



# Jani Ruscica

Camden Arts Centre / October 2009 — March 2010

File Note #49 Jani Ruscica *Travelogue*



Malin Ståhl

# Jani Ruscica

Ruscica approaches his subjects much like an anthropologist or sociologist, posing questions about our very being in the world — who we are, why we are what we are and what it all means. He is interested in places, cultural identities and how we define and communicate personal belonging in an increasingly mono-cultural and global society. Ruscica's curiosity about locations has led him to develop a practice where residencies have become a fruitful situation for the making of his work.

As I write these notes Ruscica is in the process of making his film *Travelogue*, consisting of three different elements: visual, sound and text to be filmed and recorded in the Artists' Studio at Camden Arts Centre. It is a piece that lends itself perfectly to the imagination. But it is also a film about a place, a city, London. How then does one capture a city, represent a city? The title, *Travelogue*, refers directly to a film genre, embedded with information about travelling in the remote places of the world, that became popular in the late 20th century.

In the mid 19th century the moving panorama was another popular form of entertainment featuring landscapes from journeys to exotic places. Painted sceneries were installed on spools that were rolled past an audience. The machinery was often concealed behind a screen to enhance the illusory effect and a Delineator would accompany the imagery, narrating, explaining and dramatising the scenes. Yet Ruscica has filmed a moving panorama screen in black and white creating a screen within the screen where the apparatus, the moving panorama, is the main protagonist.

Production still *Travelogue*, Artists' Studio,  
Camden Arts Centre 2010

Ruscica's *Travelogue* is thus pointing at two historically popular forms within the genre of travel as entertainment — the moving panorama and the travelogue film. But where in both these mediums a landscape would appear and a drama unfold, Ruscica leaves the screen blank. The eye scans the plane in search for something to hold on to, only to encounter the materiality of the surface itself; a roughness in the canvas, a knot in the fabric. In a Brechtian manner, what is staged and dramatised is the technique of staging itself. The lens zooms out providing a view of the whole setting — the blank panorama screen in a studio with a row of empty chairs organized in front of it. The panorama is not providing scenery and the chairs are not holding an audience.

*the not, as an abrupt intuitive discovery, appears as consciousness (of being), consciousness of the not.\**

It is the gap, produced by Ruscica's refusal to provide a window to another world, which allows the viewer to reflect on the function of these objects. Through the use of our experience and knowledge we assign potentiality to the objects — the chairs wait for an audience and the screen for its scenes to begin.

The unpopulated visual image is presented in relation to text and sound. The text exists both in the form of a screen print and as subtitles in the film. Interested in existing cultural expressions and representation, Ruscica has decided to select quotes from English travel books as a collectively shared tradition rather than writing his own text. In contrast to the empty visual image the textual collage portrays a city analogous to a body — a city that breathes, is fleshy, dirty, slimy, has moods and so on. The sound, which has been recorded from the studio, provides a more direct and 'real' reference to the location. To some the sound might suggest any city, a generic big town, but to the knowing ear it will contain site-specific clues. The piece thus sits in tension between the abstract and the specific. Like a montage the three elements of the piece, the visual, sound and text, pull in different directions producing gaps where the viewer is invited to reflect on how representation is produced, and to imagine his/her own city.

Malin Ståhl is director of Hollybush Gardens

\* J.P. Sartre *Being and Nothingness* [Routledge, 2003] pp 35

*Beginning an Ending* 2009 / 16mm film transferred to HD  
© Jani Ruscica / Photo: Sini Pelkki



*Barbox/Beatbox* / 16mm and DV transferred to HD / © Jani Ruscica  
Courtesy Finnish National Gallery, Central Art Archive  
Photo: Pirje Mäkkänen





Design: James Goggin (Practise) & Sara De Bondt studio  
Print: Xraprint, London

Travelogue 2010 / 16mm film  
transferred to HD / © Jani Ruscica

**Jani Ruscica** was born in Savonlinna, Finland in 1978 and lives in Helsinki, Finland. He studied Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art and Design (1999–2002) and the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki (2003–2007). Ruscica works collaboratively, his interest lies in how one defines one's location, one's placement in the world, and how this definition changes according to personal, cultural, representational or even scientific factors. Ruscica's works examine the intersection between cinema, video art, theatre and performance. Ruscica has exhibited in Europe and America. His recent exhibitions include: 5th Momentum Biennial, Moss, Norway (2009); 'Tracking traces' KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland (2009); 'Life Forms', Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden (2009). He has also had screenings of his work in institutions including Tate Modern, London, Centre Pompidou, Paris and MoMA, New York. His film *Evolutions* was awarded the main prize at prestigious Kunst Film Biennale in Cologne in 2009.

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#### Reading/Viewing List

- Italo Calvino *Le Cosmicomiche* Mondadori (2002)
- Vladimir Nabokov *Pale Fire* Penguin Classics (2000)
- Luigi Pirandello *Six Characters in Search of an Author* Nick Hern Books (2003)
- Charles Darwin *The Origin of Species* Wordsworth Editions (1998)
- David Rothenberg *Why Birds Sing, a journey into the mystery of bird song* Basic Books (2006)
- André Bazin *What is Cinema? Volume 1* [Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray] University of California Press (2004)
- Stefano Giannotti *Geologica* [radiopiece] (2006)
- Jean Painlevé (dir.) *Liquid Crystals* (1978)
- Michael Snow (dir.) *La Région Centrale* (1971)
- Federico Fellini (dir.) *Prova d'Orchestra* (1978)
- Nicholas Ray (dir.) *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958)
- Samira Makhmalbaf (dir.) *Sib* (1998)
- Jean-Luc Godard (dir.) *Le Mépris* (1963)
- Luchino Visconti (dir.) *La Terra Trema* (1948)
- Paolo Brunatto *Io e...* — Pasolini e *La Forma Della Città* RAI TV (1974)

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**Published to accompany the Magic Lantern Residency at Camden Arts Centre**  
October 2009–March 2010

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Travelogue was commissioned in collaboration with Animate Projects and supported by FRAME and the Finnish Institute in London

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ISBN 978 1 907208 05 8

‘Uncurtaining the night, I’d let dark glass hang all the furniture above the grass, and how delightful when a fall of snow covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so as to make chair and bed exactly stand upon that snow, out in that crystal land!’

— Vladimir Nabokov:  
Pale Fire Penguin (1962)

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Funded by Camden Council

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Cover: *Beginning an Ending* 2009  
16mm film to HD / © Jani Ruscica  
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