

**A CELLAR TROPIC:  
ELISION\* AND THE MARIJUANA WORKER**

by

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## Abstract

The marijuana worker is absent from public discourse. The following thesis will illustrate this fact. While it is indeed difficult to collect data on illicit industries like (non-medical) marijuana production, it is curious that the default representation of marijuana workers and their employers or, for the purposes of this context, growers, is either that of a gang member or an invisible, non-subject.

Ongoing, radical changes in marijuana production social labour and the surrounding socio-legal environment in Canada, the United States and beyond have wide-ranging effects in store for British Columbian industry workers and growers. Tracking relevant discourse and assessing typical representations of marijuana growers and workers in media and popular culture products reveal the ongoing construction of abject identities: malingering medical clients employing natural remedies of questionable efficacy, violent gangsters, community-destroying hooligans, and exoticized products of alterity, the hyper-racialized ethnic *other*. Extended periods of participant observation in multiple marijuana production sectors familiarize the ethnographer with an altogether different cast of characters: peaceful men and women working full or part time as entrepreneurial owner/operators or workers struggling to favorably balance the risk/reward ratio.

The project of comparing the resulting divergent representations and discourse—the armed Hell’s Angels grower you meet in the newspaper versus the single mom grower you find in her garden—is important as nascent structural changes threaten this occupational category in both the illicit and legal sectors. Creative re-representations found throughout are a result of participant observation-based autobiography and autoethnography methods, intended to contribute to new understandings of these hidden peoples, their life-ways and communities.

## **Preface**

Research outlined and purveyed in this project, the research design and the accompanying creative works were created, performed or are otherwise produced herein by Clayton McCann.

This project proposal, ethics certificate number H13-02495, “She Dies in the End” (formally entitled “Cellar Tropic: Elision and the Marijuana Worker”) was approved by UBC Okanagan Behavioral Research Ethics Board, 18 December 2013.

The creative work, “Army of Joy” appeared in *The Elephant Mountain Review* 2013 anthology.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate these words to peaceful growers and workers of marijuana everywhere, legal or otherwise, from the littlest seed to the mighty tree. Good luck. And don't get caught.



## Chapter 1 Introduction

*Not the suspect we were looking for: In this book we are going to meet the essential Trobriander. Whatever he might appear to others, to himself he is first and foremost a gardener. His passion for his soil is that of a real peasant. He experiences a real joy in delving into the earth, in turning it up, planting the seed, watching the plant grow, mature and yield the desired harvest. If you want to know him, you must meet him in him in his yam garden, among his palm groves or in his taro fields. You must see him digging his black or brown soil.*

- Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, (1935:8).

\* I employ “elision” in the title of this thesis to indicate omission made in the interest of a speaker’s comfort. Simply stated, it is a *crushing out* (Lat.) of parts originally intended for speech to achieve *euphony*, or a pleasing effect on the ear. What can it mean when powerful elites choose to speak on certain issues specific to marijuana but not others? What is consistently omitted from the discourse? What is pleasing to power and what is not?

Of principal concern in this endeavor are the various forms of representation of marijuana workers and the growers for whom they toil. In this project, the distinction is made between a marijuana worker, who toils for a wage or share but does not own the means of production, and the grower, who owns the means of production. Of secondary consideration are the creative impressions generated by the ethnographer as a result of several years’ sustained participant observation with the workers and growers in hidden communities in the study region of southern interior British Columbia.

These considerations are important for several reasons: 1. marijuana prohibition in Canada will likely end in the next few years (*The Walrus* 2013:31); 2. the practice of marijuana production will only be permitted to a select few, large-scale producers (Vroom 2013); and, 3. few studies have previously looked to representations of marijuana social labour in this geographic region. This project thus contributes original and worthwhile knowledge to the disciplines of anthropology, critical/media studies, and creative writing.

In *Qualitative Media Analysis*, David L. Altheide writes that, “most human documents are reflexive of the process that has produced them” (1996:2). A good example is an RCMP

media release. I came across these missives several times in my research, which were, in many cases, faxed copies. The media outlet that received the fax, such as the now-defunct radio station Kootenay Boundary Radio (KBR), would, as a routine procedure, staple the media release to the news copy that would then be read on air. As stories developed, more text would be added to the copy or additional sheets would be stapled to the original release. For larger, more sensational stories, this practice would result in thick dockets, all stemming from one RCMP media release. All KBR local marijuana news items were generated this way and I came to understand it was the RCMP who set the mandate for reportage, deciding how long after a bust to release information, whether or not to insinuate suspects were involved in organized crime, etc. It struck me that the news desk at KBR was incapable of generating a marijuana story without it first being initiated by an RCMP media release. Perhaps that was policy at KBR.

Another policy seems to have involved the altering of stories. It is difficult to assess the intention behind such actions, whether it was to make a story ‘fit’ larger media tropes or to make it more interesting for listeners—the reality is that both these goals are served by the doctoring of media releases. One minor example is the RCMP insistence on spelling the Cannabis *indica* or *sativa* common term as *marihuana* with an ‘h’ while nearly everyone else spells it “marijuana” with a “j.” Health Canada is another culprit, even going so far as to spell it *both* ways (eighteen times with an “h,” twelve times with a “j”) on the same web page, Medical Use of Marijuana (24 March 2014). KBR always changed the spelling to the latter, regardless of the fact that phonetically the words were identical. Were they afraid their news DJs would not recognize the RCMP spelling? Or was it because the RCMP spelling just doesn’t look right? Impossible to say. What is important is the changing of the spelling by the secondary agent in the process.

One reported case (KBR fonds, Shawn Lamb Archives, 21 June 1993), involved the seizure of a bolt-action .22 at the scene of an arrest, noted in the police media release but not in the news copy. Text read *on-air* suggested weapons were found in association with suspects’ activities, implying organized crime or at the very least, violent behaviour. This tweaking of the facts was conducted by whomever prepared the on-air copy, a sort of voluntary spicing up of the story, which, unfortunately, played into the trope of criminals as violent offenders so popular with mainstream, corporate media. The reality—that a bolt action .22 was found—is perhaps less entertaining for listeners. This is a sport rifle firearm with little stopping power fashioned with a

slow reloading mechanism and, as such, unlikely a weapon used by violent criminals. Yet, it is transformed in the public process of *telling*.

What does one find, then, along the arc of public narratives, of constructed discourse and manufactured representations of marijuana workers and their employers? This thesis asserts that one overwhelming discovery is a type of elision: a *crushing out* (Lat.) of parts originally intended for speech to achieve *euphony* or a pleasing effect on the ear when powerful elites choose to speak on certain issues specific to marijuana but not others. What do we find consistently omitted from the discourse? What is spoken and what is not?

“Two trimmers were killed the week I arrived.”

“Where was this?”

“Humboldt.”

“How did it happen?”

“People on meth, with guns. They know everybody's a grower there, they just come busting in. They come for money, for the cash, the weed. And two trimmers got shot.”

This bit of dialogue took place with a friend who had just returned from Humboldt County, CA, in the autumn of 2013, after eight weeks of “trimming,” a term used in the industry to describe the complex of skills involved in processing harvested marijuana. After this discussion, I conducted regionally-specific, online (including LexisNexis) searches for details of these incidents. Nothing turned up in the search relating to the dates given by my friend. I did find one item—“Alleged pot grower pleads not guilty to murder”—from the *Associated Press* wire, 13 March 2012. It was shocking news. A grower shot two of his workers when they summarily quit and demanded their wages. One of the workers, Maria Roberto Juarez-Madrid, a father of two from Guatemala, died in the shooting, while his co-worker, shot in the face, survived the ordeal to testify.

The article was noteworthy for several reasons. It is rare, in my experience, to come across the mention of “workers” in news items concerned with marijuana and this article communicated significant data about the slain worker: he was Guatemalan and, therefore, likely a migrant worker, the father of two children. The story indicated something had incited the two

men to cease their unspecified labours and demand their pay. The grower refused payment, started shooting and, perhaps most significantly for the purposes of this study, the murdered man worked in the marijuana industry. Other assumptions are implicit in the article: marijuana work can take place in violent, even deadly environments; guns are involved; and, unequal relations of power can and do inform the unregulated process through which social labour is organized in such a business.

The above example of a news story illuminates the complexity at the heart of analyzing documentary materials. Central to such inquiry is a critical evaluation of representation, not simply of marijuana growers and workers in British Columbia's southern interior, but also of agricultural workers in legitimate (i.e. legal) industries in the same geographic region, as well as representations of workers toiling in other illicit industries in the same geographic context. A principal objective is an analysis of representation itself, what it means to *represent*. And it is deemed important to assess the distinct but thematically linked worker categories and how they are constructed in public discourse for popular consumption.

Thomas A. Schwandt, in *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, notes the term “‘crisis of representation’ was coined by George Marcus and Michael Fischer to refer specifically to the uncertainty within the human sciences about adequate means of describing social reality” (2007:44). It serves the discussion at this point to clarify terminology. First, Schwandt did not go far enough: “describing social reality” implies an objectivity, as per Robert Rowland Smith, “cleansed of the interests of the observing subject” (2012:xxix), a preposterous sort of hippopotamus, to be sure. Secondly, the construction of social reality is the axis around which this project hums and, thirdly, the crisis of representation is far from over. Nearly thirty years have passed since anthropologist James Clifford (among others) asked these very important questions: “Who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?” (1986:13) and to this list of questions others must be added: who does not speak? why, or why not?

Speaking of. Spoken to. Speaking for. The work of representation as it relates to marijuana production is obviously not limited to the academy. Newspapers, television news programs, Health Canada officials, podcasts, non-fiction novels, TED forums, short film documentaries, police officers, street-level rappers, digital animation artists, blockbuster films, magazine journalists, playwrights, advertising corporations, Pentecostal evangelists, recording

artists, comedians, performance poets and even the Prime Minister of Canada—everyone is in on the game. But the world of mass communication is a power-laden environment. Wealthy elites, like the Asper family, control huge media corporations such as Can-West Global, dictating editorial policy. While this is the purported right of any media owner, a monopoly or ownership of a majority of media outlets by a single corporate entity can result in little or no free discussion or debate over constructed identities within the public discourse. What is spoken, what goes unsaid, who is represented and how this is done are, unfortunately, decisions made in the mass communications industry by a select few corporate entities, resulting in the construction of mass consciousness—how we see the world and our place in it (Altheide 2002). If we never see a marijuana worker in the news, never read about one in a history book, are never confronted by one in a documentary film or a magazine article, how are we to know them in any meaningful way? This project is concerned with the meaning in public messages and how marijuana growers and their workers are portrayed (or not portrayed). In *Anthropology and the Politics of Representation*, Gabriela Vargas-Cetina notes that,

many anthropologists think our discipline should never side with those in power and many believe it should actually side with those against or outside the margins of established powers, that our work should primarily further the causes and enhance the lives of the people with whom we work in the field, helping the advancement of respect for alternative views and ways of knowledge (2013:3).

