Strangers with Candy
The Highway Safety Foundation and The Child Molester (1964)

"The issue surrounding The Child Molester have become only more ambiguous: despite its cheesy retro aesthetics, it allows no room for nostalgic reflection on how far attitudes have progressed or how much things have changed."

The Highway Safety Foundation is a name familiar to cult film fans with a taste for gore and kitsch, as well as to those interested in the history of ephemeral film cultures. The company's notorious driver education films from the 1950s and 1960s provide an insight into an America long since gone, combining the cliché baby-boomer suburbia of white picket fences and domestic consumerism with the incorporation of actual vehicle accident footage filmed and around Mansfield, Ohio. Documentary filmmaker Bret Wood has observed that "these films offer a picture-perfect view of small-town life in Ohio, then punch a hole in the centre of it." This contradiction is intrinsic to all Highway Safety Foundation films, but it is most apparent in their non-road safety movies such as the 1964 productions Camera Surveillance and The Child Molester. While the latter more directly engages with the real-life double-homicide in 1962 of two young girls, Jean Burtoch and Connie Hurrell, it is Camera Surveillance and the events surrounding its production that have most recently come to public attention through its incorporation into celebrated American artist William E. Jones's experimental films Mansfield 1962 (2006) and Tearoom (1962/2007), the latter shown at the prestigious Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 2008. Jones's Highway Safety Foundation-based works are powerful documents in their own right and present eye-opening insight into the historical treatment of homosexuality in small-town America during this time. However, it is the relationship between The Child Molester and Burtoch and Hurrell (whose bodies are shown in graphic detail at the end of the film) that is the primary site of interest in this article.

Only hours after the girls' bodies were found on a summer afternoon in Mansfield on Saturday 23 June 1962, 18-year-old local Jerrel Ray Howell was arrested. When interviewed, he stated: "You guys don't know nothin', you ought to take a look at the men's room in Central Park on the square, that's where I first had oral sex with a man." Desperate for a way to convince the public that they were responding to the horrific attempted sexual assault and murder of the two young girls, Howell's information led the Mansfield Police (with the help of the Highway Safety Foundation) to set up cameras behind a two-way mirror in a public toilet in Central Park, where they recorded anonymous sexual activity that was to become the primary piece of evidence to convict a large number of local Mansfield men of "sex perversion." It is this footage that — almost 50 years later — Jones incorporated into his Highway Safety Foundation-based works.

The first incarnation of Jones's Tearoom was Mansfield 1962 (2006). A silent 9-minute short, Jones adapted it from the Highway Safety Foundation's police training video Camera Surveillance that he found online. Camera Surveillance included actual footage shot by police in Mansfield, Ohio, in 1962 of anonymous homosexual encounters in the public toilets underneath Mansfield's Central Park. Jones has described Camera Surveillance as "illiterate and hateful text as I have ever heard committed to film," and it was upon sourcing the original footage that the 56-minute long Tearoom originated. "Not so much made as reclaimed" says Jim Supanik, "Tearoom has been referred to by Jones himself as a 'found object'." As Jones explains on his website, "the unedited scenes of ordinary men of various races and classes meeting to have sex were so powerful that the director decided to present the footage with a minimum of intervention. Tearoom is a radical example of film presented 'as found' for the purpose of circulating historical images that have otherwise been suppressed." Jones had already established himself as an artist intrigued by historical representations of homosexuality, as demonstrated in earlier work such as the 19-minute
short The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography (1998). The Mansfield footage held particular personal interest for Jones: born in the same year that the teashop bust footage was recorded, he grew up in the nearby town of Massillon, Ohio. Echoing the return-of-the-repressed horror tropes that would come to the fore in The Child Molester, for Jones, "the footage was evidence of everything beneath the surface of his own Midwestern reality."

But no artist of Jones's calibre has yet reclaimed The Child Molester, nor has it received the same kind of retrospective analysis of the teashop bust footage outside of its direct relationship to the creation of that footage. The Child Molester is not unique amongst Highway Safety Foundation films for showing graphic images of dead or injured bodies, but in no other context are those scenarios the result of a topic that is still so morally charged today as child sexual abuse. Contemporary discourse about the sensitive and controversial subject of child sexual abuse is still riddled with contradictions, confusion, and fear, and it is in this spirit that The Child Molester can be examined as a historical document haunted not only by its initial historical context, but by the ghosts that remain kinking in its shadows almost 50 years later.

