Kunsthalle Wien

#Foil Booklet

Kidnappers

Museumsquartier

GARETH LONG
KIDNAPPERS FOIL
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Foil

Foreword to
Kidnappers Foil

Nicolaus Schafhausen

Kunsthalle Wien is exceedingly proud to present Gareth Long's first solo exhibition in Austria, *Kidnapper's Foil*. In 2013, Long was invited to Vienna to be Kunsthalle Wien's first curator-in-residence. While it is for his practice as an artist that Long is known – particularly in North America, where he has exhibited frequently for a number of years – the title 'curator' was in many ways apt. This is because his multi-faceted work, which to-date has included video, sculpture, drawing, and numerous discussion and writing-based projects and book-works, has often reveled in moments of – as he puts it – 'muddiness', where definitions such as 'artist/curator' and 'author/collaborator' are explored, discarded or put to the test.

Kidnappers Foil is no exception. The outcome of his residency, it puts the curatorial activities of archiving, selecting, editing and framing at its center and questions established notions of originality. The work is comprised of an extraordinary set of 15 versions of the same film, *The Kidnappers Foil*, made by a little-known American filmmaker called Melton Barker. The films were shot over five decades, starting in the 1930s, in small towns across the United States, using local children as actors. They were presented in one-off public screenings in local cinemas to audiences mostly comprised of the actors themselves, their families, and friends. It is thought that nearly 300 versions were made, but almost all of the films have since been lost. Long has assembled those remaining for the first time, and presents them in a special, multi-part, synchronized installation that brings the endless repetitions and variations of Barker's unique, astonishing and almost fanatical project to the fore.

Repetition is an interest that Long has explored in a number of projects over many years, both as a subject and as a generative method in the production of his work. His ongoing *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Invented Desk for Copying* (2007 – ongoing), for example, is a series of two-person desks for copying taken from Gustave Flaubert's last novel. Working with different fabricators and co-designers, the artist has made 18 iterations to date. Despite the repetition of a basic two-person recess, each varies greatly in style, from a simple folding table to an elegant wood and metal desk inspired by French designer Jean Prouvé. Long activates the desks by working with fellow artist Derek Sullivan to illustrate Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas,* copying images found on the internet. The activity of copying is similarly central to Long's earlier work

Don Quixote (2006). The work consists of a book generated by processing the audio book version of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* through speech recognition software. After training the software to recognize the voice of the narrator of the audio book, the recording was played to the computer and the resulting text was reformatted to once again be a book. Long's version of the book is far from a perfect 'copy'. Misheard words and errors that have occurred in the transference between books have been retained, resulting in a compromised object that sits somewhere between repetition and difference.

In an incisive and rigorous essay for this publication, critic Erika Balsom offers further insight: "Like Barker before him, Long fully inhabits the realm of iteration, but puts repetition in the service of the production of difference: the artwork *Kidnappers Foil* possesses a significance quite other than Barker's films of the same name, a significance generated through the acts of assembly and reframing. Exhibited together in a context that is historically, institutionally, and geographically distant from those for which they were intended, these films no longer offer the pleasures of recognition they once did to their first audiences. Rather, Long takes a parallax view on this strange episode of film history, finding in it very contemporary questions of serial repetition and amateur participation."

On behalf of Kunsthalle Wien, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to those that have had a hand in making this important project happen: Caroline Frick – the expert on Melton Barker and *The Kidnappers Foil* – who, with the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, have generously provided Gareth Long and Kunsthalle Wien with the films. Without her support and enthusiasm, the exhibition would not have been possible. Thanks also to Erika Balsom for her insightful essay on the project.

The Kidnappers Foil
Transcript of Dialogue

Children singing and playing London Bridge

KIDNAPPER 1: Look, that's Betty Davis over there giving that party. Get her and her old man will pay big dough for her.

KIDNAPPER 2: Ok, let's wait around after the party and catch her.

KIDNAPPER 1: C'mon, let's hide.

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GIRL 1: We sure enjoyed the show, Jean!

JEAN DAVIS: Thanks, see you later.

ALL GIRLS: Bye!

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KIDNAPPER 1: Look out for Betty Davis, we gotta watch her.

KIDNAPPER 2: Ok, you grab her and I'll get the car started.