While I support this view, my research design was invented as a sort of sensing device, intended to compare and contrast public representations of growers and their workers with the impressions of lifeways of people working in the marijuana industry in BC's southern interior, an archaeology of memories as recorded by myself over the arc of several years of informal participant observation. As such, the next section of this inquiry strives toward an operational definition of representation and a defining of method, ethnographic content analysis (ECA), and its application. Below I examine numerous accounts, expositions, character sketches, reports and blatant omissions with this form of qualitative content analysis.

Throughout I attempt to deal the workers and the growers for whom they labour into the broader game of identity construction, in hope of illuminating how they see themselves, their place in the industry itself, and in the larger context of the world in which they live. These subjective, creative parts are meant to become part of the larger dialogue, pursuant to the necessity in contemporary social sciences research to promote social justice. Each creative section typically opens with a statement of intent: why this particular example? what purpose does it serve? and what sort of representation(s) is it intended to contradict within the wider, public discourse?

### ***'Tis Always the Season (at an indoor)***

The following was performed for me (to the tune of “The Twelve Days of Christmas”) by workers at a medical marijuana plantation in December of 2013. A staff of five, three women, two men, they had lived on-site together for over nine months, toiling away in four large outbuildings and, until autumn, a massive greenhouse. Living conditions were comfortable but the facility was located far from any urban centre; each worker was permitted one day off per week as a condition of their informal contract with the grower. As such, they made communal meals, rotated the more arduous tasks and, as a result, had bonded as fictive kin. Due to changes in Health Canada’s medical marijuana regulations all of them could be out of work as early as 1 April 2014.

On the twelfth day of Christmas my grow job gave to me:

twelve hours trimming, eleven undies hanging,  
ten pounds a-selling, nine neighbours knocking,  
eight rooms a-growing, seven scissors snipping,  
six joints a-smoking, the guard dog ran a-way!  
Four transformers blowing, three howling bitches,

two dumb jocks, and [the grower] in a G-string!

## Chapter 2 Representation or, Call My Lawyer!

Defining representation is our first important step. Kobena Mercer reminds us “identities are not found but *made*; they are not just there, waiting to be discovered in a vocabulary of Nature, they have to be culturally and politically *constructed* through political antagonism and cultural struggle” (1992:427). Repeatedly, throughout this project, I was drawn by parallels in the practice of exploring the mass communications landscape to that of archaeology: you are looking for something, perhaps you don’t really know what it is, then you begin to uncover artefacts, very similar ones, again and again. And if the artefacts were once tools, useful objects to someone, what of these representations that were coming up through the cultural stratigraphy time and time again? They, too, were constructed, intentionally, to serve some purpose, to serve certain people. The question wasn’t so much whom did they serve? For the answer was obvious enough: they served those who controlled editorial policy and those who toiled under such constraints in the representations industry, enabling representations to take on a uniform, assembly-line sort of production process. And they served the receivers of the representations as well: these were easily digested, two-dimensional characters engaged in “crime,” the term itself a catch-all, an intellectual void packaged for a population mortified by crime in any manifestation. The question was, rather, what sort of tools were they? Could they be sifted, catalogued, held up to the light? And, finally, what is accomplished by them?

Newspapers, TV news and radio broadcasts, online information services and other venues actively engage in representing illicit marijuana workers and the growers they toil for as criminals. These workers *are* criminals: by performing their labours they break the law. And, as the following research shows, the identity of gangster is peremptorily painted upon many of them. The result is a manufactured product, a constructed identity. The *people* thus identified become *things*. Eric R. Wolf discusses the problem:

By turning names into things, we create false models of reality. The ghastly off-spring of this way of thinking about the world was the theory of forced draft urbanization, which held that the Vietnamese could be propelled toward



modernization by driving them into the cities through aerial bombardment and defoliation of the countryside. Names thus become things, and things marked with an X become targets (2010:7).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (2010) notes that representation has at least two distinct definitions: “two senses of representation are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy. These two senses of representation—within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other—are related but irreducibly discontinuous” (2010:28).

While I do not wish to debate a preeminent scholar on the grounds of etymological nit-picking, I would suggest that the enactment of analysis conducted in the formation of this thesis brings these two senses together: representations that *speak for* marijuana workers and, in the other sense, to *re-present* the worker I have come to know from years of experience. But perhaps Spivak is correct after all, for the impression one gleans from public discourse and the folk one meets in the industry are *discrete* types indeed. Spivak asks that analysis be rigorous and that locating the subject is never about fixed co-ordinates, that as close as one might come to forming a worker-subject, something will always exceed one's grasp: “the empirical subject, the intending subject, the self even, must be constantly assumed in radical calculations” (26).

The part-time illicit worker who also owns a retail store; the small-scale hippie grower who sells her marijuana to gangsters; the social sciences researcher who, by his very presence in an illicit production facility, is an accessory to crime: in the real world categories are fluid, borders are permeable, and absolutes are difficult to come by. The reality is that a continuum of actors persists in these occupational categories and while I highlight throughout, the public representations of workers and growers as either gangsters or non-entities, *all* types are found therein, in varying proportions contingent on the nature of industry subsectors.

For the purposes of this inquiry, we commence with an assessment of representation in the first sense, a *speaking for*, with an eye to theoretical implications, complemented by ethnographic content analysis (ECA) of multiple representations as they are sourced from public discourse. Stuart Hall, in “The Spectacle of the Other” (1997), determines three practices of representation: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist, focusing primarily on the

constructionist that considers “meaning is constructed in and through language” (15). I am concerned almost exclusively throughout this thesis with constructed representation, employing an analysis based on two variants of constructionism, the semiotic (of which de Saussure is the noted theorist) and the discursive (wherein Foucault is the noted theorist), which take different roads toward their object. De Saussure is interested in the literal symbols, the denotations that, in turn, connote other meanings, such as the metonymic cross used to represent Christianity. Whereas Foucault is more inclined toward “relations of power not relations of meaning” (Foucault 1980:114-115), when, for example, he suggests that, “so long as the posing of the question of power was kept subordinate to the economic instance and the system of interests which this served, there was a tendency to regard these problems as of small importance” (116). Hall brings these concepts together, noting, “things don't mean” (1997:50) on their own. Rather, meaning is constructed, and it tends to be the owners of the communication process or their agents who *make* meaning. In terms of semiotics, then, I am interested in the signification of marijuana growers and the workers who toil for them: do they exist? Are they delineated in public discourse? Or, are they invisible, drawn instead to read as criminal, as gangster?

Semiotics enjoys important applications in the social sciences and is an excellent sub-discipline through which to explore the practices of signification: what is said (or written)? What is meant? Do symbols indeed stand in for actors/agents in media representation? Shortcomings include semiotics being inappropriate for quantitative applications, as well as the practice not being well suited to explain how interpretation occurs (for this, we have ethnographic method). Further, de Saussure would balk at the notion of semiotics being applied to photography or film, unless methods were established to treat these media as languages complete with lexicography and even a codex of sorts, like an alphabet. Finally, it is important to note that semiotics is not an objective science, that subjectivity is, in fact, a mainstay in this form of analysis. But biases aside, what has proved efficacious in its application is the unearthing of repeated significations and representations of growers and their workers in media practices. Analyses of signifiers, of symbols, therefore, can and do form the basis for legitimate ethnographic inquiry into how meaning is constructed in complex societies (Altheide 1996:7; Berger 1982; Manning 1992; Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994; Denzin 1995; Gottdiener 1995; MacCannell 1976; MacCannell and MacCannell 1983; Manning 1987, 1988, 2004; Perinbanayagam 1985, 1991; Vannini 2004; Wiley 1994).

Common methods in the construction of representations include the use of binaries, stereotypes and fixation on differences of class, ethnicity, religion, gender, age and sex between the scrutinized subject and the observer. As Derrida (1978) reminds us, one pole of binaries is always implicitly more powerful. There are four theoretical approaches to the use of *differences*: linguistic; socio-linguistic; the anthropological; and, the psychoanalytic (Hall 1997:52). The linguistic approach attempts to uncover meaning through the analysis of the use of differences. In a news item regarding a bust at a grow-op, the binaries in place are representatives of the state, the police (powerful) and those who have moved beyond the state's control (and therefore need to be punished), the "suspects" who are *arrested* (rendered powerless). This approach, then, is beneficial when examining artificially constructed binaries like "good" and "bad."

The socio-linguistic approach focuses on the dialectic at work, one party to which is more powerful, while the other, in many cases, is not permitted to speak. Stereotyping is an example of this practice, elements of which are essentialism and naturalization, that is, reductionist practices employed to simplify portrayed events or individuals. Hall uses the example of African Americans born into slavery but unwilling to work, a tendency described by slave owners as 'natural characteristics' (and what anthropologists might describe as performed agency). This example illustrates how the more powerful are permitted to speak, while the 'lazy' slave is not. It is important to be able to see reductionism at work when analyzing public documentary materials, such as a news release or a non-fiction novel-length exposé. Jerry Langton's *The Notorious Bacon Brothers* (2013, examined below) is a good example of a complex object of analysis because it is marketed as a piece of non-fiction and yet it stereotypes criminals and law enforcement personnel, employing reductionist techniques to such a degree that it could be regarded as creative non-fiction, the lines blurring as constructionist methods *make* the subjects' lives into entertainment, the subjects into action movie characters.

The anthropological approach is one absorbed in taxonomy, a construction of categories. The use of "gang" in news items serves to create a distinction between the criminal and the subject absent in such coverage, the "good citizen." Feminist socio-philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva (1982) asserts that the criminal represents the one who is *abject*, an outcast, whose image (and fate) reinforces popular ideals of the "morally bereft criminal" and is the binary opposite of the object of desire, the "good citizen." Thus, representations help to construct categorically normative standards that perpetuate the circularity of civilization, considering here

the term “normal” as defined by the voices that construct public discourse. These might originate, for Kristeva (1982), from socio-political pseudo-Christian mores. To further explicate the importance of investigating the specific cultural mores related to media sources and the people who engage them, David Altheide notes, “the topic of discourse—or the kinds of framing, inclusion, and exclusion of certain points of view—are important” (1996:69). A good example is the statement made by then-Secretary-General of the UN and Nobel Laureate, Kofi Annan, that the American war in Iraq was illegal (BBC 2004). While this is an incredibly significant speech act, it never received widespread coverage in mainstream American media. One story, appearing in *The Washington Post*, rebuffed Annan’s statement while not quoting it in any meaningful length (Lynch 2004).