The Highway Safety Foundation: A Brief History

To understand how The Child Molester relates to Teashop and Camera Surveillance, it is necessary to briefly provide an outline of the company that produced the films, and that facilitated the filming of the original teashop bust footage. With many of their films available in the public domain on websites such as archive.org and Brett Wood's exhaustive 2003 documentary Hell's Highway: The True Story of the Highway Safety Foundation, the notoriety of these films has straddled the line between cult ephemera and urban legend. Wood explained that it was the mythological status of these films that first sparked his interest in the Highway Safety Foundation: "I didn't believe schools would actually show films of car accident victims to their students. When I finally found copies of the films, and saw that they were real, I became curious to know who made the films, and the process by which they were made."

Two key archivists involved in the Hell's Highway project — Mike Vraney from Something Weird films and renowned educational/industrial film archivist Richard Prelinger — both mention this same mythological aura of the Highway Safety Foundation films in Wood's documentary. Aside from its inclusion of explicit accident scene material showing real victims (and corpses), Wood identifies the features that made the Highway Safety Foundation's productions so unique: these included features crucial to exploitation cinema, such as their "small town authenticity, the churny filmmaking techniques, and the unflinching view of human suffering that was shocking but never exploited." For Wood, Highway Safety Foundation films are "grim, gruesome, even morbid, but they are genuine and always earnest in their intentions."

The Highway Safety Foundation (and its affiliated distribution and production company, Highway Safety Films, Inc.) produced 14 films in total, beginning with Signal (1959) and finishing with Options to Live (1979). Prelinger traces the origins of education films back to the early 1900s, where film was used to demonstrate processes difficult to replicate in the classroom, and film increasingly grew in popularity as a teaching aid for the military during both world wars. Insurance companies commonly sponsored safety films, and Prelinger identifies We Drivers (1935) as one of the earliest driver education films. At the end of World War II, surplus projectors from the military were transferred to American schools. From this period, it was not only safety films but also other kinds of training films that were produced, and the 1950's welcomed "the golden age of the drivers ed. film." For Ken Smith, "highway safety films are . . . the bad cop of mental hygiene. They are the only genre that grew not more refined and sympathetic as the years passed, but cruder and more brutal." Smith presents a clear picture of why highway safety films became the
phenomenon they did at the time of the Highway Safety Foundation's formation: automotive technology had remained relatively undeveloped since the 1920s when there were simply fewer cars on the road, so things like air bags, shoulder belts, roll bars, head rests, child safety seats and "crumple zones" were non-existent. It was in this "uneven world, where minor auto accidents were often fatal and the driver shouldered all the responsibility (that) highway safety films flourished."  With the 1960s and the growth of "muscle car" culture, the death toll resulting from car accidents "skyrocketed," and according to Smith, so did the sale of the Highway Safety Foundation's films: by their estimation, by the 1970s they claimed that 40 million people had seen their films.

The central figure in the Highway Safety Foundation was Cleveland-based accountant Richard Wayman. While there are differing accounts surrounding what originally led to his interest in car accidents, as an amateur photographer in the mid-1950s he and Phyllis Vaughn of Mansfield took colour photographs at crash scenes that assisted police investigators. With public interest in their activities growing, in 1958 they began presenting safety slide shows at the Richland County State Fair in Ohio, and to school and community groups. Enlisting local newspaper photographer John Domer and Vaughn's sister, Dottie Deems, the group turned to moving images. The Highway Safety Foundation was soon incorporated as a non-profit organization, and in October 1959, their first film, Signal 30, was screened.  While the success of the Highway Safety Foundation grew, the legitimacy of the group was later questioned, with ex-journalist and private investigator Martin Yant airing controversial rumours about Wayman and the Highway Safety Foundation in the Hell's Highway documentary and in his books Return to the Core (1994) and Return to the Core 2 (2004). The most shocking of these include rumours that Phyllis Vaughn was murdered, and that the Highway Safety Foundation was heavily involved in the production of pornography. But these rumours aside, the demise of the Highway Safety Foundation was itself both spectacular and scandalous. Despite receiving $2 million in pledges, the star-studded telethon that screened nationally with Sammy Davis Jr. as host in August 1973 was financially ruinous.