BETTY DAVIS: Help, Help!

JEAN DAVIS: Betty Davis, my little sister, has been kidnapped. Oh, what shall I do? Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad!

DAD: What's the matter Jean, what's wrong?

JEAN DAVIS: Betty's been kidnapped!

DAD: Kidnapped?!

JEAN DAVIS: Yes, she was standing right over there. A man came out and put her in the car and drove off. She was screaming for help.

DAD: What did they look like?

JEAN DAVIS: I don't know. I didn't see his face.

DAD: C'mon, let's call the police.

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BOY 1: Look, there's a bunch of the gang.

BOY 2: What's up?

BOY 3: I don't know, let's go and see.

BOYS 1-3: Hi gang.

OTHER BOYS: Hi, boys! Sit down.

BUTCH: Listen to this gang, Betty Davis has been kidnapped.

BOY 1: Betty Davis, well I know her.

BOY 2: So do I. Well, what's it say, Butch?

BUTCH: It says she was kidnapped yesterday afternoon after her birthday party. And her father's offered a ten thousand dollar reward for any information leading to the capture of the kidnappers.

BOY 3: Ten thousand dollars? Gee whiz, that's a lot of dough.

BOY 4: Boy, I say it is.

BOY 5: What could we do with a thousand dollars?

BOY 1: What could we do with it? We could have a swell party with presents and everything.

BOY 2: I say we could.

BOY 3: I'll tell you what we'll do, gang. We'll find those kids and maybe will get the thousand bucks.

BOY 4: That's a swell idea.

YOUNG 1: May I go too?

BUTCH: Naw, you're too little you might get hurt. Come on, gang.

YOUNG 1: I'm big enough. I'll show them, I'll get my gang and get those kidnappers too!

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YOUNG 1: We are going to look for the kidnappers that have Betty Davis.

YOUNG 2: But what if they get us too?

YOUNG 3: Oh, they won't hurt us, I'm not afraid.

YOUNG 4: Well, why don't we go look for them?

YOUNG 1: Let's look on the other side of town.

YOUNG 2: Come on, let's get going!

***

GIRL 1: Listen girls, have you heard the news?

GIRL 2: What is it?

GIRL 1: Betty Davis has been kidnapped.

ALL GIRLS: Kidnapped!?

GIRL 3: Gee, I sure would hate to be in her place.

GIRL 4: I wonder what they'll do to her.

GIRL 1: I don't know, but her dad's offering a ten thousand dollar reward.

GIRL 1: Here comes Butch and the gang. I wonder where they are going.

GIRL 2: Hi Butch, where you fellas going?

BUTCH: We're going after the kidnappers who took Betty Davis.

GIRL 1: Oh boy, can we go too?

BOY 1: Nah, you'd probably crumb everything.

GIRL 2: Oh, is that so?

BOY 2: Yeah, we don't want any sissies in this gang.

GIRL 3: How you gonna track them kidnappers anyway?

BOY 3: Yeah we'll show you about that if we find them.

GIRL 4: Well, if you did find them, all you'd do is run. And we can run as fast as you can.

BOY 4: Says you smarty.

GIRL 2: Oh come on, please let us go.

GIRL 3: That's what I say. We never have any fun.

BUTCH: Well, what do you say gang, should we let them go?

BOY 1: I guess so, if they stay out of the way.

BOY 2: Let's get going.

***

YOUNG 1: Gee, I'm tired and hungry. I could eat almost anything.

YOUNG 2: I bet Betty's hungry too.

YOUNG 3: I bet those kidnappers won't feed her a thing.

YOUNG 4: I wouldn't cry if they kidnapped me.

YOUNG 1: I bet you wouldn't.

YOUNG 2: I wish we could find Betty and get ten thousand dollars.

YOUNG 3: If I had a ten thousand dollars I'd buy a bicycle.

YOUNG 4: If I had ten thousand dollars I'd buy a thousand worms.

YOUNG 1: Get them, and you'll get the stomach aches too.

***

GIRL 1: What are you going to do with your part of the reward money if you get it?

GIRL 2: I'm going to take my part and go to college and learn my ABCs.

GIRL 3: I'm going to take my money that I get and buy me some new clothes.

GIRL 4: We better wait until we find the kidnappers before we start spending the reward money.