Finally, the psychoanalytic approach engages notions of *otherness*. Formations of self and identity, it asserts, require a “not self.” This enactment of alterity is frequently employed in coverage of marijuana busts, where the trope of the criminal gang is a complex image employed by journalists to evoke fear, fear of *other*, fear of the outsider. David Altheide notes that, “we live in a secular society, so the mass media do not include many references to the ‘fear of God;’ they do refer a lot to ‘fear of crime’” (2002:6). Thus, various approaches exist which enable us to analyze representations and it is important to remember, as per Paul Rabinow, “their construction is a public process” (1977:155). Located in news reports, popular non-fiction, film and other sources, documents are “reflexive of the process” and the ideologies “that have produced them” (Altheide 1996:2).

When studying documents, the necessary focus is “on depth, the critical emphasis is on trying to unravel the author's assumptions, motives and intended consequences as revealed by analysis of the document” (Altheide:7). Much in this process requires our attention to the words that are used, the symbols that are incorporated in the discussion and, especially, to the power dynamics present in the representation—Who is speaking? What institution do they represent? What proof do they provide? Whom is not speaking? And, finally, what form does the communication take: a TV newscast? An online documentary film? Or a home-made YouTube video?

David Altheide's *Qualitative Media Analysis* (1996) explores the challenging terrain of documentary ethnographic content analysis or ECA, the form of inquiry specific to this project that involves a combining of the researcher's personal experiences with the subject matter and

content analysis techniques. Altheide divides documents into three classes. Primary documents include TV newscasts, diaries, newspapers and magazines. Secondary documents are records of primary ones, such as an archival catalogue of fonds—the term used for the aggregate of documents issuing from the same, originating source, such as all birth records from a single hospital—reports on important texts or a media analysis. Finally, auxiliary documents are used to “help clarify and illustrate data derived from other research materials” (1996:4). Understanding these class distinctions informs the research process in important ways. Auxiliary documents can add context, secondary documents can lead a researcher to more relevant data, and primary documents, even when unobtainable for whatever reason, can still be researched via secondary and auxiliary documentation. Documents are explored, then, for the simple purpose of locating our worker within contemporary, public representations.

### **Late Callers.**

In “Late Callers” I present two forms of the marijuana criminal, the violent threat to community (purported by media and other cultural outlets to represent the vast majority of marijuana workers and growers) and the peaceful worker—in this instance, a *fall-guy*, an illegal indoor live-in worker. I try to illustrate the isolation of the peaceful worker, the vulnerability of his or her position, in terms of exposure to key risks: loss of liberty due to arrest and detainment by civil authorities, and loss of income, as well as personal injury or death, at the hands of marijuana thieves. In a sense, this conflict is a figurative one in that the image of the peaceable marijuana worker has, in the past, lost out to the image of the gangster, violent and out of control.

*All you fair weather watchers,  
watch out and beware;  
when your trouble comes knocking,  
I hope you ain't there.*

— Timber Timbre, “Trouble Comes Knocking”

Late. He sits in bed, reading. His shoes are on. Through the window sealed tight for smell and winter he hears a car roll up.

One. A heavy door thuds outside. Two. Another door. A brief pause and then the thumping of heavy-soled shoes on the porch. Then the bell, a loud rolling bell-sound through the ridiculously empty ground floor.

On the bed he thinks through his options. Going out the back door was the best one except, by now, the second man is around back, trying the sliding door, the kitchen knob. By now there are no options. He waits.

The bell again, this time accompanied by a heavy pounding. A few moments of silence. He waits. What is coming is a dull thud and the splinter of wood as the deadbolt rips through the doorframe. Next, one of two things will happen: he will hear a voice identify itself as a police officer and begin to read a warrant or he won't. He hopes for the voice because it means they really are police officers.

The door cracks nearly in half from the force of the kick. Glass in the door window shatters and, from the bed, he hears heavy boots on the bits of glass. No voice. This is bad.

Then a slow stepping into the foyer proper and on into the kitchen. In the bedroom he looks from the bear spray to the knife and baseball bat assembled beside on the nightstand. The bear spray. As quickly as he can he slides the safety clip off the pressure trigger. He tries then, unsuccessfully, to get off the bed without making a noise. The cheap frame creaks loudly.

He can no longer hear the boot steps walking through the house. It is a curious shift, when the intruder knows where he is and he can no longer count on where the visitor might be.

He steps quietly to the bedroom door and quickly lies down at an angle so the door may still be opened. He reaches up silently and switches off the light. He waits.

He is certain he hears the handle turn. A thin ray of light as the door opens, a hand in silhouette, groping, too high, for the switch. The knife would have made sense here, but only for an instant, as the hand withdraws. The door swings out. He is yet in the shadow. From his position he can see the figure's left side but no head. The person steps forward.

From the floor he sprays a long fierce blast, the orange cloud enveloping the figure. He can hear the man falling backwards, sputtering, coughing, shouting now, "Haahhhhhck!—Russ! Ahck! Russ!!!" more coughing. He clutches at the door, pulls it wide and fires another blast of the spray at the man. The effect of the second cloud is curious. The man strains backward, crab-like across the hall floor, smashing bodily into the opposite wall. Heaving violently for air and hacking at the same time. Like a hound. Suddenly the man falls flat on his back, unconscious.

Keeping low beneath the spreading orange haze, he crawls frantically past the man. He sees the man has no weapon. He moves toward the fractured front door. Glass digs into his palm. The air stings his eyes. He is shaking with adrenaline and nearly out the door when something cold smashes into the back of his head. The bear spray was the right choice, anyway. He blacks out.

"Aw, look who's up."

"Slap the fuck." Coughing.

He feels the sharp sting on his cheek and his head whiplash to the left. His skull feels cracked wide open at the back. His eyes slide open as though filled with sand.

"Mr. guy! Come on, Mr. guy, it's time to tell us a secret!"

"Slap him again, Russ."

Another smack, this on the left cheek.

"There he is. Hello, Mr. guy. How's the head?"

"Ungh..."

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, fellah, you hearing me?"

"Yes-s-s."

"Guess how we got you?"

“\_\_”

“Don’t wanna guess? Okay. We followed you home from the grow shop. Nice, hey? Now we’re in kindofa rush so I’m gonna make this easy. Tell me where’s the cash and we’ll be outta your hair.”

“Cash?”

“Yeah, Mr. guy, the *cash*. You a grower or what?”

“Let me talk to him, okay? Lissen, fellah, I want you to tell me what these are.”

“Garden shears.”

“Bingo.”

“He’s a grower alright.”

“What are they good for?”

“Shearing.”

“The man’s a genius.”

“Shearing, correct. How’s your hand?”

The ache reaches him now and he notices his arms and legs are tied to his chair. Around the base of all four fingers on his right hand are short white zap straps. The fingers are blue from lack of circulation. They sting when he flexes them out.

“I said how’s your hand.”

“Hurts.”

“I bet, I bet. Okay, here’s how this works. You tell us where’s the cash and I cut a strap... you *don’t* tell me and I cut off a finger. Sound fair?”

“There’s no cash. I’m the fall guy. I haven’t been paid, the crop’s still in the blocks.”

“Oh? Maybe we should come back when you get your cheque?”

“Lissen, fellah, I’m gonna ask once more and then I’m gonna go with the shears. I warmed ‘em up on the plants. So, where’s it at?”

“Look, I’ve got \$700 in the bank—drive me down there and you can have it.”

Another slap.

“Maybe we’ll go for lunch, too, hey Mr. guy?”

“\$700?! Are you fucking with us? You *gotta* have ten grand piled somewhere... Where’s the money?!”

“I swear.”

“Okay, Russ, put the sock in his mouth. Now hold on, fellah, this is gonna sting.”

He jerks his head away so as to not see it happen. That’s my chord hand. And a flash burn cold on the high knuckle. He screams into the dirty sock, rocking wildly on the chair.

“Hold him, Russ. Yeah, it sucks, I know. So does a fuck-load of pepper spray in the lungs—so I figure at this point we’re even... But then there’s the money. Why don’t you just tell us?”

Pulling the sock out. A supreme effort to not look down at the hand.

“I only have the \$700, I swear to god.”

“This guy’s tough. Or stupid.”

“Okay, okay. Russ? Put the sock back in.”

“No, wait! It’s the truth, I haven’t—please DON’T DO THAT!!” In goes the sock.

“You think I *like* taking your fingers, man? You think I—” cutting “*enjoy* this?! Hah?”

Agony, worse this time, the next finger over. He rocks in the chair, head shaking in disbelief of the pain, burnt, or frozen vanished finger bits. He looks at it now, black blood dribbling out.

“Where’s the money? Where’s the money, Mr. Guy?!”  
“Come on, fellah, this is boring. You gonna make me cut ‘em all? You’ll never jerk off again.”

“That’s sad.”

“Take the sock out, Russ... Where’s the *mon-ey*?”

Through tears, everything he’s saved, “Under the sink, in the compost.”

“Under the sink, in the compost!”

“Go and check, Russ.”

Waiting...

“Yeah,” from the kitchen, “maybe five grand.”

“You’ve made us very happy, fellah.”

“Gross, it stinks, even inside the zip-lock.”

His head is down in the anguish. Another slap.

“Okay. We got one more request and then you can go. You probably want to go to the hospital, hey? You know? They can probably sew those fingers back on, no harm done. You *hear* me, fellah? You can *save* your hand! Just one more little favour.”

“Uhhh...” Spinning in the half-light.

“You ready?”

“He looks not ready.”

“Slap him again, Russ.”

Back to the chair, the world, away from the placeless pain.

“Okay. Here we go. For a *thumb*—this’ll cost you a thumb if you get it wrong. For a *thumb*—give us the names and addresses of three of your grower friends.”



## Chapter 3 Rumor, Gossip and other forms of Reliable Data.

### Why ethnographic content analysis (ECA)?

When designing this research project I was confounded by what I deemed to be the most grievous of problems with proceeding through the overburden of documentary material. Was I to pour through all this information in a semi-organized, serial manner and finish by applying statistical methods to the collected data? That would leave little or no opportunity to ask important questions of the individual documents, especially the ones that stood out as exemplars of the larger discourse. It was necessary to find a way to interact with material in a more qualitative manner and that standard statistical analyses could be foresworn in exchange for qualitative methods that measured aggregate meaning and messages in constructed representations. The result was a move toward discourse analysis, a form of inquiry that tracks discourse over time to note shifts and trends in representations and the key speakers (or speech acts) that shape discourse on a specific topic.