With self-confessed shock tactics governing their use of grizzly, real-life gore, whether the Highway Safety Foundation films can be considered to have positively influenced road accident statistics also remains open to debate. For Ken Smith, changes in car safety statistics can be attributed more concretely to Ralph Nader's book Unsafe at Any Speed (1965) than to any of Wayman and the Highway Safety Foundation's films. Rick Prelinger also shares his suspicions regarding the practical success of the road safety films in Hell's Highway: "Do they work? I'd have to say probably not. We have fewer accidents now per trillion miles driven, but I think that has to do with the fact that we do more freeway driving and cars and safer." But Bret Wood is more optimistic: "I know that they had a strong impact on me, especially in terms of wearing a seat belt. It has been stated that the films had a strong short-term effect but were ineffectual in influencing long-term driving habits. But I say even if they scared some kids into driving safely for a month of so, during those accident-prone teenage years, I figure it was worth the effort."  These questions surrounding the impact and success of the Highway Safety Foundation's productions are crucial to determining the ethical status of the films in question: is it "right" to show the mangled bodies of real-life car accident victims? If, as conventional wisdom would suggest, it stops more people dying in similar ways, then yes. But what if it does not? And what if instead of car accident victims, it is the murdered bodies of children?

The Highway Safety Foundation Beyond Highway Safety

The debate surrounding the effectiveness of the Highway Safety Foundation's films as didactic tools and their status as learning aids or mere exploitation is one not shared by those associated with the group itself. Up to and including the period of Hell's Highway's
production, Highway Safety Foundation member and Dottie Deems's husband Earle Deems was insistent that their films were not exploitation for the simple fact that they had successful results. As Wood states in the documentary's press book, one of the most striking features of the Highway Safety Foundation films is their absence of self-referentiality, a sincerity and earnestness that stems from the simple fact that despite making films, these were not "filmmakers" as such:

They weren't filmmakers by trade. They did not aspire to make feature-length films. The 16mm camera was merely a tool by which they could convey this safety message most effectively. Whenever I asked the filmmakers about editing choices or aesthetics of the film, I received little or no response. The films were strictly functional in design. I think some of the most fascinating films in our history were made by people who didn't consider themselves artists, and the Highway Safety Film are a great example.

This absence of self-conscious artistry, while intriguing in the Highway Safety Foundation's driver education films, becomes even more important in the context of their non-road safety related titles. These titles include The Shoplifter (1964), A Great and Honorable Duty (1965), Plant Pilferage (1965), the Paperhangers (1966), and Camera Surveillance, but it is The Child Molestee that will provide the focus for this remainder of this article. Although these films mimic the tropes and motifs of Hollywood and exploitation cinema in many ways (as will be discussed further shortly), the collision of these tropes with the grim realities that form the centerpiece of a film like The Child Molestee add to their shocking and unforgettable impact.

These non-driver education Highway Safety Foundation films were the direct result of Richard Wayman's close relationship with the Mansfield Police Department. As Wood explains it to Jones, while the initial tearoom bust footage was produced by the police department and not the Highway Safety Foundation, it was filmed with their equipment that was offered to the police by Wayman himself. The stakeout in Central Park was the result of a need for a more satisfying scapegoat than that of Howell himself (a mentally challenged teenager), and while not directly involved in the production of this film, it could not have been made without Wayman and the Highway Safety Foundation's involvement.

Jones quotes an editorial from the Mansfield News-Journal on August 22 1962:

The link between this round-up and the Howell case in which two small girls were murdered by a sex deviate is obvious. While only one case of attempted child molestation is on the film, police feel that some of the deviates involved are potential child molesters. Some already have records of molestation. This brings us squarely up against the problem of what to do with sex deviates — not just locally but in Ohio and the whole nation. What was done with Jason Howell was obviously inadequate.

As Ohio librarian Boyd Addlesperger has noted, "the connection between the murders of the two little girls and the 'Hidden Camera' affair seems ridiculous today. At the time, however, officials in Mansfield used the crime as pretence for ridding the city of homosexuals." He continues, "The whole sordid affair did little to rid Mansfield of real deviants. It only succeeded in ruining the lives of lots of people — including some rather well-connected folks in town." Jones is even more explicit regarding the hysteria that governed what in retrospect can only be considered as a violation of the individual rights of Mansfield's comparably innocent citizens:

The Mansfield tearoom busts have an aspect of grotesque disproportion. With the hidden camera, the round-the-clock arrests, and a card of self-righteous sadists, the whole affair, while strictly defensible in the eyes of the law in that specific time and place, looks more like a witch hunt at amateur hour. A bunch of policemen, given carte blanche by a public out for blood in the wake of a brutal murder, peeped on some marginal characters, perfect scapegoats who had no way of justifying themselves, and made a movie about their activities.

