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:: Article

Rape New York: Jana Leo

Interview by Richard Marshall.

3:AM: How did the actual writing of the book happen? Were there people encouraging you to do this or was this something that really was just you. And was it something that you started to do without thinking of publishing it or was that always what you were aiming at? Can you say whether there were key moments when the motivation clarified for you?

JL: By early 2007, the assailant was in jail, and the civil suit with my landlord was settled. I thought about making a movie. Looking through the materials from the lawsuit, I selected key documents that together might serve as the basis for a script. But as I compiled the material, it began to take the shape of a book of documents rather than a film script.

Now that I had a package of documents the question was how to organize them; chronology didn't quite work because some documents overlapped in time. Then I tried to order them thematically, but that didn't work either because different subjects relate to each other. I made several sequences but I wasn't happy with any, they were always too linear, and I was unable to retain the three hundred pages of documents in my head to choose the right sequence. I made several copies and spread them on a big table and tried different orders; looking at the sequences, made me dizzy and anxious.

In the same way that when renovating a building, scaffolding is used, I realized that I needed a scaffold to build the structure of my documents. The scaffolding would be a text. I would write a text that I would then follow to organize my private archive of documents. Once the documents were organized, as the scaffolding from a building is removed, I would take out the text.

The first part of the text was a narration of the actual assault. During the writing, I began to interweave my feelings and thoughts about what had happened, with the facts. This narration became not only the scaffolding for documents but for an independent text with value in itself. The question now was where to put the text. I kept that question on hold and went back to the original idea of the movie.

When thinking in terms of a movie, I wasn't sure whether to go for documentary or fiction. I watched as

many documentaries as I could at the NYU library. Although I prefer documentaries to narrative films, my main concern with contemporary documentaries is that they were not really true documentaries but a fictionalized version of an event. A documentary needs some trace of reality. But how does one film in the present, something that happened in the past? Simon, my companion, and a filmmaker, told me to watch *Little Dieter Wants to Fly* by Werner Herzog. Dieter, the main character in the movie, goes back to where the event happened and tells, in the place it happened, what happened, acting it out. There was a trace of reality. This movie was of special interest to me, because years later, Herzog used the same story to make a Hollywood feature: *Rescue Down*. Now it was fiction based on reality.

So the text was used to organize the documents, as well as being something in itself, but it hadn't become a separate book yet. Simon, who in the early stages was making sure what I wrote in English (a second language) was what I wanted to say, told me, "You have a book here." I was beginning to agree.

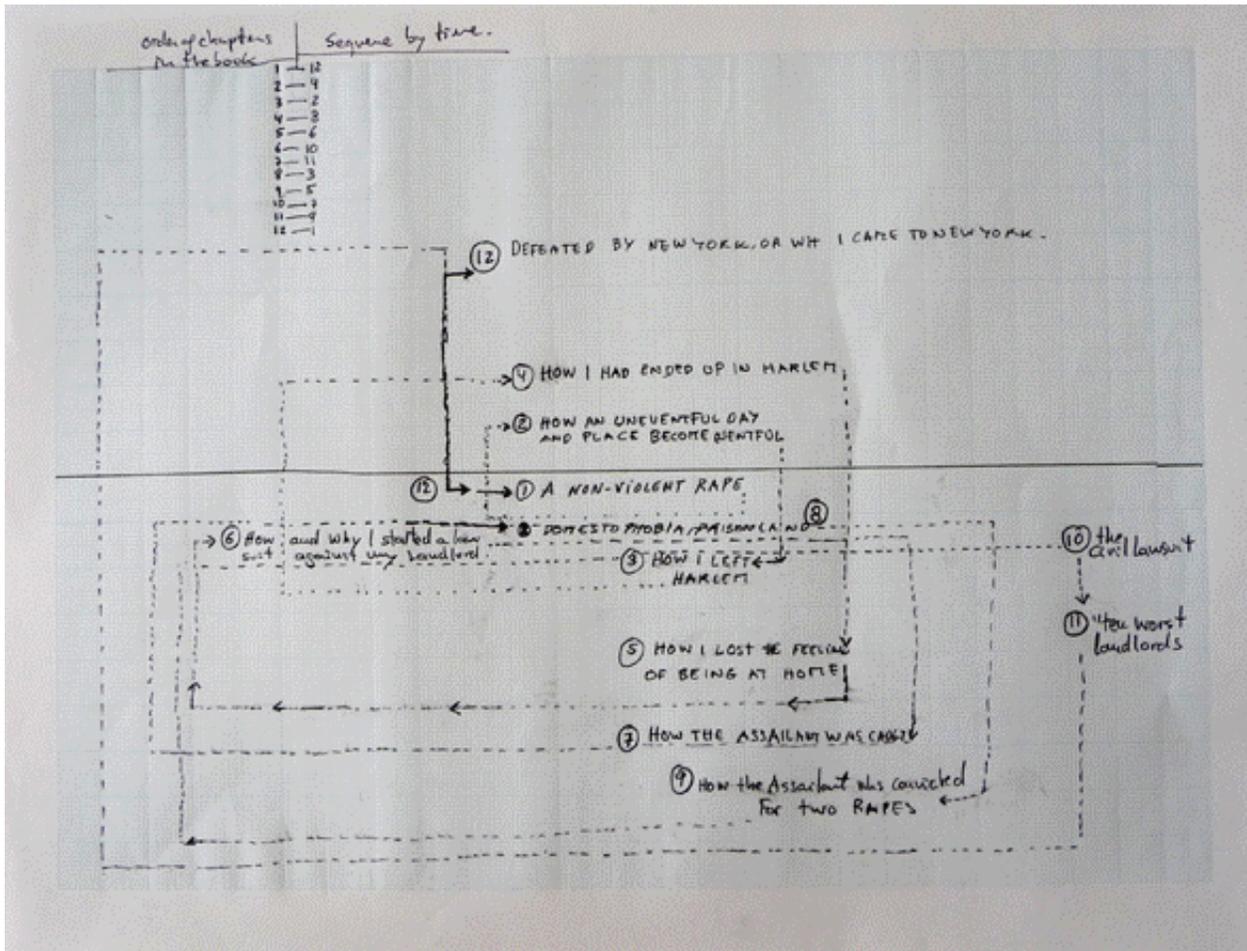
At this point, I abandoned the idea of making a movie but retained the incipient filmic structure: four tracks. Each track referring to the same story through different forms: documents, text, art pieces or photographs. Instead of a movie, it was an archive, a catalogue of documents. After the whole text was drafted, and the documents were organized into a sequence, I focused on making the text into a book.