GIRL 2: We've been looking three days and we haven't found them yet.

GIRL 3: Let's not give up gang, we may find them.

***

BETTY DAVIS: Help!

KIDNAPPER 1: Stop your crying, nobody can hear you around here.

BETTY DAVIS: You just wait, they will get you for this.

***

GIRL 1: Listen gang. What was that?

GIRL 2: That sounded like someone screaming to me.

GIRL 3: It's coming from that old cabin over there.

GIRL 4: I bet that's her gang, c'mon lets go.

GIRL 2: I'm scared; I don't believe I'd want to go.

BOY 1: I thought you girls would be trouble if you came along.

BOY 2: Yeah, just a bunch of sissies.

BOY 3: Well, you're not so brave yourself smarty.

BUTCH: Well, there's nothing sissy about us, c'mon gang.

The kidnappers have fallen asleep. The gang of children sneaks in, removing Betty's bonds and restrain the kidnappers.

BUTCH: Go gang go!

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JEAN DAVIS: It's Betty! It's Betty! It's Betty!

DAD: My Betty, safe at last.

DAD: Gang, the police just phoned and said that you captured the kidnappers and deserve the reward.

BETTY DAVIS: And to show my appreciation, I'm going to give a party for the entire gang tomorrow afternoon.

YOUNG 1: Ahh gee, we're too late they already found her.

YOUNG 2: We are late for everything.

YOUNG 3: We never have any luck.

YOUNG 4: Maybe we'll get some of that money.

YOUNG 2: Maybe we'll be invited to the party anyway.

YOUNG 1: Go up there and see.

DAD: Come on in gang, and get the money.

The End.

***The Kidnappers Foil* Films in the Exhibition:**
Childress, Texas, c. 1936; Grand Island, Nebraska, 1938; San Marcos, Texas, 1943; Darlington, South Carolina, c. 1946; Childress, Texas, 1948; San Saba, Texas, 1948; Allentown, Pennsylvania, c. 1948; Reidsville, North Carolina, 1948; Bristol, Tennessee, 1949; Elizabethton, Tennessee, 1949; Shawnee, Oklahoma, 1940s; Memphis, Tennessee, 1949; Robinson, Illinois, c. 1950; Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1951; Pine Bluff Arizona, 1952

Repeat Performance:
Kidnappers Foil
(1936–1952/2014)

Erika Balsom

From the late 1930s to the 1970s, Melton Barker travelled across the United States making the same film in town after town, using local children as actors. Entitled *The Kidnappers Foil*,[1] its narrative was simple: a girl is abducted, the children band together to find her, and all celebrate her safe return with a party that includes song-and-dance numbers. Shortly after shooting, Barker would exhibit the film for the townspeople, offering them a unique opportunity to see themselves inhabiting a fictional world onscreen, however skeletal it was. To these children-turned-actors-turned-spectators and their parents, *The Kidnappers Foil* was a film like no other. It collapsed the distinction between cast and audience, breaking down the divide between the immaterial virtuality of the silver screen and the located actuality of small-town life. Though fiction, the film's real fascination resided in the documentary value that lurked within it, in the pleasures of recognition generated by the camera's automatic registration of a trace of physical reality. This aspect of the moving image is commonly valued, but rarely in professional cinema has the proximity between sign and referent been exploited with the same tenacity that one finds in *The Kidnappers Foil*. Whereas Hollywood films aimed for a universal form of address that would transcend regional specificity, Barker's financial success depended on precisely the opposite gesture – on producing a film tailor-made for just one audience. In this regard, his practice finds unlikely kinship in site-specific works of experimental cinema, such as Morgan Fisher's *Screening Room* (1968) and William Raban's *2'45"* (1973–), films which document their respective sites of exhibition and thus must be remade each time they are shown.