Filmed between a two-way mirror over a three-week period, the footage was used to convict anywhere from 38 to 69 men. According to Wood, the film was strategically executed to garner the highest number of identifiable participants and attain the greatest number of convictions possible.
While the tearoom bust footage was filmed in 1962, it was not until 1964 that the Highway Safety Foundation re-edited the footage into the training film \textit{Camera Surveillance}. This film was designed to educate those in the police force of the technological possibilities open to investigators. This was the same year they released \textit{The Child Molester}, and this is where the connection to Howell's murder of the two young girls to the tearoom busts becomes apparent. \textit{Camera Surveillance} makes the justification for the tearoom bust in 1962 as a clampdown on "deviants" typified by the Burtoch-Hurrell murders explicit:

\begin{quote}
We were confronted with a terrible crime, the brutal murder of two small girls, aged seven and nine, who were stoned to death by a sex deviate. An 18-year-old boy was arrested by our department within six hours after the discovery of the children's bodies. The quick solution to a crime such as this is possible only when the police department knows their sex deviates. . . . As police officers we realize that child molesting is the most revolting crime we can be faced with . . . Officers are searching for evidence. Evidence to convict a murderer? No, worse yet, evidence to convict a child molester. Think of the terror, and as you think of it, the lesson is clear. We must know the sex deviates in our community. Know them and watch them. \\
\end{quote}

This problematic connection between homosexual activity, "sex deviates," and the child sex murders was the sole assumption that prompted the Central Park stakeout that led to the bust. Consequently, the murder of the two girls is of importance to both \textit{Camera Surveillance} and the work that has stemmed from it (\textit{Mansfield 1962} and \textit{Tearoom}) only as it pertains to the tearoom busts. But do \textit{The Child Molester} itself and the real-life circumstances surrounding it warrant critical investigation in their own right, separate from the latter "witch hunt at amateur hour"? In many senses, the two cannot be separated, but just as the Burtoch-Hurrell murders are often provided as a passing detail in introducing the fascinating circumstances surrounding \textit{Camera Surveillance}, this too can be at least temporarily suspended to allow a more detailed exploration of \textit{The Child Molester}.

\textit{Living/Dead Girls in The Child Molester} (Herbert J. Leder, 1964)

The incorporation of the tearoom bust footage into \textit{Camera Surveillance} appears self-explanatory: intercut between mug shots of those arrested and contextualised by the Highway Safety Foundation's signature male voiceover, \textit{Camera Surveillance} — as its name suggests — demonstrates how technology can aid criminal investigations. But the relationship between the Burtoch-Hurrell murders and \textit{The Child Molester} is not so clear-cut, and part of the film's shocking impact (like many of the driver education films) stems from the incompatibility between the synthetic, pantomime-like nature of the re-enactments and the footage of real-life victims in various states of graphic, bloody disassembly. Even today there remains some confusion regarding the intended demographic of the film: Bret Wood made it clear to me that the Highway Safety Foundation intended it solely to be a training film for adults. "Deems insisted that the film was not meant to be shown to children — that it was made for the police, parents and educators," he writes. But Wood has his doubts, explaining that this does not gel with the fact that the Highway Safety Foundation "catalogued it as being 'cleared for television,' which suggests they were okay with it being shown to a wider audience." Either way, children \textit{did} see the film: one of the most memorable moments of Wood's \textit{Hell's Highway} documentary is when adult brothers David and Eric Krug recall watching the film as children at school in the early 1970s, and the deep trauma that resulted.

Like most Highway Safety Foundation films, \textit{The Child Molester} combines dramatic re-enactments with actual crime scene footage. The film was directed and written by Herbert J. Leder, known to trash film audiences today for his two British-produced horror films, the Hammer-style \textit{Dracula} and the Nazi science fiction \textit{The Frozen Brain} (both made in 1967). Leder was in his early forties when he made \textit{The Child Molester}, and had by this time garnered at least some professional repute having worked on successful (albeit B-grade) fare such as \textit{The Fiend Without a Face} (1958), \textit{Pretty Boy Floyd} (1960), and \textit{Nine Miles to Noon} (1963). As Bret Wood speculated, it was unlikely that Leder had any association with the
Highway Safety Foundation outside of being a directorial "gun for hire": "Earle Deems once told me that when they were going to make a film, they would often hire a director who was experienced in educational/industrial films, because it was more efficient than one of them trying to stage a dramatic scene." 