In *Rape New York*, common film strategies, such as flashbacks, are imported into the text. There are flashbacks of different scales: the end goes back to the beginning, and then throughout the book, among chapters. The sequence of the chapters doesn't correspond with the sequence of events.

Order of chapters in the book	Sequence by time
1	12
2	4
3	2
4	8
5	6
6	10
7	11
8	3
9	5
10	7
11	9
12	1

I watched *Memento* a few times. The flash back, a cinematographic strategy was very good for me for another reason: it's how memory works. For me, the memory of the rape was fresh. Everything that happened before and after was either erased or affected by that act. That's why the main axis of the book is the rape. The first part is, *A Non-Violent Rape*, and everything else rotates around it. The second part is *Before and After A Non-Violent Rape*.

Then on a smaller scale, like a fractal, this operation was repeated, and the chapters started to dance, one step forward into the future and two steps backward into the past: a dance between the before and the after. This sketch tries to visualize the structure of the book. At the same time it is intended to draw a map of memory with time lines, routes and intrusive mementos. A fraction of time is a second; a fraction of memory is a memento. This intrusion is also the way reality works, how one intersects into the lives of others. An intruder broke the natural sequence of my life; that was the origin of this process for me.



For me, it was clear that the text needed work, but I saw it as a book. It began as something else but it was there. I had no doubt about that. And I wanted it published. The situation at the university where I was teaching wasn't great, and I eventually left. By that time I was working on the book obsessively, all my focus was on this one thing. And in the reality that the book brings.

People were not encouraging me to do this; most people discouraged me to do it. The response from my close friends was negative. Leslie, a close friend to whom the book is dedicated, said, "There are no foreigners writing literature in their second language... you should write in Spanish and translate. Though, I don't see the point of writing the book at all. Start something new." My friend David said, "You know literature doesn't work that way, one doesn't become a writer just from making a story from an experience one has." Simon, and a few other friends, who know the material from actually reading or commenting on it, supported the idea of a book.

In December 2008, I was working on a project with no budget, and was too dependent of friends, who I could not pay, to help with the editing; I looked into other ways to find an editor. I thought I might find a retired teacher or someone interested in experimental writing and who had the time. My friends thought this was impossible. I sent a few emails to universities:

"I am writing to see if you can pass this information to alumni, retired faculty or anybody that can be interested in working as proof reader in a very rare book on rape.

The book takes maturity to follow; a young person will be probably hard time to understand it or to read it. ...due to the subject, its innovative form and theories it had been impossible for me to gather funding, but the book is an important one. For personal reasons I started this adventure

and want to finish....I am a Ph.D. on philosophy living in New York, originally from Spain.”

No responses from universities. I placed an ad in an online local exchange add between individuals, in community services: “Proof reader for a very rare book Date: 2008-01-02”

A former detective from the special victims unit, now retired, answered my ad. We met, but he lacked the skills needed to edit. However, he was able though to notice a few telling details about the police reports, and my interaction with him was rewarding.

Another person who replied to the ad said, he wasn't a writer but a 'reader.' We exchanged e-mails back and forth. I sent some text, which he edited. He was very well educated, well read and extremely intelligent, but had difficulty coping with some of the more complex thoughts that needed to be understood and edited. I explained this to him, and he was upset. So, I placed the ad again, but this time explaining more about what I was looking for, and why the project was important. The man with whom I had just exchanged e-mails responded again:

“I read your ad again. I have a proposition. I'd like to fund part of the costs towards the successful publication of this book. ... I am offering (a figure).....to cover the expenses towards you enrolling a professional proof reader for the project... Just would like to see the book published properly....Why this and why now? It's about making some meaningful difference to the world. The earlier the better.”