All of these attributes suggest that *The Kidnappers Foil* courts singularity with especial vigor, but this emphasis is offset by the fact that Barker produced hundreds of versions[2] of the film throughout his itinerant travels. It is only through archivist and historian Caroline Frick's tireless efforts to assemble these dispersed and neglected films that it becomes possible to appreciate

The Kidnappers Foil for what it was all along: an unusual work of seriality. Taken together as they never would have been in their own time, Barker's extant productions appear as so many iterations of a reusable template. Has a single screenplay ever been produced more often than this? Unlike the scripts of live theatre, film scripts tend to exhaust their use value after a single realization, or two at best. Directors as diverse as Alfred Hitchcock and Michael Haneke have remade their own films, but none comes close to Barker's ceaseless return to his rather banal scenario, something that was no doubt a matter of commercial expediency. *The Kidnappers Foil* thus stages in a unique manner the tension between the singular and the reproducible that lies at the heart of the cinema itself: it trades on the production of an indexical trace of a particular time and place, yet it is also deeply grounded in an economy of the copy in which repetition has profound ties to the commodity form. But Barker also inverts the way that the original/copy opposition normally plays out in the cinema. Most often, a screenplay is made only once, but then the finished film enters widespread circulation through the production of numerous copies; instead, here it is the screenplay that generates multiplicity, while the finished film remains bound to a single location, namely its site of production.

In re-presenting fifteen of Barker's extant films as a multi-projection artwork, Gareth Long extends this interrogation of the reproducible and the singular while adding a new layer of complexity. The installation extends the artist's longstanding concern with iteration, amateurism, and the re-telling of narratives, exemplified by his Flaubert-related works, *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Invented Desk for Copying* (2007 – ongoing) and *The Illustrated Dictionary of Received Ideas* (2009 – ongoing). But with *Kidnappers Foil*, Long leaves behind nineteenth-century literature to delve for the first time into the history of cinema, an institution with its own unique relationship to the copy. Like Barker before him, Long fully inhabits the realm of iteration, but puts repetition in the service of the production of difference: the artwork *Kidnappers Foil* possesses a significance quite other than Barker's films of the same name, a significance generated through the acts of assembly and reframing. Exhibited together in a context that is historically, institutionally, and geographically distant from those for which they were intended, these films no longer offer the pleasures of recognition they once did to their first audiences. Rather, Long takes a parallax

1. Though the title cards of Barker's films do display variation in their rendering of this title, this essay will refer to these films together as *The Kidnappers Foil*. Long, meanwhile, has chosen the title of *Kidnappers Foil* for his engagement with these works.

2. Caroline Frick has compiled a list of of almost 300 known versions available at http://www.meltonbarker.org/full-list/

view on this strange episode of film history, finding in it very contemporary questions of serial repetition and amateur participation.

Seriality occupies a central place in twentieth-century art history, perhaps most prominently as the parameters of painting and sculpture were rethought in relation to the automation of industrial production. Film, of course, had a very different relationship to the world of machines than these older mediums: whereas they were tasked with responding to technological change, film *was* technological change. As such, seriality was not a historically foreign attribute with which film had to grapple, as it was for painting and sculpture, but rather something that informed the material basis of the medium and which was instrumental to the way it circulated as a mass art. More than an overt aesthetic or conceptual strategy, serial repetition often figures in the history of film as a fundamental and implicit part of the process of production and distribution. The *défilement* of the still photograms on the filmstrip, for instance, is a form of serial succession, as repetitions marked by slight differences are what enable film to produce its illusion of movement. Meanwhile, the film print itself is conventionally a serial object, mass produced for mass distribution.

The early cinema took full advantage of these features of the new medium. Around the turn of the century, the duplication and remaking of popular films were exceedingly common practices pursued in an attempt to maximize revenues. Motion pictures were not covered by copyright until 1909, before which time unauthorized copying was a prevalent business practice. Between 1895 and 1900, for instance, at least ten different versions of *L'Arroseur arrosé* – a brief comedy in which a gardener gets sprayed with his own hose – were in circulation in Europe and North America.[3] The pre-classical cinema thrived off of a promiscuous culture of reproduction, but it was one that was to be short lived. Before long, the formalization of the film industry and the enactment of copyright legislation would put an end to such practices and prepare the way for conceiving of the history of narrative cinema as a succession of autonomous texts, each of which would (or at least should) be different from one another, and the originality of which would be protected by law. Though the repetitions of mechanical reproduction would remain absolutely central to film's ability to function as an industry and a commodity, the parameters of permissible copying would be sharply defined.