Leder may not have made a lasting impression on the Highway Safety Foundation, but the subject matter of The Child Molester appears to have had an impact on him. His last feature film was The Candy Man (1969), which starred George Sanders also in one of his last film roles before his tragic suicide in 1972. In this film, Sanders plays Sidney Carter, a drug dealer who masterminds a kidnapping plot to abduct Jenny Stevens (Lapita Ferrat), the daughter of a famous actress. While the film is explicit in associating "candy" to illegal drugs, it also consciously alludes to the pedophilic implications of the title. In a clear reference to the clichéd "strangers with candy" threat, the opening credit sequence shows Carter handing out sweets to children in a park. And while not overt, there is an implied sexual threat to the kidnapped child when Carter imprisons her in a hotel room near the film's conclusion. Outside of its retrospective evidence of Sanders's visible decline, The Candy Man has received very little fan or critical attention. In the context of The Child Molester, however, it suggests Leder's continuing fascination with the subject of child sexual abuse that began in this film for the Highway Safety Foundation. There is evidence within the film that if Leder left it with the legacy of this subject matter weighing upon him, he may have entered the Highway Safety Foundation project with a cinematic framework for how such material should be treated. The contrast between this filmic metaphor and the stark reality of the opened bodies of actual murdered children is the key feature that makes this film sit so uneasily even today.

The Child Molester begins with a close-up of a young girl drawing a hopscotch board on the ground in chalk, with the title of the film appearing over the top of this image in a similar hand-drawn font. A child's voice sings a nursery rhyme a capella as the camera pulls back to show Mary playing the game. The song is simple and childlike, but it speaks as much of the childish innocence about to be corrupted as it does of an awareness of rules, and the negative consequences that may follow breaking them:

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Hop up and down
Hop anytime
and turn it all around
Step on a line
Not so fine
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When she finishes singing, a man's ominous shadow appears over her hopscotch board. From this initial shot of the eponymous character, it is not merely expressionistic film noir
elements that are evoked, but specific associations with both versions of the child molester thriller M (Fritz Lang, 1931; Joseph Losey, 1951), thus identifying itself as part of the same cinematic tradition. The man is shown from the thigh down as he walks into frame:

The next shot is a first-person point-of-view shot from this unidentified figure offering Mary a bag of sweets. The first-person perspective from a monstrous or villainous character is typically associated with the horror genre, and The Child Molester seeks to subvert the perspective of the spectator's gaze from its opening moments:

As Carol J. Clover has observed, in the slasher film this "habit of letting us view the action in the first person long before revealing who or what the first person is" is "now-standard," and in her discussion of films like John Carpenter's 1978 Halloween, "the device is probably the most widely imitated — and widely parodied — cliché of modern horror." In Carpenter's famous slasher film, she suggests, "we are invited to look not through a murderous camera, but with our own murderous eyes," proving her claim again that in horror, "we are both Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; the force of experience . . . comes from 'knowing' both sides of the story."

But can such claims be made for The Child Molester? For one thing, the title suggests at this early stage in the film that it is child molestation that is the source of its interest, not child murder. Although the subject matter is undeniably serious, nothing about the title suggests that this film will end with its gruesome display of children's corpses, and it is here that it deviates from other Highway Safety Foundation films. As Richard Prelinger observes in Hell's Highway, one of the most important features of the driver education films was their sense of inevitability:

If you think about the drama of safety films, they really lead towards one thing: you are waiting for the accident to happen. The great tease is to whom will the accident happen, at what location and when, and it's throughout the whole film you are supposed to be innately worried about the safety message but you're really waiting for the accident to happen.

The Child Molester is therefore unique because it thwarts these expectations from the outset. Bret Wood explains this further:

Because of the purity of the crime that you know is going to happen, you become emotionally invested in it — in a way that you don't with driver's ed. films. There is a deeper sense of dread when you watch The Child Molester. And then — at the end — when they show you the actual photographs, it's devastating. For one thing, they weren't just molested, they are murdered. That wasn't expected. And you certainly didn't expect to see their bodies. I think the driver's ed. films are deeply disturbing when you first see them ... but after so many of them, you grow used to the formula and become almost immune to them. The Child Molester gets under the viewer's skin because it isn't following a formula that we can predict. And, of course, the fact that the crime is against children is even more disturbing.