He sent me a check. His name is in the acknowledgment page.

I was able to *hire* a friend with whom I had already been working, who is a professional writer and editor.

3:AM: Looking at the book now as a finished product, out there, open for criticism, for sale etc etc has anything changed in your perception of the writing. Are there things that surprise you now about what you have written in retrospect? Are there things that you would change?

JL: I recognize the book, and at the same time, I read it as if I was reading another person's writing.

The process of the book have been intense but some how diluted in time, took a year after I finished the first draft. The process has required some patience and has allowed for some thinking. I am happy with the book as it is in the context of the [Semina series](#). For that collection I wouldn't change a thing.

3:AM: As with anything constructed, omissions are important and interesting. Are there omissions that you now regret from the text? Are there things that just got away from you, that were not deliberate but just accidentally left out that now you have noticed? And things that you deliberately left out, are there things that you're perspective on them has changed and you regret the omissions?

JL: I see the book in the same way that one sees the layout of a house: within the same square foot area the distribution of space can be different.

This book is a studio apartment, an introduction and at the same a space, in which, from any point you see it all. If a tenant gets a family or wants more privacy, he/she has to move. It is the same with the book. I can imagine going deeper into what is there or going broader, into other rapes and other contexts.

A good house for one person will be not as good for another. Depending of what one asks of a house. There are a few paragraphs I would have liked to include, but they didn't go well with the book; the distance and language of those paragraphs don't belong to this book as it is now. Also it is like going to a movie, you

realized something important but you don't tell your companion until the movie is over. These paragraphs are an afterthought.

3:AM: Barthes said that an interview can be justified if there is something that can be placed in an interview that can't be put in a piece of writing! Is there anything you can say that would justify this interview?

JL: This interview is the place to put these paragraphs. Here we go:

RAPE: To force someone to be part of you.

Jean Baudrillard (1) defines rape as "forcing someone to have pleasure." Even more perverse, rape is to force someone to be part of you.

There is simply no way to forget the experience of a rape. The rapist is as alive, if not more so, than the memory of your most memorable lover, the one that you loved the most, the best time you made love.

(1) "Thus, genuine rape is not forcibly "enjoying" someone, bur forcing someone to have pleasure. p.123 Baudrillard, Jean. *Impossible Exchange*. London, New York: Verso, 2001

Translated by Chris Turner

**THE ELEMENTS OF RAPE:
RAPE AND SEX**

The essence of sex in rape is perverted in two ways. One, by separating sex from libido; sex is detached from romance and from pleasurable experience, and the positive element associated with Eros is destroyed. Two, by overwriting choice with force, the idea of carnal union, the deepest and most delightful union is eliminated from the idea of sexual intercourse. A union happens by agreement and not by force. Other forms of sex such as prostitution, while not being unions, are made by mutual accord; however, in rape there is no exchange of any kind. Rape is depredation.

RAPE, TORTURE AND HUMILIATION

Rape is a form of torture. A victim is forced to satisfy someone else's sexual wishes in a situation in which there are no rules, only total vulnerability.

There are two forms of torture in rape: passive torture and active torture. Passive torture is experienced in violent rapes; active torture, in non-violent rapes. In a violent rape there is a higher degree of raw violence and in a non-violent rape, a higher degree of coercion. In passive torture (violent rape), which is more common, the victim is violently made to accept sex she does not want. She is passive, the rapist is active. In active torture (non-violent rape), the rapist uses coercion rather than force. The victim must force herself to do something that is radically against her nature. She is active, the rapist is passive-aggressive. While passive torture involves physical damage, active torture involves latent and long-lasting humiliation.

Active torture is an inverted form of torture, in which the figure of the tormentor is passed onto the victim. It releases the tormentor from guilt and imposes feelings of self-betrayal and humiliation onto the victim. Active torture is perverse because it creates the illusion that nothing is actually happening against the victim's will. There is a gap between the coercion and the fulfillment of the request. Humiliation is created in the gap between being asked to perform sex and being directly forced into having sex. The victim must force herself to be raped, to dominate her own body for the rapist.

Jana Leo

New York, November 2006

3:AM: You have written the book but also have had an art gallery show also. How do you see the two approaches coming together and complementing each other and alternatively, where do they come apart, in some way, not necessarily contradicting each other but offering different routes?

JL: The book is about content; the show is about its language.

The main piece in the show is: *Rape New York, Affective and Legal Documents*. A catalogue or an archive, a display of the documents: police reports, medical records, detective files, psychological evaluations, lawyers correspondence, deposition transcripts, recorded conversations with the assailant, and the victim's statements and letters.

A difference between the book, *Rape New York*, and the catalogue, *Rape New York, affective and legal documents*, is that the book is in first person – I am there – in the catalogue I am not there. The catalogue it is an autobiography of a rape. This can be linked to your reference to Kafka. For me Kafka tells how bureaucracy and its process reduces the person to nothing, makes her disappear.

