a primary example of how a documentary filmmaker like Junge stages and frames the Neubau city with a keen interest to examine the city life of the young republic.

Yet what the film really is about is showcasing the new, modernist Berlin as the Socialist capital emerging from the rubble. Thomas 'childlike gaze' is that of the synchronous modernist marveling upon East Berlin's new representational spaces. In a production report by the production collective Gruppe KAG Berlin the purpose of the film was to produce the film in a 'documentary style'. So while a good amount of street footage is authentic, most of it is carefully staged. Thomas 'flânerie' takes him from 19th century Prenzlauer Berg to Alexanderplatz, the construction of the second part of Karl-Marx-Allee, and the crumbling historical houses of the Friedrichstadt. The film's skepticism towards the layer makes *Schulschwänzer* also an example that frames the synchronous Time regime of modernism that regarded historic architecture with a skeptical gaze, and here even makes a case for its demolition. I will thus present the idealised modernist gazing of a child signifying the future of the Socialist project — and a developing dialectical relationship with the regime's institutions — as emblematic for the Au>au period.

Biography: Stephan Ehrig is a Lecturer in German at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of *Neubau Atmospheres* (2025), *Der Dialektische Kleist* (2018) and co-editor of *The GDR Today* (2018) and *Entertaining German Culture* (2023).