It is through this disruption of expectation that the first-person perspective shots taken from the point of view of the child molester himself can therefore be considered to both confirm and simultaneously subvert the use of the device in horror. So rather than Clover's dual (subversive) "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf" experience, this tension in the case of The Child Molester may be better understood through what Murray Smith has defined as alignment and allegiance. "Under the rubric of alignment, I include all those aspects of textual structure that pertain to our access to the actions, thoughts, and feelings of characters," he states. "Under the rubric of allegiance, by contrast, I include those aspects of the text that pertain to our evaluation and emotional response to characters . . . Allegiance refers to the way in which, and the degree to which, a film elicits responses of sympathy and antipathy toward its characters, responses triggered — if not wholly determined — by the moral structure of the film." As will be demonstrated, formal analysis suggests that the film's answer to this question can be read as becoming increasingly more ambivalent over time.
Mary accepts the sweets from the stranger and is joined by her friend, Jeannie. Mary asks the man if her friend can also have some, and the voice answers "Why, sure." Again, there is another first person pov shot from the stranger's perspective (its repetition establishing the careful and conscious decision of this formal choice). Mary's hands are so full of sweets that she drops some on the ground, and the camera then pulls back to a long shot from above 45-degree angle. As he walks away from the park with the two young girls, we hear his voice say to the girls "You don't have to pick them off the ground. This man has more of them in his pocket, just over there." The man is shown in full, but from the back so his face is still not visible. As they leave with the man, Mary and Jeannie bump into their friend Cathy. Excruciatingly they show her their sweets and the man's voice asks "Do you want some?," but Cathy refuses. She walks away in one direction, as the two girls walk with the man towards a car.

Nearby, an older woman who rests at the park spots the two girls getting in the car with the man. In an exaggerated manner, her enquiring expression turns to one of self-reprimand as she shakes her head, and continues on her way. As she leaves, she looks down at the hopscotch board and sees the lollies that Mary had just dropped. This image fades to a close up of the ears wheels as it drives away, then quickly cutting to a suburban kitchen. A woman is shown pacing her kitchen nervously, checking her watch and anxiously drinking tea. A male voiceover — not dissimilar to that of the stranger in the park — appears for the first time: "It's past lunchtime, and Jeannie still isn't home." The woman puts down her cup, and rushes to the telephone. A montage sequence of the places she calls in hope of finding her daughter follows, narrated by the same male voiceover. In terms of Smith's issues of allegiance and alignment, it is worth noting that the narrator's voice is not wholly dissimilar to that of the "child molester": it is gentle and while not elderly, it still exudes an authoritative adult masculinity. Mike Vraney from Something Weird Video described the style of the narration in the Highway Safety Foundation films as "dry and monotonous," and its affect as "creepy". It may be speculated that for a viewer of this film in the early 1960s, an association between the authoritative narrator and the sexual predator would have seemed illogical, but for contemporary viewer with an understanding that "stranger danger" is not the primary threat to children's safety, the possibility is both real and chilling. As Christiane Sanderson wrote in 2004, "in approximately 87 per cent of cases the abuser is known to, and trusted by, the child. We can no longer protect our children . . . by telling them to avoid strangers." While such claims would not necessarily apply at the original time of the films release, the similarities between the threatening presence (the child molester) and the figure of authority (the narrator) for a contemporary audience debunk the film's intended "stranger danger" message, thwarting its original moral message and channelling that ethical meaning into a strikingly different direction.

While Jeannie and Mary drive away with the unidentified stranger, Cathy walks home. By refusing to accept sweets from the stranger, Cathy's behaviour is contrasted against that of Jeannie and Mary. Interrupting her daydream about her potential new toy, she remembers that she should inform her mother about the incident in the park: "Gosh! I gotta tell Mommy about that man!" Meanwhile, the stranger has taken Mary and Jeannie to deserted parkland underneath a bridge — a scene not dissimilar to the area at Toubby's Run where the bodies of Jean Bertoch and Connie Hurrell were found. The sequences in which the girls escape and are pursued by the stranger, despite the obvious formal qualities that mark their time of production, are still striking: as the man runs after Jeannie, he forcibly drags Mary behind him. While far from a high standard or professional level of acting, there is regardless a palpable sensation of dread and foreboding as the little girl's legs and arms are dragged along the bushland behind him as his hands cut into her small arms:

When he says, "Keep quiet or I'll kill both of you," it is the first time that the film's conclusion — the discovery of the two dead girls — is explicitly foreshadowed. After
Mary escapes, her face crumbles as she hears Jeannie scream off-screen. When the stranger catches her after a lengthy pursuit through the woods, the close-up of her terrified face suggests she is to meet the same fate as her friend.

Jeannie and Mary's experience is not the sole interest of the film, and their story is intercut with police procedurals and witness responses. The four parents are interview by the police, and the narrator voices their shock: "It doesn't seem possible that anything could happen to their daughters. They're such good girls! But the presence of the police - their quiet seriousness- brings home to the parents the reality of what they might be confronted with." But another formal feature strikes the contemporary viewer: Jeannie and Mary's fathers wear identical outfits as the "child molester." In fact, all the men in the film wear similar attire, except for the uniformed policemen. While it may not have factored into the experience of viewing the film at the time of its release for whom casual, conservative attire was not as flexible as it is today, to a modern audience the implication that one of the girls' fathers could be the attacker is difficult to avoid despite the narrative logic of the film itself. Thus despite the ubiquity of this style of dressing at the period the film was made, what was then assumed to be clear-cut and factual can instead today be construed as deeply ambiguous.