Standard quantitative content analysis is a positivistic approach based on an assumed objectivity, designed to measure frequency and extent in messages but not meaning. It must be remembered that social sciences *soft* data cannot be treated the same way as purely positivistic *hard* scientific data. There are other methods for seeking data, such as a commitment to participant observation insofar as it pertains to documentary analysis. Thus, “although it may seem evident that any sustained inquiry is constituted through a complex and reflexive interaction process, it is also apparent that some research methods (e.g., ethnography) embrace this process, whereas others (e.g., survey research and standard qualitative content analysis) disavow it” (Altheide 1996:14).

Ethnographic content analysis presents an alternate ethos to sifting through documentary material. Where qualitative content analysis (QCA) is interested in reliability, ECA is more concerned with validity; QCA’s primary researcher involvement is in data analysis and interpretation; whereas, ECA requires the researcher to be reflective through all phases of the research process; QCA seeks numbers and, while ECA *is* interested in the quantitative aspects of any datum, it stresses as important the narratives which emerge from study.

Other important differences between QCA and ECA are worth considering. QCA seldom involves a reflexive research design; the progression from data collection, through analysis to interpretation is linear, while this process can be circular or even a-linear with ECA; sampling with ECA is purposeful, incorporating a progressive theoretical sampling methodology; data with ECA is narrative *and* numbers, while with QCA it is all numbers. Data analysis with ECA (i.e. the repetition of messages) advocates textual presentation. With QCA, as expected, data analysis is a statistical process and presentation takes the form of tables.

ECA meant not only that I could bring personal experience—gained through contacts in the marijuana industry—to bear upon primary documents in an effort to gain *proper context*, but also that I could bring large, text-based data groupings into the study. I was (and remain) interested in the Sam Brown story (explored below) but found it difficult under an initial QCA approach to find a way to discuss this large story in anything other than a numerical form; that is, there were such and such mentions of the word *crime* and a photo showing the suspect’s face in anger was reprinted X number of times, while his happy face was printed only Y times and so forth.

Another problem with the QCA approach is that it failed to account for/discuss omissions. *Not* covering the 2012 *Casseroles* protests in Quebec, a decision made by several Canadian media outlets, is a significant speech act and reveals deeper motivations within corporate-owned media to describe reality in a certain way or ways—a phenomenon Altheide describes as, “the more closely the concerns and values of social movements coincide with the concerns and values of elites in politics and in the media, the more likely they are to become incorporated in the prevailing news frames” (1996:32) and, by extension, the less, the less so. Hence the power of omission—what power doesn’t like to see, it will not cast the panoptic, unblinking eye of the media upon.

What delighted me, then, about the prospect of ECA was that I could use this form of archival and media analysis to discuss, in relation to the marijuana industry, that media outlets, although they imply a form of objective journalism, are *not* ideologically neutral. And it provided an opportunity for what James Clifford describes as thinking “historically about text and its possible readings” (1986:19).

Philippe Bourgois, in his *In Search of Respect; Selling Crack in El Barrio* (2002), reminds us that “structures of power and history cannot be touched or talked to except in the

purely subjective experience of the respondent” (17) or in the purely subjective experiences of the qualitative researcher who must wade through piles of documents, each of which constructed “in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all” (Sapir 1949:52). Yet, how necessary such an approach must be for, as Monica Wilson has stated, “any analysis not based on some translation of the symbols used by people of that culture is open to suspicion” (Turner 1956:6). Thus, we must attempt to *read* the marijuana workers and the growers for whom they toil in an exegesis of repetition through the twin lenses of the media and the documents of the larger culture beyond to understand how they are made and into what distinct formations of symbols and signs.

ECA or “how a researcher interacts with documentary materials so that specific statements can be placed in the proper context for analysis” (Altheide 1996:2) is an important methodology if we are to be able to first recognize and then ask questions of data as it surfaces. Several concepts must be defined before we advance. Frame, theme, format and discourse are used in ECA to describe aspects of this form of inquiry. Briefly, frame is concerned with the rhetorical structure of a communication, such as defining medical marijuana as a criminal justice issue rather than a public health issue. Themes are purveyed as universal truths, such as the consistent reference to former-President Richard Nixon’s retirement from public office as “resignation” when, in reality, he was about to be impeached by Congress and could have faced criminal charges; “themes (therefore) are the recurring theses that run through reports” (Altheide 1996:31). Format can be understood as the programming package or, “for example, we can quickly tell the difference between, say, a TV news cast, a sitcom and a talk show” (28-29). Finally, discourse is the meaning deployed, strategically producing understandings one way and not another, such as referring to the total population of 1999 WTO protestors in Seattle as “rioters” (*New Republic* 2013) or, as referring to the initial voluntary media blackout of the BP Deepwater Horizon environmental disaster in April of 2010 (Merry 2014). Meaning-making is an active process.

Media influences include trivialization (making light of language, dress, age, style and goals), polarization (emphasizing counterdemonstrations), emphasis on internal dissention, marginalization (demonstrators as deviants), disparagement by numbers, by effectiveness, reliance on statements by

government officials and other ‘authorities,’ emphasis on violence in demonstrations, de-legitimizing use of quotation marks around such terms as ‘peace march,’ [and] considerable attention to right-wing opposition (Altheide 1996:32).

Establishing exactly *what* proper context might be, however, can pose a peculiar ontological challenge. Fortunately for this researcher, several years of phenomenological experience with marijuana personnel—especially in instances of those *caught* or apprehended by state authorities—has illuminated the experiences of growers and the workers who labour for them as they go through the public process of being turned into a generic gangster whole. Representations in media documents of people I had encountered in the field were in stark contrast to the folk themselves. Individuals were anodized through discourse into criminals, gangsters, addicts and so forth; whereas, my experiences of them introduced me to people employed in alternative income-generating strategies, struggling to pay their bills, buy winter tires and getting their kids off to school. My grounded experience, then, provided relevant perspectives necessary to deem what could then be considered *proper context*. Altheide suggests the desired outcome is a blending of “the traditional notion of objective content analysis with participant observation to form ethnographic content analysis” (1996:2). An illustration will, perhaps, best clarify this practice.

First, however, it is important to note that when discussing *document*, I mean “any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis,” while *analysis* of said documents “refers to an integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure and technique for locating, identifying and [studying] documents for their relevance, significance and meaning” (1996:2). Documents are studied using a symbolic interactionist perspective that, in this instance, focuses on the meaning of representations found in the larger culture, the context in which the representation appears and the importance placed on the signification. Documents are the symbolic places where representations are generated and it is within documents where one finds the narratives that are intended to shape social consciousness. “Situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances” (13-14) are all to be scrutinized to better understand *how* these representations are achieved. Thus, “context, process, and emergence ... one of the most important facts about newspaper and TV news casts is that they are organizational products” (9)

and organizations are structured according to ideological imperatives. Therefore, even though most crimes are property crimes—387 violent crimes compared to 2,859 property crimes per 100,000 people in the U.S. in 2011 (FBI 2012) and, in Canada, 79 per cent of crimes reported in 2012 were property crimes (Statistics Canada 2012)—the perception created by media is that nearly *all* crimes involve violence (Bastian et al. 2013). The logic, then, is that news organizations have reasons to sell crime as violent. For our purposes, we want to look into how representations are forged as well as what was said and how was it illustrated.

On to an illustration. A peer, we will call him Michael, employed in marijuana's prodigious indoor industry in the Okanagan region, employed as a cultivation worker—a job that requires strict attention to marijuana plant needs and growth cycles as well as environment maintenance—was, in February 2012, arrested at his place of employment by members of the RCMP Kelowna detachment. Given that the facility in which he worked housed in excess of 3,000 plants, one might reasonably assume Michael was in a considerable amount of trouble. Local media were present on site at the time of the bust and, while police were advised by the grower that Michael was not a principal beneficiary of proceeds of crime nor was he the owner of the plants and released him from custody within three hours of arrest and, perhaps *most* significantly, later dropped all charges against him for Cultivation with Intent to Traffic, the media representation of him was simply as one of three men arrested. Not described as a worker, Michael's represented self was left dangling in the media report as a grower/trafficker, in fact, a principal beneficiary—"A 46 year old woman, a 38 year old man and a 36 year old man have been arrested and face charges trafficking and production charges" (AM1150 Radio 10 February 2012)—the broader implication being that there are no workers (as in those who sell their labour for wages and who do not own the means of production) in marijuana production.

What can be divined from such a representational strategy? Why are workers consistently ignored in reports? Why are growers consistently represented as gangsters? The relentless repetition of identical forms of representation seems to serve some sort of function. What is important is that this practice persists and evidence of such is presented in this paper. ECA is an excellent method that can illustrate and elaborate upon this relentless repetition.

As for data collection, only a few strategies are appropriate for ECA. Principal among these is progressive theoretical sampling or, "the selection of materials based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation" (Altheide 1996:33). This means learning to select

news items that are exemplary in terms of presenting such stereotypical representations as mentioned above. It means seeking out texts, such as CBC's *Fifth Estate* video documentary on the death of smuggler Sam Brown or Emily Brady's *Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier* (2013) to gain a better understanding of the public construction of representations of growers and their workers in a non-fictional, subject-specific, contemporary format.

### **A hiker's handbook.**

I was interested in the idea of a handbook for marijuana workers for several reasons. I wanted to articulate a useful artifact handed down to me as a participant observer in the outdoor sector. Should industrial-scale outdoor cultivation vanish as a practice in this province, this material would be invaluable as evidence of past life-ways and slash-and-burn type illicit agriculture in the region. Further, it struck me as a novel idea to write down what traditionally had been passed orally from worker to worker or grower to worker. Here was a body of information that aided new workers to function in the bush—a codified body of knowledge transmitted (in varying forms) through an entire industry sector, year after year, all by word of mouth. It rapidly set the parameters for conduct, was constantly being updated (“Tree down, tree down, tree down,” coming through a walkie-talkie from your lead vehicle, now means police roadblock ahead), and could outline necessary materials without which, the initiate would suffer needlessly.

But more than this, the very existence of such a handbook could serve to materialize and normalize what have, in the past, been exotic phantoms: the invisible woodland marijuana workers and the growers for whom they labour. By normalizing the worker as any other worker requiring trade knowledge and by exploring the dimensions of this worker's operational landscape he or she reverts from a nonentity to a human being. And a human worker presents a challenge to others who would objectify him or her. In this sense, then, the handbook is not really *for* the hiker, but for the reader who works in other, legitimate industries and who is prey to the media's (and other outlets') mis-representations of marijuana workers.