“Psychology, law, criminology, and literature each conceptualize rape differently. This work, *Rape New York, affective and legal documents*, tries to juxtapose these approaches, revealing by contrast the roles of written and visual language in communicating facts and emotions. Lawyers, psychologists and detectives report facts. Their reports, even in the case of psychologists, do not document emotions. Clearly though, there is a correlation between trauma and the loss of joy and between the act of rape and the long-term feelings of humiliation.

The language that professionals often use when reporting on rape separates emotions from facts. But emotions are a reality inseparable from facts. Art unifies process and content and bridges emotions and facts. The use of codified phrases and bureaucratic procedures facilitates recording and classification but conceals the full reality of rape, reducing its emotional importance. Reality is reduced to facts and the victim to a “subject for study.” For the victim, rape is a life-altering event, for the rapist, it is merely an action—a crime he voluntarily commits. When a rape is treated as an action, one takes the point of view of the rapist. Switching to the perspective of the victim, rape is treated as an event. This work, *Rape New York*, by including works of art and personal narratives, tries to bridge emotions and facts to address the reality of rape without taking the perspective of the assailant.

In a way, *Rape New York, affective and legal documents* is an anatomy of rape. However, unlike the anonymous character of a medical case study, in this dissection the identity of the body is not hidden, nor is its individuality denied.”

One step further in this effort to recognize the individual, in the show *Rape New York, Open Archive*, I am there in person during the duration of the exhibition, acting as the archivist. This brings a whole other dimension, it brings the person in. Visitors cannot think that this is generic, or a fallacy. I eventually talked to those who spent time in the gallery looking at stuff or interact with them when they request items. Then they are engaged with a reality don't only read it.

Another difference between the show and the book (any of the books) is that the show is alive. I guess this is why is more often call it a show than an exhibition. I am there doing nothing but also doing a performance, being an archivist. As somebody put it very well, “I am in control but also doing a public service”.

The show give you place to focus. It is like going to a movie theatre to watch a movie. In this case the atmosphere is created by the tension between a scene of a crime and the comfort of the domestic environment. This happen through different means, one is the furniture. The furniture in the show is my own

and was in the apartment while the assault happened.

The book that has just been published is only part of “the big book” that hasn’t been made public in any form. In early 2009, an agent wrote: “I understand the value of this book you’ve put together. But I’m afraid I very much doubt I could find a publisher for it. It grieves me, because I think it’s the kind of documentation we need.”

She suggested a web page. I haven’t thought yet in an exhibition but I was looking for engagement, a web page is anything but engaging.

Once I had a publisher: Book Works, and a launch date: May 28 2009, I thought about ways to show these documents, and the idea of an exhibition came up. The show was an archive by default, I was targeting for something else. By putting the archive together I realized my instinctive impulse to make an archive: violent acts made out of private records became “of public concern.” Through the duration of the show, the idea of finding an institution to house my archive, came up. This took me to a more ambitious place though: a place where people can donate their own “rapes archives,” a “Rape Archive” or a “Museum of Rape.”

3:AM: How did you decide to write the book as you did – were you thinking of other writers, other reading experiences of yours, and how influential were other people, friends, on the form you chose?

JL: I think I answered this question partly in my answer to question one. The book started with a life of itself, not a decision but something that happened by default. The text was seen originally as a tool for another book, which became a book in itself. At this point, conscious of the process, it got inverted, and the documents served the text as well and the chapters were re-ordered.

3:AM: How did you become connected to Semina and Book Works. Who approached who and what was the nature of the editing process? Was the Semina series something you knew about? Were you aware of the original Semina project and how do you see your work as contributing to both the new and the old series?

JL: I entered Book Works’ 2008 open call for submissions. A friend of mine, Benjamin Tischer, sent me information in response to the manuscript I had e-mailed him in March 2008 along with a request for any idea he might have of publishers. He told me he knew the work of Stewart Home, the invited editor of the open call, and that he thought my book was along the lines of his work.

By July 2008 Gavin Everall from Bookworks told me that my manuscript had been pre-selected from ninety submissions, along with other eleven others, as possible titles for the next Semina. Late that summer, Gavin told me that my title was definitely selected to be published.

In September 2008 we drafted a contract and I send the manuscript in the state that it was. I went to London, in November 2008 for a working session at Book Works, with Gavin Everall and Stewart Home. I also met the rest of the stuff: Jane Rolo, the director and Gerrie van Noord, an editor.

Stewart has sent me his version of the manuscript a few days before. Stewart’s editing has very good moments, but the overall feeling I had was that the text was flattened out; my voice was lost. You know how, sometimes, two people who stand in a very similar position in the world interact and all that is rebuilt between them is their difference. I think this is what happened between Stewart and I. I think it was painful for him to edit the text, and it was painful for me to read his edits.