It is when the police become involved in the investigation of the two missing girls that the film's didactic motives are exposed. First of all, the older woman who saw them get into the car with the stranger is shown: she is angry at herself that she did not say anything at the time for fear of being labelled a "busy body," and she rushes to the police once she hears the girls are missing. Cathy is then shown at home, and when her mother offers her a bag of sweets she remembers Mary and Jeannie. As Cathy tells the police her story, a close-up of Mary's mother is accompanied by her voice-over as she wonders "Why my child? Why? Why? Why not any other one?" "Why not Cathy?" says the narrator, finishing her question, and he provides this answer which is worth quoting at length:

The answer is her parents. Like you, they know about molesters, but unlike you, they realized it is necessary to give Cathy specific information about child molesters, people with perverted minds who enjoy touching young children. Cathy's parents know that most child molesting cases can be prevented. Not all, of course, but most would never happened if the child victim had sometimes been given the opportunity to know their enemy. Like what does a child molester look like? Do they have certain faces? Or do they look like people you see everyday? Police studies show that child molesters range from the very rich to the very poor, they can be old or young. Where are they from? Skins... or turn houses just like your own. Actually, they can be anybody, and live anywhere. The thing that matters is that they do exist, and the child must know what to do if approached. Forewarning children can prevent most molesting crimes.

During this monologue, the film shows children and teenagers of different ages responding in the correct manner to strangers of all ages and social types who accost them in public spaces. When Mary's mother asks "Worl warnings about sex criminals set up an undesirable mental association in the child's mind?" the narrator puts her mind at rest by telling her children should be taught about strangers and child molesters as part of their road safety education (such as learning to cross at traffic lights).

At this point, it is significant that the information provided is aimed specifically at children. The lessons are imparted by the narrator are as follows:

Don't get into automobiles or talk walks with strangers, say "No thank you," and be firm. Always do your homework, and if invited into a car, after refusing write down the license number... Talk in low whispers in the movies, and if a stranger speaks to you or touches you, call the usher. Make your allowance last the whole week, and don't accept candy or toys from strangers. If lost, go to the nearest policeman... if a stranger asks directions, tell him to see a policeman or enquire at the nearest store. Never go with him, or get in his car. Never be late for school...and never go with a stranger even if he said your mother or father sent him to get you.

After this, information is explicitly directed at parents and teachers, which suggests that what has preceded it is intended for a childhood audience (contradicting Deen's claim that the film was only intended for adults). The film is ultimately clear about where
responsibility lies. "Authorities contend that it is negligence for today's parents not to educate their children about child molesters. A few moments of instruction can save you a lifetime of grief."

Aside from the molester's passing threat to Mary and Jeannie in the woods, the gravity of what has happened to the two girls is only made explicit in the films concluding moments, and the context for this possible "lifetime of grief" for parents is made very clear. Contrastingly, dramatically against the didactic tone of the last few minutes of "dos-and-don'ts," the visceral shock of the sudden cut to actual crime scene footage is overwhelming, even by today's standards. In these final moments, the narrator states:

The missing girls were found. These are the actual police films of the tragedy. Your children put their trust in you. Do not betray them. Teach them all the safety rules. Give them their chance at life.

This sequence begins with still photos that become increasingly graphic of two children lying in pools of blood, one with severe trauma to her face and skull, the other with some kind of fabric tied around her neck lying on a stretcher as investigators or ambulance workers look on. The film ends as a child's show is shown floating down a river to the sound of the child's a capella rhyme that opened the film.

There is no debate that Camera Surveillance, the original "tearoom" bust footage and The Child Molester are still equally shocking and fascinating films today. But that the former has found its way into the Whitney while the latter remains little more than an uncomfortable footnote is worthy of investigation itself, and deserves serious reflection. While the answers can only be speculated, this article argues that it is perhaps because the ideological trajectory of the tearoom bust footage is ultimately progressive, even optimistic: the notorious film footage from that public toilet in Central Park in Mansfield in 1962 stands not only as tangible historical documentation of the homosexual "witch hunt" that occurred after the Hurrell-Burtoch murders, but by association it implies that this sort of appalling and disgraceful invasion of privacy can be retrospectively exposed as the discriminatory horror story it really is. In contrast, the issues surrounding The Child Molester have become only more ambiguous: despite its cheesy retro aesthetics, it allows no room for nostalgic reflection at how far attitudes have progressed or how much things have changed. If anything, it effectively confuses them even further with its own probably unintentional formal ambiguities: why do the child molester and the narrator have similar voices? Why are Jeannie and Mary's fathers dressed in the same way as the unidentified stranger? What possible implication is there to the repeated use of first-person perspective when the children are initially abducted?