Despite this partial suppression of reproducibility, the production of multiple versions spurred by commercial motivations never went away entirely, but persisted in ways that would not disturb intellectual property concerns. Prior to the 1917 Revolution, many Russian films were produced in two versions: one with a tragic ending

for the domestic audience and the other with a happy ending for export. In the early sound era, one finds multiple language versions such as Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), which was produced in German and French, with only the actor Rudolf Klein-Rogge as the mute Mabuse remaining constant between the two. The Shanghai industry of the early 1930s produced sound films in Mandarin alongside silent versions for distribution to non-Mandarin-speaking parts of China. Hollywood loves its remakes and its sequels. But perhaps the biggest site of survival for the kind of repetition that so marked early cinema is to be found in the thinly-disguised iterations that lie at the foundation of the moneymaking regime of dominant cinema: the rules of genre. Again and again, the same narratives are repeated with slight variations; though this might lead to boredom for some, for others recognizing the dynamics of these iterations constitutes precisely the pleasure of such forms of cinema. To see one western is fine, but to see twenty is sublime.

The Kidnappers Foil occupies a unique position in relation to this history. In foregoing the pretense of novelty central to genre filmmaking and instead repeating precisely the same scenario again and again, Barker's films might be said to lay bare the close ties between repetition and the financially driven industrial logic of much narrative cinema. As an emanation of the system of industrial production, seriality is profoundly tied to the commodity form and might be understood as violent imposition of sameness that liquidates historicity and authenticity. This is certainly what Theodor W. Adorno had in mind when he argued that repetition lies at the heart of the culture industries. Drawn to seriality out of economic concerns, Barker's work would fall firmly in line with this claim. But viewed as an installation, *Kidnappers Foil* stages another approach to repetition, one that acknowledges its relationship to the commodity form whilst also subverting the latter's homogenizing mechanism. Here, iteration proffers difference rather than sameness, as the copy is transformed into a generative site of singularity. Placed side by side, what emerges from *The Kidnappers Foil* films is the extent to which each one is distinct from the next, despite their obvious commonalities.

Barker's work also unsettles teleological narratives of film history, as he somewhat anachronistically inhabits a pre-classical economy of copying in a later period, by which time such blatant repetitions were either avoided or at least had begun to cloak themselves in the guise of originality. His mode of production, too, is reminiscent of early cinema: a lone travelling showman operating far outside the vertical integration of the industry. In this regard, the extent to which these films recall the representational system of pre-classical cinema in

their schematic narrative and mode of address is especially striking. Despite gestures towards narrative integration and continuity editing, *The Kidnappers Foil* relies on archetypes and on frontal, exhibitionist performances typical of what Tom Gunning has termed the "cinema of attractions," which held sway until roughly 1907.[4] Barker's narrative is simply an empty framework used to make space for the presentational force of the children's on-camera appearances. One finds no interiority, no voyeuristic pleasure, no psychologization: just a girl kidnapped in order to facilitate the performances that result.

Gunning has famously claimed that the cinema of attractions never died, but simply went underground, persisting in particular currents of experimental cinema as "a Coney Island of the avant-garde."[5] Long's *Kidnappers Foil* suggests that the same might be true of the economy of repetition that characterized pre-classical cinema: driven out of the mainstream, the love of the copy endures in Barker's unusual practice before resurfacing within a certain vein of recent artists' cinema. The experimental film tradition is replete with extensive engagements with serial repetition, but these tend to recuperate the production of copies within a single authorial agency, forego narrative, and organize repetition sequentially. Here, one might think of works like Andy Warhol's *Kiss* (1963), Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1970), or, to take a more recent example, James Benning's masterful examinations of the natural world in serial long-take works such as *Ten Skies* (2004) and *Thirteen Lakes* (2004). In recent gallery-based moving image practices, one finds an embrace of the copy that is both much more closely related to Barker's and which recalls the contaminated and contested authorships of the pre-classical period. Since the 1990s, many artists have turned to the re-use of footage, often from recognizable sources of narrative cinema, and the remaking of existing narrative films, often with amateur participants. In both instances, one finds a rejection of the autonomy of the filmic text in favour of an acknowledgement of a parasitical dependence on an iterative chain. Long's engagement with *The Kidnappers Foil* braids together these two concerns: he engages in an excavation of the filmic archive very much in line with the explosion of recent found-footage practices, while doing so with materials that raise questions of authorship, the remake, and the amateur.