In that *first* working session working session, we went through the structure of the book and we have no differences here. Here are the notes I took:

NOTES NOVEMBER 24-25

Structure

- Consider shifting chapter 3 and 4
- Chapter 9 get split into two:
decision to press charges
the trial: quotations from the court report
- Steven Green with less narrative
- Article 16 is introduced with quotations from the phone conversation.
- Deleting chapter 12, but keeping:
condo- single family house,
crime goes to chapter 4
border, Danemmora goes to chapter 8
A. and I arriving to NY, don't know where to put it
- End
- Try to do another end as if the rape never happened

How to proceed with his edit was problematic. I proposed to go back to Stewart's edit and mark what I wanted to stay and copy back the parts of my text that were deleted and then make a master from that.

This was going to be a lot of work, but I didn't see any other way to do it. There was a morning of tension. In the end, this is what we did. It was Gavin who went to this Frankenstein text (blue for Stewart's edit -yellow for going back to Jana's) and put it together as one.

My assailant was unknown to me, but he knew my space. He knew the building's security conditions and where to wait for a victim without being seen. The super told me he was staying on the roof of my building. What was he doing on the roof? Did he live there? Did he have a job? He attacked me in the early afternoon. Was he homeless? He was clean and well dressed. He didn't seem to be homeless. He was familiar with the swimming pool and might have showered there. If he was a local, how far away was he staying from my apartment? I could tell he stayed nearby, I was raped in the middle of winter, and he was wearing no jacket. I encountered him twice. Why would he come back to the location of the rape? He didn't come back. He never left because the building was his territory.

Detective M. was in charge of the investigation. He wasn't helpful. He took everything for granted and disregarded indications that the rapist lived close to my apartment. He took lightly my fear of the rapist killing me because I reported the assault and dismissed the possibility he might be back. I was angry that the police did not watch my building waiting for my assailant to reappear.

Then Gavin re-send to me and we went back and forth until we agreed on a definite text. Gerrie, did the proof reading. I had a chance to go through it with Gavin before it was sent to print.

When I think of how many hours I, and others, have put in per page, I never want to write again. But I am happy with the final result, and I think Gavin is also. I think the book fits well in the Semina Series, another individual voice, politically uncompromised, but very political and with an original agenda. I think it is a triumph for Book Works and for me.

3:AM: The book is an intimate portrait of your relationship both with yourself and with New York and the

USA. How do you feel now about New York and its spaces? Your Robocop theory of landlord/crime patterning and of prison architecture and notions of the domestic are foregrounded in the novel and help to make sense of what's going on. Could you briefly outline this complex of ideas in the book and say how far you'd want these theories to be used to further deepen a reader's understanding of the work? Stewart Home wrote an interesting blog piece about how wealthy groups are replacing poorer people in his part of London where he lives. So a Waitrose supermarket replaces a less expensive store, forcing the poor to have to travel further to get their food. Anna Minton in her book [*Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century City*](#) has also written about how what used to be public spaces have become privatized, with the result that the owners of space are able to marginalize the poor, and push them into the marginalized spaces you describe in your book. So it seems that the politics of architecture is enormously important when discussing issues of social equality. Could you say something about your thoughts on this?

JL: Sexual assault and real estate abuse are discussed as two symptoms of a broader phenomenon: Cities are more and more like interiors: climate-controlled islands.

In New York, a stereotype of a city, life happens mostly indoors and housing is expensive and difficult to find. However, laws do not always protect a building's tenants, who have no control over their building's security. For workers raped on the job, the hotel maid or the fast food clerk, the situation is even worse, rape is accepted as a "job hazard" and taken for granted. There is no reason for rape, no sequence of premises that necessarily leads to a conclusion. However, there are conditions that encourage rape. Economic forces related to immigration, unemployment, dislocation, homelessness and poverty nurture rape. The city, its street, its public space are the responsibility of the government, but "the inside of the city" belongs to the lords of the land.

The street is surveilled but life happens mostly in interiors not in the street. This might explain why the number of rapes on college campuses has not decreased in the last thirty years in the U.S.. There is a disorder here: crime grows green in interiors. There is a gap here between the old structure and the new life.

In January 2008, while writing the book, I signed up for a DBA (doing business as) under the name of: Civic Gaps. The idea was to address "gaps".

"Once an area is targeted for real estate development, that area will be developed sooner or later. The length of the transformation varies from a few years to several generations. During the transition a few get rich; many get hurt. Strategies go from direct-cutting basic services and harassing to perverse operations of criminal complicity. The developer's objective was clearly profit, but the mechanisms were fraudulent.

"The magnitude of developments in New York lately, the cost for displaced residents and the effects on those who stay call for an agency that studies and controls each steps of the transition. The agency will observe and study moves from the first steps of development and communicate with other agencies to stop fraudulent strategies used for real estate agents and developers. The agency don't try to stop the development but to warranty humanity in its process. It will be a mediation agency with authority to negotiate improvements and measures to counteract the violence inflicted on the individuals."

From the University side, writing directly to the Dean at Columbia University who was my teacher at Princeton, I tried to get help to start: *HOW NY- Controlling the Transition in Developments in New York*. No response. I tried City College and CUNY. No response.