Even more unsettling is the fact that Howell was a stranger to Hurrell and Burtoch: a viewing of The Child Molester today reminds us that inherent to Sanderson's 2004 statistic regarding 87 percent of child sexual abuse cases are committed by someone the child knows, there must therefore be 13 percent that are committed by someone the child does not know. The Child Molester does not allow the luxury of retrospect that accompanies other Highway Safety Foundation films, but rather emphasises the shocking reality behind a phenomenon that is still so sadly contemporary.

Author's note: This article would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Brett Wood (director of the 2003 documentary Hell's Highway: The True Story of the Highway Safety Films Inc.) and Boyd Addiesperger (the Sherman Room Librarian at the Mansfield/Richland County Public Library).

Notes
2. The Child Molester may be viewed on the public domain archive site Archive.org [link]
Although Jean Hurnell and Connie Burtoch's names are not used in the film, there is enough evidence that supports claims that this crime scene footage in *The Child Murderer* is taken from their case. This echoes Bette Wido's opinion that it's a "safe assumption. The circumstances are identical." William E. Jones also explicitly states that both The Child Murderer and Camera Surveillance were "inspired by" and "based on the 1962 double-homicide" (p. 40). Witnesses at the Hurnell-Burtoch scene recall the girls wearing "sleeveless or sun suits" ("Bodies of Two Girls Found in Creek, Suspect Murderer," Manchester News-Journal, 26 June 1962, p. 1) and in the film, the outfits the girls wear (Mary in a white top and Janene in a pink sun suit) closely resemble the same outfits worn by the victims shown in crime scene footage in the film's final moments.

A summary of the events surrounding the Hurnell-Burtoch murders based on new evidence and other accounts of the event I have found can be found [here](#).

- Ibid., 12
- Bette Wido, "Interview request," e-mail correspondence with author, 20 June 2009.
- The Highway Safety Foundation was not the first to include real accident footage, as according to Ken Smith, Canadian company Crownway films were the first to insert footage of a real accident scene in a highway safety movie, "calling the debut Safety or Slaughter (1958) ‘the first educational gore film’" (Ken Smith, Mental hygiene: classroom video, 1945-1975, Blast Books, Inc. New York, 1999, p. 78).
- Ibid.
- Ken Smith, 73.
- Ken Smith, 74-5.
- Ken Smith, 81.
- Ken Smith, p.81.
- Bette Wido email, 20 June 2009.
- This is stated in the Hal's Highway documentary, and Wood also makes this explicit in his email correspondence when discussing his discussions with Deems. He writes: "Having interviewed the guys who worked on the film [Sara Deems, John Deems], I can say with absolute certainty that there was no intent on their part to titilate or provide pleasure. They were very wary of me because they were suspicious that I was meaning to exploit the film for its entertainment value. I think if there was a little bit of a 'show man' in them, they would have taken more pleasure in being interviewed for 'Hal's Highway,' or spoken about the film with a bit more pleasure."
- Ibid., p.5.
- Boyd Adlakhaesperger, "Hurnell-Burtoch murders," e-mail correspondence with author, 8 July 2009.
- William E. Jones, p.42.
- Numbers vary. According to Superlek, it is "some 38 men" who were convicted (p. 12), while for John Buller "of the 70 men arrested, 60 were convicted and sentenced to the Ohio State Reformatory" (p.128). As Jones explains, "estimates of the number of men convicted vary widely" and "it may ultimately prove impossible to arrive at a definite total." Transfers from Lima State Hospital are noted in the register books of the Ohio Reformatory and State Reformatory, but in the cases of men who were committed to the state mental hospital and who are not subsequently sent to prison, records are unavailable" (Tearoom, p.34).
- Jones, p. 35
- Buller, p.
- Bette Wido email, 20 June 2009.
- Bette Wido email, 20 June 2009.
- Cleaver, p.185.
Alexandra Heller-Nicholas is a PhD student who currently works as a research assistant at Monash University and Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia. She has published on horror film, exploitation film and rape-revenge film, and her book Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical Study will be released by McFarland & Co. in July 2011.

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