Could you walk a hiking trail without leaving tracks? Or carry huge loads down a logging road without a trace? Crouch in the bush, long after dark, silent, though you be in the company of bears, waiting for the word, for the moment you must rush to the truck, give every ounce of strength to shift the masses of dirt, the blocks of peat, the miles of hose, the pumps, the plants in long grey totes, countless times, agile and certain of every step into the black thick woods, no footprints, not falling once from site to trail

to road, to not reveal this secret place—found simply by stepping from the order of city to the chaos of bush: part of a vast aggregate of farms stretching province-wide, illicit, discrete; ten thousand, thousand hands, a wealth uncommon. Builders of community, parents, growers of food, home-makers, making off without a tax, without a trace. Here you'll find your British Columbian *Zapatas*: an insurgency of hard-working, happy, healthy people, under the very nose of the oblivious state—these ones know. They know how to leave no trace.

It's time to prepare. This is all stuff YOU need to BRING (if you do not wish to suffer unnecessarily). Hiking boots? Check. Socks & spare, zip-locked socks? Mmm-hmm. Gators? Super painkillers? Toilet paper? Caffeine pills? Quick-dry pants? Long sleeve shirt? Is this gear mosquito-proof? Is it brown/green? What's the forecast? Shorts and gaiters might not be your cup of tea—I happen to revel in the red marks the super elastics make on my legs, they make me feel 'on duty' like reins for a horse. Headlamp? Is this a night operation? Could it turn into one? Just bring it, and spare batteries. 1-3 litres of water, depending on conditions/heat. Compass? I think so, but I often get accused of an absurdly heavy pack. Defeat pack Nazism!!! A light t-shirt, green or brown. NO blues! No yellows! No reds! No oranges—ever!!! You got it?

Lunch? 1 meal for every four hours in the bush—at least. Avoid breadstuffs, they make you nappy. Energy balls, *Clif*, coconut bars (plenty of good fat!)—of these you will tire. They will reappear, uneaten, in tomorrow's lunch. Chocolate bars = good! Energy + a treat to fixate upon during the heavy slugging. *Arizona Green Tea* with ginseng is my secret weapon—a huge shot of water and delicious caffeine for when you feel as though you might not make it, like when your benefactor says, “50 more holes, now, up on those rocks.”

Sun hat—camo, mosquito net fitting over, down to your shirt collar. Merino wool pullover—wool stays warm, even when wet. *Natrapel*: a citronella, all-natural insect repellent (because there's no point in going all *Thoreau* only to catch the cancer from toxic repellents).

This is important: NO I.D.!!! No identification on your person in the bush—ever. No ATM receipts (one turned up at a site recently!), no mail, no to-do lists, no Health Care card (can you handle the chaos?). Zilch, nada.

Garden shears, *Leatherman*, knife (fixed blade), BEAR SPRAY—these things, in any combination (as long as that combination includes BEAR SPRAY—which works on bears, cougars, Conservation Officers (C.O.s), rippers, etc.). These go on your waist, on a strong belt. Bear bangers? Bottle rockets? These are good for ridding yourself of the more persistent of predators. How about a 12-gauge? You aren't required to have a transport permit in B.C. for this specific shotgun, but you *will* need a P.A.L. Check your work zone: are you likely to run into a grizzly? A cougar? Ask your benefactor. As one ex-military grower put it, “A 12-gauge just *feels right*.” Hell, usually you can talk/yell a bear away.

Gloves—gardening gloves are great (bring 3 pairs). I suggest a heavy-duty, leather palm/fingers glove for hard-core digging days (like 300+ holes plus two reservoirs in rocky or super-mud/clay conditions). Also, some surgical gloves for the more articulate, tinkering work.

Frame-pack—your lower back's 2<sup>nd</sup> best friend (the 1st being taking the day off)—with at least 2 ratchet- or pull-straps.

What you WEAR WHILE COMMUTING are civilian clothes: bright colours, sneakers, the kind of ball cap your Dad might wear (i.e. dorky), sunglasses. This stuff stays—clean, unscented by weed—inside the vehicle for the drive home. If you’ve been harvesting all day (or night) or even just working around mature plants, chances are you stink of the stuff and even have resin all over your person. Mechanics’ orange abrasive soap (*Gojo*) is good to have around (who doesn’t love oranges?) but it does seem out of place to a cop or a C.O. Pine tree-scented gas station fragrance is the least suspicious, so is gibroni cologne.

Here’s a tip: if you are carrying huge loads through hairy bush on a frame, use ski poles or sticks for extra balance and reduce the probability of a back injury (your back is your equity!)—especially when you are exhausted at the latter part of a 16hr workday.

“Why are you in the bush?” This is a profound question. Formulate a solid answer for the authorities. Remember, you’ll run into other people out there, too, loggers, hikers, and other growers. Your answer should be plausible. There’s no point carrying a kayak through the bush (been there!) if there aren’t any rapids around, likewise climbing gear with an absence of climbs. C.O.s must be taken especially seriously as they can seize a vehicle in the bush if they are suspicious of your intentions. So, you have shovels? Maybe you’re building a mountain bike trail. Where are your bikes? This might seem like paranoid overkill but it is *super* important. Got a canoe with you? Can you name the local waterway you are purportedly seeking? A well thought-out cover story can make all the difference between the careful and the incarcerated. Here are a few decent ideas: 1. berry-picking—make sure you have the correct time of season and you have baskets—maybe even go pick some, you can leave half-filled baskets by your vehicle for excellent cover; 2. wood-cutting—you’ll need a woodcutter’s permit, a helmet, chainsaw (and knowledge of use) and gear. Maybe even cut a little wood and have it stacked nearby; 3. RV camping—great! Take a crew out and do several days’ maintenance over multiple sites. An RV doesn’t look so out of place as long as any specialty work gear isn’t left lying around a campsite, drying over a fire, etc. You’ll need a way to deal with resin-encrusted work clothes—maybe a fresh set for each worker for each day, the soiled stuff into giant vacuum-seal bags; 4. Air-soft/paintball/bow-hunting expeditions—these are always in season and lend an air of recreation to you and your gang. Obviously, whatever works for you is an option, as long as it gives the casual watcher and law enforcement officer alike something to rationalize regarding your presence in the bush.

Vehicle. Double (king-cab), SUV or pickup with tinted canopy; ‘sensitive’ loads can be dropped prior to the more high-visibility trips (i.e. with multiple workers). Remember: no canopy = less hassle/suspicion. RVs forever!!! Outdoor trekking-type vans with huge gear racks; quads; dirt bikes. It all depends on the specific work at hand. You should never get caught if you’re on a dirt bike (license plate wisely removed prior to operations).

Maps. Know your work zone—is it being actively logged? Know the surrounding roads, know an alternate hike out (I mean *know* it.).

Radio. Cab-mounted (for main vehicle) and hand-held units (for lead/tailing vehicles: “We got a deer on the road,” this means a roadblock ahead and time for the main vehicle to turn back, now led by his formerly-trailing vehicle.



Some thoughts. What is/ought to be visible through the windows of your locked, parked vehicle? Stuff that is easy to rationalize: forestry tape, permits; as a tourist, maps, hiking guidebooks. DO YOUR HOMEWORK! This isn't day camp—this is a career path! Nothing sloppy, nothing incriminating. A final check is a good idea before you leave your truck parked for the day/night. What do you see inside other vehicles you come across in the bush? Take a look, make mental notes.

Alright. Let's say you're on the road. What's preventing the police from pulling you over? Keep your speed +/- 3 km/h around the limit. A clean vehicle. All your lights are in working order. Your vehicle is in good repair. But, as freedom of movement is slowly rescinded in Canada, you should assume always that you *will* be pulled over. Papers are in order, the interior is clean, no smells. Non-work clothes on passengers. Now, what's your situation? Police are permitted to search your vehicle in Canada, so the best defence is a strong offence. Be calm, be respectful. You have a reasonable expectation of privacy according to the Supreme Court of Canada, you merely need to appear a normal citizen on his normal way to wherever/whatever.

On logging roads, be friendly and polite. But there's no need to chat with locals: wave and move on. Remember to switch your vehicles up if your parking spot/drop zone/frequency in a certain area has the potential to arouse suspicion (i.e. active logging areas). My experience with loggers is they don't really care why you're in the bush, they just wish you'd get out of their way. But there's no need to lead them to your site—some will steal your weed if you give them a chance! Good luck. And *don't* get caught.

### **Purposes of this inquiry as they pertain to methods**

I flatter myself that I engaged in an organized approach to materials unearthed in the processes of inquiry. I organized my efforts around the practice of progressive theoretical sampling (defined above); yet, the reality is more about permitting data patterns, as they emerge, to set the direction of inquiry. If but two examples of “worker” are uncovered during the examination of hundreds of documents, one might move the inquiry in a direction which seeks to analyze representations of growers and their workers as gangsters, of which there are many examples. Progressive sampling, then, must be considered in light of the fact that, “it is difficult to know what the range and variety (of relevant messages) are to be at the start of the research. It must emerge as the researcher inspects and reflects on some initial materials ... [and through] progressive theoretical sampling” (Altheide 1996:33).

An over-arching goal is the ongoing assessment of the discourse surrounding social labour in the marijuana industry as it may be discerned within the framework of theory gathered under the banner of political economy. Eric R. Wolf, celebrated practitioner of this Marxist socio/political theory, suggests political economy “studies societies, states and markets as historically evolving phenomena and hence questions conceptions of these arrangements

particular to the capitalist experience” (2010:xix). News items, film and book-length non-fiction documents that dealt with marijuana in this context are analyzed and included in this research.

### **The development of protocols**

In the case of the RCMP media release and Kootenay Boundary Radio (KBR) mentioned above, I do not suggest the radio station’s alteration of the story resulted in the manufacture of a secondary document. Instead, the entirety of the document as it was found in archives is, for my purposes, a primary document. The *process* is most significant when defining terms, rather than a strict observance of the application of a ‘filter.’ So, the document is *not* the RCMP media release form and its contents but, rather, the RCMP media release form and its contents *and* the KBR copy (and, were it available, a transcript of the on-air reading of the copy).

Ways of knowing gleaned from conversation with marijuana growers and the workers who labour for them can be understood as auxiliary documents, insofar as they are “neither the main focus of investigation nor the primary source of data for understanding the topic” but are “relevant for understanding a particular aspect of a study” (Altheide 1996:4).

The study protocol, defined as the construction of “several categories [variables] to guide data collection via the use of a data collection sheet” (1996:25) was designed to enable the assessment of two chief aspects of any document, “document process, context and significance *and* how the document helps define ... meaning” (1996:12). In relation to the assessment of representations, then, I designed a protocol that looked to how a document proceeded (what sort of narrative was employed? what sort of constructionist employment of differences was engaged?), what was its context (i.e. was it concerning medical marijuana? was it concerning marijuana-related gang violence?) and how was the document significant? Thousands of marijuana news items can be located but, of these, which are significant? And why? Finally, the protocol must be designed to ask how meaning is defined. What can it mean when nearly every newspaper article that mentions illicit marijuana production includes an assertion that the people and the facility had links to organized crime? And what is meant and what is implied by the phrase “organized crime”?