From the government side, asking for grants, I tried to start: *RED-Real Estate Developments control agency*

in New York. The idea was to create a kind of HPD (Housing preservation and development) but precisely to control the transition bracket. I failed.

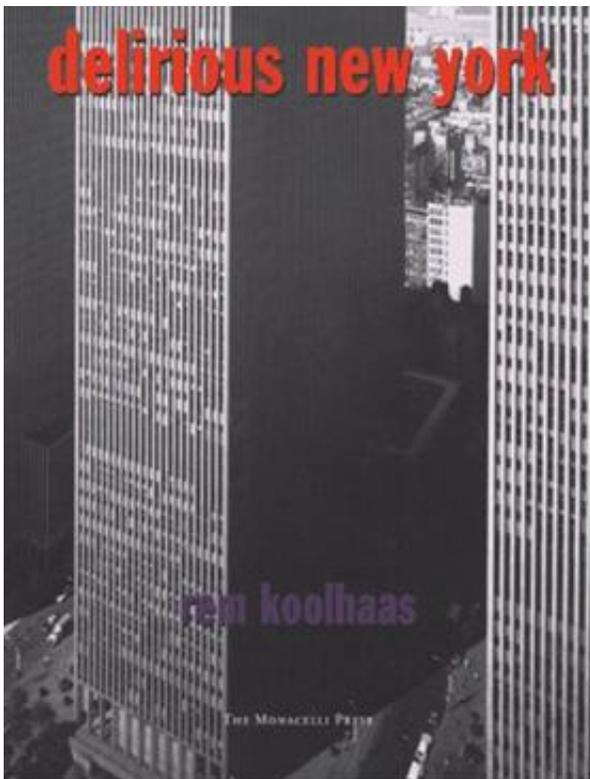
“When I was six years old, the single-family rentals in my neighborhood started being vacated. Tenants were pushed out by owners who wanted to use the land to build apartment buildings, which were far more profitable than single-family units. This was in “Pueblo Nuevo,” within the city limits of Madrid, Spain in 1965. A man in a hat and a suit, who appeared tall from a child’s point of view, harassed my mother, my sister and me while my father was at work. All the houses in the community had been vacated, but my family had resisted the move. A developer who’d recently bought the land to build an apartment building was waiting for my family to leave in order to get a construction permit from the building department.

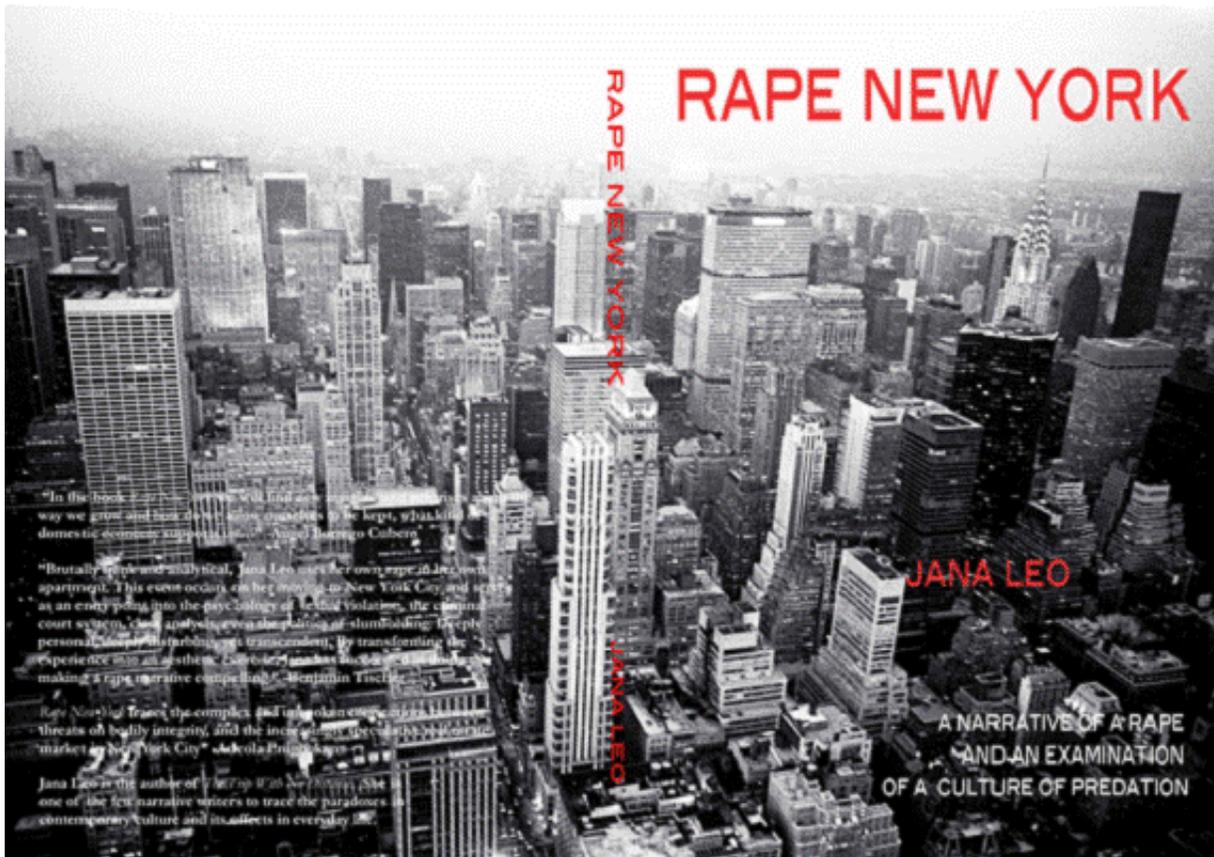
“I only remembered this childhood event after being assaulted in my apartment at the age of thirty-five in 2001. I was living in the United States in an apartment on 129th St. and Convent Avenue in Harlem, New York. And just as my father had been away when my family was harassed, I was raped while my boyfriend was away.