The amateurs involved in *The Kidnappers Foil* are predominantly children. A few adults show up in the roles of concerned parents and scheming kidnappers – indeed, Barker often made a cameo as the latter – but the overwhelming majority of screen time is given over to group shots of the "local gang," specified in the credits as the collective star of the film. Here once more, Barker shores up his connection to the pre-classical era, carrying forward a key genre from the first years of the medium: the local film. As Vanessa Toulmin has noted, short titles documenting particular events or locations in a specific town or region were "one of the most important and commercially lucrative types of non-fiction film produced in the early 1900s," but gradually fell out of fashion around the time of the First World War.[6] These films often privileged large groups of people, documenting events such as children's parades or workers leaving the factory gates. Without a doubt, the 1923 introduction of 16mm as an amateur gauge significantly diminished the need for professionals to produce local films, and the genre was gradually usurped by the fledging domain of home movies. But during their heyday, such films were an important part of cinematic exhibition and often featured the kind of group shots seen in *The Kidnappers Foil*. The children of Barker's films are not the inchoate witnesses of *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) or *Germany Year Zero* (1948), works that established a paradigm for the use of nonprofessional child actors that is carried forward in film history through Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967) and into the present in Panahi's *The Mirror* (1997) or Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *The Son* (2002). But nor are they child stars so popular during the era in which Barker began producing his films: Jackie Cooper, Shirley Temple, Jane Withers. Though Barker's crediting of the "local gang" undoubtedly references the immensely popular "Our Gang" series produced by Hal Roach Studios and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer between 1922 and 1944, the children of *The Kidnappers Foil* are above all reminiscent of the anonymous crowds of the cinema's earliest years and, as such, recall that era's focus on the contingencies of physical reality made visible and reproducible on film.

As much as *The Kidnappers Foil* looks back to the pre-classical era, so too does it resonate with our contemporary moment, something drawn out

3. For an exploration of this case, see: Jane Gaines, "Early Cinema's Heyday of Copying: The Too Many Copies of *L'Arroseur arrosé* (*The Waterer Watered*)," *Cultural Studies* 20, nos. 2–3 (2006): 227–244.

4. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 6, no. 2 (1986): 63–70.

5. Ibid., 70.

6. Vanessa Toulmin, "'Local Films for Local People': Travelling Showmen and the Commissioning of Local Films in Great Britain, 1900–1902," *Film History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 118.

by its reframing as *Kidnappers Foil*. The role of the nonprofessional image producer in digital culture looms large over Long's installation. When the Oxford English Dictionary proclaimed "selfie" its word of the year in 2013, it had less to do with naming a new genre of image as it did with describing the particular conjunction of an old genre with new forms of circulation. The production of images of the self is, of course, a centuries-old practice – though one whose meeting has shifted historically in line with changes in technology and in conceptions of the individual. In some sense, the ubiquity of the selfie precipitates a return to a use-value of the self-portrait associated with painting: the desire is not so much to see oneself represented (for twentieth century technologies transformed this into a rather banal experience), but to circulate an image of the self to and for others. In the seventeenth-century portrait, for example, portraiture was tied to power and nobility, playing an important role in legitimizing its subject: it not only reflected the established authority and wealth of a given individual but actively participated in furthering it through the act of circulation. Certainly, the circulation of the versions of *The Kidnappers Foil* was limited. But these portraits may nonetheless be understood as offering their participants the allure not simply of a moving image of the self, but a moving image of the self produced for a public. Unlike the handheld snapshots of photography, the giganticism of cinematic projection would have catapulted these images into the realm of the collective and the extraordinary. Moreover, this pleasure of seeing oneself bigger than life would be redoubled by the experience of seeing oneself become a part of the fiction, so different from life.