The Shawn Lamb Archives were selected as they house the complete *Nelson Daily News* fonds—as that publication is now defunct—including all press photos dating from 1964. A semi-complete fonds from KBR, Nelson City Police and court records dating from 1897, the *Nelson*

*Express* (defunct) fonds, Nelson City Social Services records (1933-1975), as well as many other fonds and documents are located on-site (i.e., a complete record of Mayoral correspondence dating 1962-1984).

The numbers are important. Specific references and even the number of documents assessed are keys to understanding, to knowing. But how much is enough? For instance, Altheide postulates that “the researcher needs enough reports to demonstrate the differences ... [and] require fifteen to twenty reports, depending on resources, time and access to materials” (35). For the requirements of this study, I examined hundreds of documents over the span of three years (2012-2014), as well as noting the variety of relevant documents and the form they take (i.e. non-fiction novel, newspaper article, magazine piece, etc.).

### **Coding and analysis**

I drew on both history and political economy in order to locate the people in the larger fields of force generated by systems of power exercised over social labour.

– Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*  
(2010:xxx)

Several sources of representation were chosen for analysis. Non-fiction, book length expositions were engaged to access representations, how they were constructed, the significance such representations hold in the wider discourse and what meaning is manufactured for the public. Radio programming transcriptions were also considered if deemed germane to the nature of the inquiry. Works studied include: Emily Brady's *Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier* (2013), Mark Haskell Smith's *Heart of dankness: underground botanists, outlaw farmers, and the race for the Cannabis Cup* (2012), the CBC Radio program *The Current* interview with Slavoj Žižek (2012), NPR's *All Things Considered* (aired 13 February 2012), Ian Mulgrew's *Bud Inc.: Inside Canada's Marijuana Industry* (2006), and Eric Schlosser's *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market* (2004), among others.

Investigative journalism in the form of magazine articles is another excellent source of representations of workers and the growers for whom they labour. Examples interrogated below include: *The Tyee*'s “The war on BC's small pot farmer” by Molly Lynch (December 2013), Patrick Radden Keefe's “Buzzkill; Washington State discovers that it's not so easy to create a legal marijuana economy” (*The New Yorker*, Nov. 18, 2013), *The Walrus* article, “Grow

Industry: Marijuana prohibition is destined to end. Who will become the Seagrams of weed?" (April 2013), "Weeded Out" by Bob Keating (in the Summer 2012 *Kootenay Mountain Culture*), and the *Rolling Stone* article "Death of a Free-rider" (August 2009). Further, many shorter news items were sourced online, through *LexisNexis* portal, as well as by progressive sampling of large online media outlets, items specifically involving indoor or outdoor busts (B.C. only), medical marijuana, smuggling, marijuana and the judicial process and decriminalization or legalization. Because marijuana industry sectors (illicit and legal) have witnessed incredible change in recent years I selected stories that were published/aired after 2004, the majority dating between 2010 and 2014. Of interest were newscasts and online documentaries, such as *The Fifth Estate's* video on the Sam Brown story, "Over the Edge" (2009).

To facilitate contrasts and comparisons with representations of workers in other relevant occupational categories, I looked into Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (2011), media reports of migrant workers in Okanagan vineyards, and Jerry Langton's *The Notorious Bacon Brothers: Inside Gang Warfare on Vancouver Streets* (2013) to provide detailed descriptions of, respectively, tree-planters, vineyard workers (both occupational categories are similar to that of marijuana production work) and non-cannabis related criminals at work. Also included were Government of BC regional crime profile web pages information (2013), as well as a series of Health Canada web pages pertaining to the now-expired MMAR (Medical Marihuana Access Regulations) and the new MMPR (Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations 2014) program.

In the Sam Brown marijuana smuggling case study, which gained a national status, I assessed thirty-six documents. For an item to be considered a national story, it must have been covered by either *The Globe and Mail* (Canada's paper of record) or a similar American source (*The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*) or have aired at a national broadcast level, such as CBC's *The Fifth Estate*.

To gather data and make sense of medical marijuana in all its contemporary complexity, I have analyzed more than 40 articles, as well as meeting with Bob Marsh (July 2012) in Victoria B.C., then-current head of the Cannabis Trade Association (a medical marijuana organization linking clients to producers, with ties to Health Canada), conducting an online conversation with George E. Penfold (August 2012)<sup>1</sup>, former Regional Innovation Chair at Selkirk College, and

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<sup>1</sup> Both Marsh and Penfold's conversations were conducted casually due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter.

interviewing Don Schultz, founder of Greenline Academy (May 2013), a medical marijuana lobby and education group based in Kelowna, BC.

Media products included in this study covering arrests, seizures, busts of both indoor and outdoor grow-operations and the folks attending to such were nearly all required to be set in Canada (of these, most were set in British Columbia) and numbered over three hundred. Lastly, I considered twenty-seven articles described as legalization *state of the union* pieces—discussing various issues, facts, opinions, trends, agendas, etc. These included the U.S. Senate Hearing on the Department of Justice decision (September 2012) to permit states to decide marijuana policy and the RAND Corporation briefing (2012) on legalization of marijuana.

Once stories were selected, they were coded for relevant content. Items were coded as relevant using established research questions: does the story pertain to marijuana production, medical marijuana or legalization? Did the marijuana production occur (for the most part) in southern interior British Columbia? Did such articles speak to larger, structural issues such as legalization?

It is important to note that, dependent on the type of article selected, varying media frames (discussed below) were employed exclusively or in concert. Dramatic descriptions could be employed to frame individuals as criminals, experts, or as law enforcement personnel/state representatives to lead the reader/viewer/listener in certain perceptive/cognitive directions resulting in prescribed conclusions. Omissions of facts could be made to achieve these same objectives (i.e. the Michael example above).

Stories that frame individuals as criminals tend to imply themes of incorrect social behaviour and are understood as *accounts*, insofar as they refer to events that violate routine expectations or are dramatic descriptions and which may further act as entertainment programming. Altheide suggests accounts are “social repair devices (used) to indicate” (1996:35) to the consumer of the media product that such actions are inappropriate, immoral, illicit, etc., whereas dramatic descriptions are complexes of entertainment bites, cautionary tales and explicit references to violence.

Of significance in establishing trends was the categorizing of articles and statements therein as positive, neutral or negative. Positive ratings tended to deal with medicinal marijuana, neutral were instances when relevant facts were considered and reliable sources were available for review while most others were negative ratings. These are the emotive contents of

representations found throughout the documentary universe and are included in the analysis to aid in understanding the value judgments placed on subjects by those constructing the representation. Deleted: Put another way: how are we *encouraged to feel* about the gangster stereotype?

## Results

Once data was coded, it was analyzed for consideration. Numeric totaling had the effect of revealing the larger discourse(s) embedded within.

What emerged from this phase of the research were three main bodies of representation and reference to aspects of the larger discourse. Illicit production of marijuana, covered in media and other forms of public discourse, had two significant outcomes. First, nearly every grower representation associated the reported incident with organized crime. Second, workers in this industry were rendered invisible by virtue of omission. They simply did not appear in the majority of stories. Obviously this changed when assessing Emily Brady's *Humboldt*, but only slightly, her task being an exposition of the marijuana production reality in Humboldt County, CA. But in Jerry Langton's *The Notorious Bacon Brothers*, while grower representations abound (and are almost exclusively linked to Hell's Angels, Red Scorpions, United Nations or other gangs), no workers are to be found. While organized crime is indeed involved in the marijuana industry, it is almost entirely absent from the smaller operations. As stated above, absolute categories simply don't exist with this object of inquiry.

The subject of medical marijuana overtook illicit production in 2012 and never looked back. The hot topic of the hour, the production of medical marijuana as a news item moved from a cautionary account to a moral justification trope and back again as the politics surrounding this industry sector shifted ground in the spring of 2012 and again at the end of March, 2014. Prior to Health Canada's new Medical Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) (which went into effect 1 April 2014), stories shifted focus from the grey market nature of semi-legal production to clients of the Medical Marijuana Access Regulations (MMAR) and their right to medicine under the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in early 2002. By the summer of 2013, the focus began to shift to the proposed legislation (MMPR) and how it would "clean up" the corrupted older system. This evolution and the implications for such a shift are not explored in depth here as they are beyond the scope of this thesis.

## the Birkenstalker

This piece came out of an interaction with a buyer. I had been invited to a large illicit indoor grow operation to look over the operation and, during my visit, a truck rolled up. My hosts indicated that I should pay attention to the individual who was then rapidly approaching the facility doors, wading through the snow, sockless, in his sandals:

his name is not important enormous pick-up roaring up the drive  
a star-shaped crack in the windscreen where once in a steroid-addled rage he lashed out  
unintelligible caveman scream

yet he arrives a perpetual allergy  
clearing his throat as though some profound thing might be uttered  
his sinuses trouble him no end as he sucks phlegm down his neck  
or into the deepest Paleolithic refugium of his skull

he grunts belches sighs happily oblivious to all who stare in disbelief—and what could we  
say?  
how should one reprove this mountain? he has come with a grocery bag of bills a sneezy,  
horking Santa

he is speaking, "... the fucking guy in Regina won't fucking cough up the fucking  
remainder ..."  
but a hack sort of wheeze takes control he can't seem to get on top of it  
throws his body this way and that heave in a snort like the Chinese brother  
who swallowed the ocean

worse: the habit the grasp at such a beard with both hands strains skyward, moan  
wipes and pulls his moustaches as his hands rise press firmly into sideburns  
then up!  
into the hair smears some vital ointment to the very crown of his head  
not ceasing the hands travel down the back of his occipital  
throws out a belch to say his ablutions have stopped

he strikes the most bizarre impression upon his audience gathered to discuss matters in  
earnest  
with a man whose very head seems a contested space a planet as yet unformed  
a wad of dough

was this grizzly born and raised upon a mountain waste?  
he grunts to stand once more proceeds to bag his game finally slams the factory door  
his truck a shudder dust of cloud

## Chapter 4 The Framing of Public Discourse

### The green-eyed dragon.

'They don't make such a big deal about busting a 50-year-old couple because the public doesn't see it as a threat. The only way to maintain public support is to blame it on the Asian gangs,' says one grower.