“The position my parents took, enforcing their right for another place to live, despite the constant harassment, shaped the way I handled my situation in Harlem, and prompted me to write this book and to start CIVIC GAPS.”

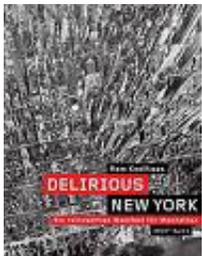
The title *Rape New York* is a reference to the Rem Koolhaas’s *Delirious New York* (the first dummy I did for *Rape New York* was a photo of New York) and also a criticism.

Delirious New York goes around the thesis of “the prison of architecture” that architecture is the prison in which one is a volunteer prisoner. And architecture is imprisoned in the discipline itself, not looking into the realities around it. I also took from him the way of looking at the city, not in a plan, horizontally but in section. Cutting a section vertically through the skyscrapers, observing how on the first floor was a gym, on the seventh a bar where one can eat oysters. How buildings were cities in themselves.





Delirious New York shows how New York works as a city, but it doesn't expose the lives of the individuals in these interiors. It is decadent. The architect is a "professional tourist", observational, precise, but always too cynical, distant and self-protected. It is the same criticism I am doing in the Lab at Columbia, with the Million Dollar Block. What is going on with these architects, why do they never touch the ground? Is it a kind of superiority of being above, is that why they build skyscrapers? Or is it fear of the reality below?



New York being as an interior, offers little public space. There are places open to the public, but they are spaces made for people to pass through. Examples of these are art galleries or supermarkets. There are few public places made solely for the people to stay.

"I went to Whole Foods on Bowery and Houston on the Lower East Side. While getting Saltine Crackers in the cookies aisle, I overheard a conversation. A couple was fighting over which cookies to buy, detailing the merits of each in absurd detail. The thing was getting tense, the woman more aggressive than the man, she was:
-I am definitely going to go for those regardless.

She was holding a package of the \$ 2.49, whole food branch oats cookies.
The man said, "Don't do that we haven't decide it yet. I think you are making a mistake."

I recognized his voice; it was George Campbell, the president of Cooper Union, the school where I taught for seven years, with his wife. I did the math of how significant this \$2.49 was to my income and to theirs.”

The Bowery starts at the Cooper Union building. This building was the confluence of Third and Four Avenues at 7th street. And when it was built, it was the borderline between those who had a recognizable life and the ones who didn't – the school was the symbolic line. Gramercy was to the north, and to the south was the Bowery, where SROs (Single Room Occupancy) at \$9 a night, winos and panhandlers defined “lowlife.” Now a homeless soup kitchen is in the same block as the New Museum, but there are no more SROs. In the next block, a big condo holds the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and the whole foods, with its two floors of groceries, beauty products and beers.

Here, in New York, rather than replacing a cheap supermarket for an expensive one, what happens is that a cheap supermarket is replaced with a “condo complex.” Key-Foods, a one-floor cheap brands food grocery store, closes down and the lot is developed into a condo. Within the condo, a two story, eat-in supermarket and a gym are presented as “public space,” This happened on Bowery and Houston. Even the garbage in *Whole Foods* is guarded.

3:AM: BookWorks and the earlier Semina books have actively engaged in notions of transgressive writing and in a critical interface between writing and art. You are described as a philosopher and an expert in architecture. Do you see your writing as transgressive or avant garde in some way. It seems that your work complicates ideas of transgression and the avant garde – and that this is what gives your writing its peculiar texture. Could you talk a little about how you react to these kinds of statement? In particular, how do you think about the space of erotic/porn tropes within transgression?

Do you see your writing as transgressive or avant garde in some way.

JL: In general I find my place in the “non place.” I can be inside the institution, at the academy, for instance, getting my PhD in philosophy or a Master in Architecture and it takes some endurance and work to achieve, but at the same time, I don't fully fit in the institution.

A friend asked me other day:

-“Why you did go through a three years in isolated suburban Princeton, with these engineering courses, and construction courses to get your masters if you were not going to practice as an architect?