But despite chiming with contemporary discourses of the selfie, *The Kidnappers Foil* films are in fact not self-portraits whatsoever but rather images produced by a professional trying to make a living. In this regard, perhaps their closest media archaeological precursor is that of the photographic studio in which one would dress up in costume to pose for a portrait. Presented today, these films assert the need of taking a long view of the role of amateur participation in moving image production, something which has become ubiquitous in recent years following the democratization of the means of production through the increased availability of prosumer software. In the work of many artists who have turned to the remaking and recycling of the products of Hollywood cinema over the last twenty years, one encounters the implicit assumption that amateur participation is in large part a product of the technological advances of the 1990s. *Kidnappers Foil*, by contrast, makes evident the extent to which today's unprecedented interpenetration of amateur and professional media production has a substantial history, albeit one that has too often been overlooked. Moreover, as a rebuttal to the spuriously romantic view of participation that characterized a good deal of artistic discourse and practice from the 1990s onwards, *Kidnappers Foil* highlights the thoroughly transactional nature of amateur participation. In a simple *quid pro quo*, the children involved paid Barker in order to take part in the spectacle, sometimes for acting lessons, but at the very least for theatre admission. Their labour is more than free, but in return they see themselves onscreen. Amidst all of the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the way that participatory media offers the possibility of disrupting hegemonic structures of power, Barker's films underline the fact that participation tends to come at a price. For the children of *The Kidnappers Foil*, this price was explicitly monetary; today, it would more likely involve relinquishing the protection of one's privacy and agreeing to work as an unpaid content provider in order to gain access to "free" online services.

The Kidnappers Foil also reminds us that amateur media production is often not purely so. Especially today, amateurs frequently have some level of involvement with professionalized media spheres. For example, the fan producing remix videos of popular television and film engages at multiple points with formalized media industries. The footage he or she uses is an industrial product, while in all likelihood the distribution channel adopted – YouTube, for instance – is owned by a major conglomerate. In some cases – the *Star Wars* franchise is especially notable in this respect – rights holders have cannibalized amateur activities as a part of their own twenty-first-century promotional strategies. *The Kidnappers Foil* already prefigured this situation so many decades ago: amateurs today have tremendous latitude to participate in image production, but in so doing they often relinquish something of what it means to be an amateur – provided that one understands this as doing something for the love or fun of it, existing outside the domain of industry, and being free of commercial exploitation. Unlike the home movie, for which the amateur serves as creator and exhibitor and which remains in a distinct position of alterity vis-à-vis formalized media industries, *The Kidnappers Foil* shares with much digital amateur production a hybrid identity. These are sites at which nonprofessional participation is captured by the media apparatus, all under the pretense of "empowering" the individual while in fact exploiting him or her for economic gain.

And yet it must also be acknowledged that *The Kidnappers Foil* films are ultimately not reducible to the profit motives that led to their production. Barker's many versions constitute not only a conceptually fascinating experiment with site-specific cinema and serial form, but also

a rich set of documents of small-town life in mid-century America. In reframing these films within a contemporary art context, Long draws attention to how they complicate engrained binaries of reproducibility and singularity, documentary and fiction, and amateur and professional. At once looking back to the pre-classical era, askance to the avant-garde, and ahead to the digital glare of our present, Long transforms *The Kidnappers Foil* into an untimely artifact – one that shows how productive it can be when the "other cinemas" of non-industrial film intersect with what Raymond Bellour has termed the "other cinema" of contemporary art.

Erika Balsom is a lecturer in Film Studies and in Liberal Arts at King's College London. Her research is broadly concerned with the intersection of moving image art and the transformations of cinema after digitization. Her monograph, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, confronts the changing contours of what we call "cinema" after digitization through an examination of uses of the moving image and references to film history in art since 1990.

Gareth Long (b.1979, Toronto) currently lives and works in London. He holds a BA in Visual Studies and Classical Civilizations from the University of Toronto and an MFA from Yale University. His work has been shown at institutions such as MoMA PS1, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Denver; The Power Plant, Toronto; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal; Artists Space, New York; Spike Island, Bristol; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; and Witte de With, Rotterdam

Program

Talk

Erika Balsom and Gareth Long: *Kidnappers Foil*
Fri November 14, 6 pm

Curator's Tour

with Gareth Long
Tue November 18, 5 pm

Sunday Kidnappings

Guided tours in German
Every Sunday, 4 pm
Get an in depth insight into Melton Barkers world
and discuss with our education team the concept of
„15 minutes of fame" now and then.

Colophon

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Director: Nicolaus Schafhausen
CFO: Ursula Hühnel-Benischek

Gareth Long. Kidnappers Foil
14/11 2014 – 18/1 2015

Exhibition

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Exhibition Booklet

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Information

For more information on the program, please visit:

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#Foil

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