— Drew Edwards, *West Coast Smoke*

Clay, it's a tough one. How do you get reliable data about an illegal industry? There isn't exactly a registry of grow ops, aggregators/exporters etc ... the whole issue gets portrayed as gangs, guns and violence. All part of the 'war on drugs' storyline.

— Personal correspondence with George Penfold, former Regional Innovation Chair, Selkirk College, B.C.

In this part I look at how media frame public discourse surrounding marijuana. Paul Rabinow has suggested that media “dabble in the timely construction of subjects, especially in contexts” (1977:155). Media examples in this section include print news, online news, TV news and key forums, such as the *B.C. Medical Journal* monthly column by Dr. William R. Vroom. News sources include: *CTV*, *CBC*, *Canada Press Wire Service*, *Kamloops Daily News*, *CHBC News*, *Victoria Times Colonist*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Province*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *Forbes Magazine*, and the online news organizations *PolicyMic* and *Slumz/Boxden*.

Discourse is created and directed using techniques discussed above and certain analytical approaches, such as a symbolic-interactionist approach, are used to assess how identities and subjects are constructed, can focus on the use of differences to create binaries, to facilitate the creation of the *other* in discourse, and to employ stereotypes and categories. Constructivist conceptions “with a focus on conceptualizing news texts ... as syntactical, script, thematic, rhetorical structures ... so that evidence of the news media's framing of issues in news texts may be gathered” (Altheide 1996:68) in particular need also to be considered. A fine example, employed above, is “treating illegal drug use as a ‘public health issue’ as opposed to a ‘criminal justice issue’” (30). Frames in reference to marijuana are principally fear (i.e., the specter of organized crime/violence and/or a hyper-radicalized *other*), compassion (i.e., medical marijuana) and legalization (the socio-legal agenda). The question to consider is: how are growers, the workers who labour for them, and so-called legitimates portrayed?



## **Tracking discourse.**

I begin by seeking representations of workers or their grower employers with articles that discuss the issue of medical marijuana in Canada. Four key legal moments inform the history of this particular phenomenon: the 2001 Regulation on Access to Marijuana for Medical Purposes, as established by Health Canada; the Ontario Court of Appeal ruling in 2000 (*R. v. Parker*) that prohibition of marijuana was unconstitutional, as it held no provision for legitimate medical use of the substance; the 2008 *Sftekopoulos v. Canada* (Federal Court) decision resulting in the formation of the Medical Marijuana Access Regulations (which enabled licensed consumers to grow or designate the growth of marijuana or purchase marijuana from Health Canada licensed producers); and, the Apr. 1st, 2014 implementation of Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations.

This face of marijuana discourse is a complex one, combining categories of compassion with system abuses, organized crime, corporatization of the sector, and regulation/social control.

Rarely does one encounter stories of individuals suffering from severe chronic pain who are either growing their own marijuana or buying it from growers (see Wilson 2012, *Pot, Inc.: Inside Medical Marijuana, America's Most Outlaw Industry*). In the *BC Medical Journal's* *Up In Smoke*, Dr. William Vroom casts a dubious eye on medical marijuana, suggesting, “some caring qualities can be exploited when patients present with requests of questionable merit—for drugs, disability forms or medical marijuana” (2013:229). Vroom goes on to vilify all grow operations with a hasty sweep of the manus, “with such operations bringing the risks of fire, pesticides and crime to the neighborhoods in which they operate” (229) and then promotes the new MMAR program (he notes the MMAR program is a “failed” one). Sadly, no workers nor even conscientious, indoor growers turn up in Vroom’s op-ed.

In “Health Canada set to launch billion-dollar medical marijuana free market” (CTV 2013:1), writer Dean Beeby attempts a rapid download of the medical marijuana story-so-far. He, too, promotes the idea that the new system will be good for everyone, quoting a Health Canada official, ““We're fairly confident that we'll have a healthy commercial industry in time,” Sophie Galarneau, a senior official with the (Health Canada) department, said in an interview” (CTV:1). Beeby proceeds to confound the reader with some rapid calculations, all the while denigrating the MMAR: “The old system fostered only a cottage industry, with 4,200 growers licensed to produce for a maximum of two patients each” followed five sentences later by,

“There are currently 37,400 medical marijuana users recognized by the department, but officials project that number will swell more than 10-fold, to as many as 450,000 people, by 2024” (CTV:1).

Absent here are the workers. One wonders how the requisite marijuana will be produced for the projected 450,000 clients of 2024? I asked Beeby about public representations of marijuana growers and the workers who labour for them (he had almost two months to respond) but he declined to return my correspondence.

Stories like Beeby’s are likely to frame discourse around the state’s compassionate exception of medical marijuana use, directing discussion toward government red tape, the sluggish progress of establishing dispensaries, the myriad policies and the many abuses of the systems, which require strict governmental controls to “prevent the marijuana business from becoming too expansive, as happened in California and Colorado” (*NY Times* 8 April 2012). An excellent example here is the item “Medical marijuana lets BC growers earn thousands on streets” (CBC 14 April 2013), in which journalist Jack Keating frames an industry sector careening into chaos: “the Conservative government has been told by police, municipal government and individual citizens who say the system has spun wildly out of control. It vowed again this week to scrap the personal production licenses by next spring and go to a system of large, secure grow sites that are federally inspected and run by people with deep pockets” (1).

The message is fairly clear: that the MMAR is in the hands of criminals and needs to be changed so it might be more effectively controlled by wealthy folk. Keating moves on to note the lamentations of police and other officials: “Long and other officers say the medical marijuana rules have made their jobs almost impossible, as more and more illegal growers apply for licenses” (Keating 2013:1). Growers make an appearance in this item but not workers and the growers, are described as “illegal” even if they apply (and therefore enter the legal industry sector) to possess a license to grow. I sought to ask Keating about representations of people associated with the marijuana industry—he, too, had ample time to respond—but the CBC or Keating (or both) weren’t interested in his responding.

In “Medical marijuana licenses no longer a home-grown option” (CBC 1 October 2013), journalist Tom Parry reveals the newest of tropes associated with the MMAR issue: “Starting October 1, licenses will no longer be issued to people who wish to grow their own medical marijuana. As of April 2014, the practice will be outlawed. Anyone using medical marijuana will

need to get it from a licensed medical supplier” (1). And who will supply the supplier? Likely large-scale grow-ops. And who will grow the marijuana in the large-scale grow-ops? Workers are completely absent from this discussion.

Here is another version by Sunnie Huang (CBC News), just one week later: “Starting April 1st, 2014, the only legal source to obtain medical marijuana in Canada will be through producers approved by Health Canada” (CBC Huang, 7 October 2013). The usage of “producer” here, implies large fields of marijuana tended by a lone producer perched on a tractor—an improbable outcome given the multi-tasking, labour-intensive nature of cultivation and processing required. While one might expect to find them here, no workers are presented in this article.

Permutations of this factum appear throughout the Canadian media through the autumn of 2013 on into the spring of 2014. An earlier version on the Canadian Press Wire noted, “Need medical marijuana? You'll have to get it by mail” (10 June 2013).

Of importance is the assertion that marijuana will come from the "mail." It will not be grown at all, the article seems to say, but will appear in a sealed Tupperware container at your front door. And no mention of workers is made.

The cellar tropic theme is a popular one. I use this term to categorize stories that centre on the risks and outcomes associated with indoor grow-ops, key places where marijuana labourers work. The basement (or outbuilding) as equatorial jungle, lit by twenty (or two hundred) thousand-watt suns, stirred by mechanical winds, rained on by drippers and watering wands. In this frame, legal and illicit growers transform houses into toxic dumps, whole compounds are buried underground and, what appears to be a normal, suburban residence is really a factory. Treatment of individuals ranges from neighborhood-wrecking growers to invisible workers.

In “Abundant supply of shipping containers for would-be pot growers” (*The Vancouver Sun* 2013) crime reporter Kim Bolan urges us to consider a raid in Langley, B.C., when RCMP discovered shipping containers buried beneath a residential lawn, where a grow operation had been set up: “when [the shipping containers] came out of the ground and you looked at them—they had been under there for a while, a few years—they are pretty rusted. It is even possible at some point that the roofs could have collapsed or the sides could have collapsed and the earth

would have fallen in on the grow or the people working as the gardeners, (Constable) Houghton said” (Bolan 2013).

Bolan here uses the transitive “people working” to identify workers, an approximation of “worker”. The article then shifts ground suddenly, suggesting no one but a violent gang would think to bury the containers: “No one has yet been charged, but police said they believe the sophisticated operation is linked to the Hells [sic] Angels” (Bolan 2013). I asked Bolan if she would care to take part in this research, about her take on representations of individuals in the marijuana industry. But Bolan was not interested in talking.

In “Latest Kelowna green team sees RCMP execute 16 grow op warrants, including for medical pot,” Jennifer Smith goes to work on this frame, noting seven busts were legal indoor operations that were over their limit, “and only one of those seven operations was found to be growing within its prescribed limits” (Smith 8 April 2013). But it was busted anyway? The association of the legal ops with the illicit ones suggests to the reader that the medical marijuana system is out of control.

In the following example of the cellar tropic theme in action, we are told about the sort of damage a grow-op can bring to a house: “Bhardwaj said he noticed during an inspection that the couple had damaged the apartment by cutting 10-centimetre holes in the walls to provide power to the grow-op which in turn caused mould and moisture damage to walls and floors” (Brazao, Ormsby 2013).

In a similar item, the frame is employed to frighten would-be homebuyers: “B.C. mayors warn new medical marijuana rules will leave thousands of contaminated and fire-prone homes across the province next year.” And, in another paragraph: ““Anyone who is going to buy these homes in the future needs assurances that they were restored to correct, habitable condition,” Abbotsford Mayor Bruce Banman told CTV News at the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention Wednesday” (CTV 8 September 2013).

For home-owners, the image of the indoor grow operation represents a palpable terror: one’s single largest investment could very well have been at one time a moldy grow-op, unreported and toxic. Fear remains the frame in an overwhelming number of non-medical marijuana news items. The reason likely is that, “fear is an important social problem because it often leads people to look for fear-reducing solutions, usually involving the state’s use of force” (Altheide 1996:70). In *Creating Fear; News and the Construction of Crisis*, (2000) Althiede

notes: “The Center for Media and Public Affairs reported in April 1998 that the national (U.S.) murder rate has fallen by 20 percent since 1990—but the number of murder stories on network newscasts rose in those same years by about 600 percent” (21). In the piece, “Police bust massive grow-op with 11 greenhouses” (*Kamloops Daily News* 25 June 2011), the Hope, B.C. industrial-scale operation is associated with a nursery in Surrey, B.C. and, loosely, with another in the Okanagan’s Lake Country, B.C. The implication is the grow-ops were run by organized crime. Yet no connection is ever drawn between huge marijuana production facilities and workers required to operate them.

