



Leo Gabin Adapts 'A Crack-up at the Race Riots' to Film

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By *Ana Finel Honigman*

Harmony Korine's original 1998 book *A Crack-up at the Race Riots* was like a vivisection of his unique manic mind. I call it a "book" rather than an experimental novel or collection of essays because it has absolutely no narrative structure, overt organization or plot, yet the covers contain a captivating internal logic and flow. Between the front and back, are lists of accurate facts, observations, jokes, fractured dialogue, found photographs and suicide notes with the recipients' names left blank. In form and tone, it is closest to Tristan Tzara's dark Dadaist fiction or macabre meanderings on the internet.

Rather than try to recreate Korine's unfilmable text, the Dutch artist collective Leo Gabin are commemorating *Crack-up's* re-release by exhibiting a feature-length film inspired by the text at Berlin's Peres Projects. Whereas *Crack-up* was clearly the product of Korine's singular sensibility, Leo Gabin claim it as their own by creating an entirely anonymous piece. Their film consists exclusively of appropriated and manipulated online footage interlaced with audio transcripts from Korine's book. These recordings were made by the computer's text-to-speech function to retain the work's disembodied format. The film's unnerving score is partially unique but mostly remixed. Through these tweaks, Leo Gabin retain and develop *Crack-up's* hypnotic sense of anarchy, impending chaos and weird wonder. Here they explain how and why.



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Peres Projects



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Ana Finel Honigman: Why produce the show now?

Leo Gabin: We remember trying to order the book somewhere around 2003 but it wasn't available anymore back then. When we got to know Harmony in 2010 we got our hands on an original copy (it wasn't reissued back then). While reading it we immediately thought his writing would fit with the way we make videos and we came up with the idea to turn the book into a film. Harmony was into this idea and gave his blessing. It's like the most unfilmable book ever, at least in a conventional way, but we felt it would really work with our approach to video.

AFH: Was Korine listening to music when writing *Crack-up*? If so, how close was it to what you've included as the film's score?

LG: If he listened to music while writing we don't know, could well be, but we didn't talk about that. We do share a similar taste in music though. But the music we've chosen and made is what we felt fitting for each scene and helps set the atmosphere of the film. Sound plays a very important role, while the film is rather fragmented, the score keeps it coherent.



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AFH: What does Florida [the setting of Korine's book] mean to you? When I think of Florida, I have the stereotypical associations with retirement and the emptiness that Elizabeth Wurtzel describes in her memoirs. Then again, it's still the state that tips elections, so it seems like a slightly sinister place that looks like it's asleep but snaps awake at critical moments.

LG: Yeah, Florida is pretty badass and due to being hit so hard by the economic collapse and real estate crash we associate it with empty malls, parking lots, poverty, unemployment... against a backdrop of sun, beaches and palm trees. It's hard to explain, but it contains this kind of poetic sadness.

AFH: What does America mean to you?

LG: Growing up with a lot of American influences we always had a fascination for American culture. But TV and music showed a filtered version. The internet suddenly opened a new window on the culture, showing a less polished version. Through self-shot imagery you get a more clear view on how everyday people are influenced by it, which is even more exciting to watch. Being European we see a lot of similarities, but the small differences are very interesting, both socially and aesthetically. We always love being in America and try to stay there a couple of months per year.



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AFH: Some of the material that you appropriate carries its own loaded history. There are clips with instantly recognizable associated controversies, such as the University of Minnesota blackface video. Are these references part of your underlying narrative, for want of a better word, or are you hoping that viewers can overlook these associations and experience the images afresh?

LG: Most of the time we tend to select videos that haven't been viewed much or without specific loaded connotation. This way the viewer can indeed look at them afresh and if they want, make their own associations. But with the reference to Al Jolson in the novel, this specific video of the college girls was ideal to incorporate and we think it works either way, knowing the video or not.

AFH: Did you search for images and clips that directly corresponded with the descriptions in *Crack-up*, such as a cashier with tattooed knuckles and a bloodied sweatshirt? Or were you aiming to evoke the general mood of Korine's text?

LG: The mood the book evokes was what we wanted to capture in the film. The book goes against all literary conventions, lacking linear narrative, plot and character developments, which leaves more room for imagination and interpretation. But when using transcripts it was important to us that these were literally as in the book.

AFH: What do you know about the people posting the online material that you appropriate?

LG: We know nothing or not much. There are a lot of single videos online, posted with a username that doesn't reveal anything about the author, but sometimes you can get to know a lot. Like this girl that does the "what's on my iPhone video". She has this YouTube channel where she has been posting videos since 2007. She must have been 12 or 13 back then, so you can literally see her grow up online. Besides all the beauty and tutorial videos she also posts videos of her vacations, what she got for Christmas, etc. There are a couple of people like her who we keep following.



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