-Well, I didn't know I wasn't going to practice as an architect although in a way I did. But I had to see that I could go through it. Education can be gathered and twisted, its academic programming avoided.

This is where the transgressive part came in. When I am in the middle of things that should be changed, I try to change them. I see the institution as something that can help you, giving support and discipline, two difficult things, when going into a wild world of ideas. This is where the avant garde comes in. But the institutions represses you as well.

3:AM: It seems that your work complicates ideas of transgression and the avant garde – and that this is what gives your writing its peculiar texture. Could you talk a little about how you react to these kinds of statement? In particular, how do you think about the space of erotic/porn tropes within transgression?

JL: The writing goes from complex abstractions to simple everyday facts; in this sense it is transgressive. Also, the use of the language is precise, raw, and clean of stylistics. It is basically not literature, in the sense

of the style being naked, because that literary nudity makes for a style in itself. It's a mix between wildness and sophistication; I am a brute but a very well educated one. So the transgressive and the avant-garde come together for me naturally.

3:AM: Clearly the text and its subject engages in feminist political writing. Could you say something about how you would like to articulate your relationship with feminism and authorship and perhaps say something about whether and how you think about the place of women in cultural discourse.

JL: It is hard to imagine a beautiful person talking precise ideas or a very austere person having an orgasm, but it is real. The rest is the division between Magdalena and the Virgin Mary. This is truth for all, but specially for women. A victim can write a precise essay about crime's conditions besides narrating her own story. One lost the emotional response after a rape but not the intelligence. A victim can question the basis of punishment beyond exposing the consequences of the crime on her. Feminism is complexity.

I don't know yet if writing the book has changed what I read but I have to say that the experience of the rape did change my preference for books. I went to science fiction, feminist science fiction. *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin was the first title.

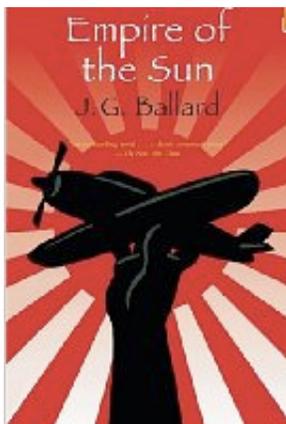
3:AM: In [my review of the book](#) I try and link your writing with the sort of absurd writing of Kafka and Sterne. How do you think of your writing in relationship to other literatures?

JL: The way I see the book is mostly the result of a construction. Not knowing the inside structure of other writing, it is hard to relate to other literatures. When I made a commitment to write (as described in an earlier answer), I wasn't creating literature, but scaffolding.

I see myself reading *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, and the *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and wanting to have a mix the atmospheres in this book, a domestic trip into the heart of darkness.

These are books that were clearly in my mind and serve as a reference. Although the obvious reference for the first part of the book (the first chapter: the non violent rape) was the first page of *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. I read it in my early twenties and the impact of how something random cuts lives stayed with me for years; I re-read that first page later while I was writing.

While working in the text, I read a lot of memoirs, some of them very interesting and powerful, but it wasn't my thing. I start looking to see the way people narrate stories that were autobiographical and still presented them as fiction. This is how I arrived to the *Empire of the Sun* by [J. G. Ballard](#). Funny enough the cover of the edition I have of the *Empire of the Sun*, is close to the design to the *Rape New York* by Book Works.



3:AM: Which writing do you now read and who do you find writing to the moment right now that you would see as essential, if anyone? Could you say something about whether what you would read now has been altered by writing your book – so that is about the effect of becoming an author yourself – and what you were reading before you wrote your novel?

JL: My relation with reading goes in waves. There are times I read 100 pages in a day and times I don't read at all. My first reading was Dostoyevsky and Kafka at age 15-17, when I switched to night time high school, and spent hours during the day reading in the library. I usually read from 11 am to 6pm. I would go "by the shelves" until I finish a shelf and moved to the next one. Then I started working on weekends, making enough money to buy the books I wanted to read. They were not in libraries at the time: Herman Hesse, Cortazar and Borges. At the same time I read all the philosophy available by contemporary authors. Then years later, when I enrolled in philosophy studies, I started with *Ulysses*, and so on.... I have my favourites, Thomas Bernhard, Jean Baudrillard, for a while I read them all until they died.

What I would read now hasn't been altered by my writing the book. At least, I don't think so. When I write, I read less. Prior to starting, I will read whatever I can find related to what I am writing without filtering genres. I don't remember what I was reading before writing the novel. By that time, at night, I listened to bits and pieces that my boyfriend, Simon, read to me. He was into Japanese short stories, (*the iceman* [Haruki Murakami](#)) intertwined with traditional Japanese stories, and eventually with cyber-science fiction.

I just started *Platform* by Houellebecq. I was writing about tourism and a friend of mine told me to read it. In general I read what falls into my hands, what friends tell me to read and what people I know are reading. I also read what my colleges write.

3:AM: Finally, coffee, wine, whiskey and hot sake is what other Semina writers use to chill! So what's your poison?

JL: Coffee when I wake up; beer before I go to bed.



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

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