Overtures to organized crime are abundant within the frame of fear. In the piece, “RCMP arrest four in West Kelowna drug bust” RCMP Const. Brown associates a seized grow operation with organized crime: “Organized crime is often involved in grow operations, according to Const. Brown. He says individuals involved with organized crime are often armed and show little regard for the safety of neighbors around drug operations” (*CHBC News* 14 December 2010).

But what is organized crime? A single grower selling her produce to a middle-man? Actually, no. A family who grows, processes their marijuana, and drives it to Vancouver where a buyer takes it off their hands? Yes, this is organized crime under the RCMP definition:

Within Canadian law enforcement, a legal definition for organized crime has only existed since the late 1990's following the enactment of Bill C-95. Amendments to this area of the Criminal Code have led to the present legal definition found within section 467.1(1) of the *Criminal Code of Canada*, which states a "criminal organization" means a group, however organized, that: (a) is composed of three or more persons in or outside Canada; and, (b) has as one of its main purposes or main activities the facilitation or commission of one or more serious offences, that, if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, including a financial benefit, by the group or by any one of the persons who constitute the group. The various components that comprise this legal definition are based on the exclusion of a group of

three or more persons that has formed randomly for the immediate commission of a single offence (RCMP 2014).

Thus, it is not the nature of the organization that is considered by police when applying this label, but the number of individuals. A group of workers toiling for a single grower are then considered an example organized crime, whether they are peaceful hippies or machine-gun toting maniacs.

Weapons seized during police raids are prime headline content within the fear frame, a tag implying violence and lawlessness. In “Record pot seizure in Mission; 8,000 plants destroyed, 8 arrested, weapons found” (*The Province* June 28, 2009), journalist Sam Cooper headlines the weapons: “Eight adults were arrested and about 8,000 mature pot plants seized, along with a duffle bag holding two handguns, two fully automatic weapons, a shotgun and four assault rifles ... (Const.) Harding said she's not aware of gang connections to the massive grow operation.”

Eight thousand plants would require a number of labourers and yet, any potential workers are transmogrified into gun-wielding stereotypes for our consideration. I asked Cooper what he thought about public representations of individuals associated with the marijuana industry. He suggested media representations were a result of how individuals portrayed themselves to the media, an interesting take on the agency of actors and the public construction of identities. But he shied away from any real discussion, stating he had not spent much time thinking about the matter.

### **Army of Joy**

This poem was written in the spring of 2012 at a time when I was following illicit outdoor marijuana workers and growers into sites located in the Regional Districts of Central Okanagan and the Central Kootenay. Of concern to growers, were proper planting, maintenance, harvesting and processing of the produce. Workers, toiling for day rates (about \$320 a day regardless of the number of hours required), were more concerned about getting through the year on the money they could earn. Many worked for multiple growers, tried working their own sites on days off and resorted to trimming in the autumn to save enough to get through the winter. Unlike tree-planters, they were not eligible for Employment Insurance.

*We work too hard  
we're too tired  
to fall in love.  
Therefore we must  
overthrow the government.  
We work too hard  
we're too tired  
to overthrow the government.  
Therefore we must  
fall in love.  
— Rod Smith*

Dear (deleted): the  
Valley looks cold  
to me. How will  
you make a life

For your lady, yourself, the  
baby? Should this poem be  
more positive? I can't get my  
head around the prob

Lem, this dream of hope and  
happiness. I write to  
fight, because poems are  
bullets are nurses are

Soldiers in the war, this  
war against (what shall we  
name it?) against the sin of wages  
against monstrous

Greed, against our own  
sorrow. Dear (your lover's name):  
winter's coming I can  
feel it in my bones. People can't eat

The dread of want, no matter  
how much wood they cut. Days  
are shorter now—already cold  
way up where

We built the zombie-proof

box. My dear (Prime Minister) we  
sense your headless machine tonight, that  
which our joyous forces

Must wrestle blind on the razor  
rim of history. This thing you've  
made screams rich white, still-born  
rage at our resolve. We smell your robot

Fear, this brute, scaled skull of isolation  
—and we're holding this thing by the ears.  
But, sooth, my child's up in the loft, sick and  
Hungry.

I can hardly see to write the

Words: "Dear Me: the Valley  
seems dark tonight, go ask the  
obviously-extant, extinct Sinixt—"  
lay lines shifting ... You say there's

The harvest, twenty days in the  
hills (I'm not allowed to name them), but  
will it get you through? Will the grower make  
advances? And will you really risk

Prison? Won't the rippers get  
it first? Aren't there deer on the  
road? By the singular beam of your  
headlamp! And *Conversation Officers*

Everywhere?! Oh, the Arnica, Emergen-C, knee-  
brace, tree-planter tape, the tensor, mole-  
skin, propolis—sing a song of aging  
labour. Are you not, in point of

Fact, selling your body piece-  
meal? Plantar fasciitis, your lower  
back spins a tail of disaster—'cause  
when it goes, it be gone: no

Worker's comp, nor re-  
training: "Name?"  
"(Yours)."  
"Occupation?"



“Pot grower.”

“Age?”

“38.”

“Oh... you look much

Older.” And what justice would you  
find, in a province where every-  
one’s complicit in the good  
times; but the cops hunt YOU

Down. And you’re just a  
worker, a hiker, a trimmer, the  
driver who’ll never get rich—I ask it  
again: WILL IT GET YOU

THROUGH? These words seem to be typing

*Me.* Dearest Mother; I’m back in  
school and what a con. The walls are grey  
and featureless, so too the lectures, but  
just below the surface, the ancient

Insects stir, inchoate, jealous  
over bits of rusted chain. The academy  
is sick and dying. By (your god here), the  
Valley looks good just now. As a

Joke, I want to start burning Business  
books, Economics texts, journals of  
Commerce, ‘cause they’re not  
worth the trees they cut down to

Print such obscenities upon. As a lark I want  
to offer a course called *Anthropology of the  
Murderous Rich* 100 or may  
be *Oral Traditions of Technocrat Doublespeak* (TBA).

And there’s *Art for Bigots*, *Art for Pervs* (seminar  
only). I think I’ll die in this  
paper-mine and no one will ever  
know. Dear (Milton Friedman): your economy

In tatters is like war coming down, dog-men  
are gathering (I see guns in their eyes), America  
is broken forever and Canada’s not far  
behind: a few breaths from collapse and I guess

We're to eat the dead? I can't walk to Pass-  
more with a sucking chest-  
wound. And I wish I'd listened  
harder to my grand-folks who survived

The Great Depression. But I do re-  
call my Granny and her final,  
asthmatic skies: The Valley looks warm to  
me, the Valley looks warm and

Bright. Dear (everyone): Maybe you'll  
make it. This poem wants you to  
be happy. We've seen others survive and they  
don't work at Kaleshnikov's they don't go

Off to the tar sands. You only ask  
for a winter cabin, to make art, a muffler  
for your shit-box, a big bag of rice—perhaps  
there's *green* enough? The

Mountain looks smart to me, like a  
victorious insurgency: a Chiapas of  
the mind, a Confederacy  
of the forest, Resistance piney-scented,

Florets of illicit statehood. And the  
Valley looks righteous tonight.

## Chapter 5 The Spokespeople

Goodbye to all my friends at home,  
Goodbye to people I've trusted;  
I've got to go out and make my way,  
I might get rich, you know I might get busted.

- Steve Miller Band, *Jet Airliner*

In this section, I look into how workers or the growers they work for are represented in longer, magazine-length articles as well as non-fiction, book-length treatments and pertinent radio transcripts. These sources are divergent in their representational strategies and include pieces from *The New Yorker*, *The Walrus* and *Kootenay Mountain Culture*, Emily Brady's *Humboldt; life on America's marijuana frontier*, Ian Mulgrew's *Bud Inc.: inside Canada's marijuana industry* and Mark Haskell Smith's *Heart of dankness: underground botanists, outlaw farmers, and the race for the Cannabis Cup*. Further, I consider excerpts from *The Current* (CBC) interview with Slavoj Žižek (2013) and from National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* (13 February 2012), as well as a RAND Corporation briefing in Washington, D.C. (2012). As a preliminary analysis of these sources, I found Slavoj Žižek's statements on how an illicit market industry serves the larger system it is embedded within, to be extremely illuminating given the scope of this thesis, while the NPR section reveals how media coverage can focus on states' rights versus federal policy in the United States. Didactically, the Health Canada source is interesting due to its linking medical marijuana access legislation and the involvement of organized crime in that sector.

### **Brady's *Humboldt*.**

Emily Brady's *Humboldt; life on America's marijuana frontier* published in 2013 is current and germane to this project, taking as its subject matter Humboldt County, CA. marijuana growers, their workers and the communities in which they operate. It stands first here among the spokespeople of this project, as Brady takes the time and effort to speak intelligently about her subject matter.

In terms of representation of individuals, Brady uses terminology familiar to any who have conducted participant observation in or worked within the marijuana industry. She speaks of “growers,” “female growers” (15), “growers and everyone who worked for them” (17), “the seventeen-year-old who cleaned their weed. The trimmer girl...” (23), “work in the marijuana industry... working for others” (25), “*partnering* was common among growers who prefer to pay someone else to dig holes, stake up plants, water, fertilize, set mouse and rat traps, walk waterlines...” (26), “manage the season’s marijuana crop for a cut of the earnings” (26), “middleman, or broker” (26), “the trimmers sat in a circle around the table and hunched over trays that contained their scissors, cleaning solution, and crispy little piles of marijuana buds,” “a typical trim scene usually consists of a group of women, with the occasional man thrown in, listening to music, sharing stories, and clipping marijuana,” “grandmothers, students, service industry workers, and teenagers such as Emma supplemented their income with trim work every year or did it full time” (90), “predominately white. In a way, they are California’s last white migrant farm workers” (91).

She discusses issues early in the work at the heart of the marijuana industry: “legalization of marijuana will be the single most devastating economic bust in the long boom-and-bust history of Northern California,” “the RAND Corporation hearing that predicted legalization would crash the market” (17), as well as the very humanizing factor that, “people began to wonder about the price their children paid for growing up under a cloak of secrecy, not being able to say what their parents did for a living” (42). Brady elaborates these individual worker concerns and how they impact the larger community, “proceeds from marijuana had not only supported and sustained individuals in the community, but had also helped build local institutions, including a health clinic, the radio station KMUD, and the Mateel Community Center” (17-18). Brady relays the costs of keeping marijuana illegal, noting that, in 2010, the U.S. “government had spent \$41 billion that year alone fighting the war on Drugs, according to a study by the libertarian Cato Institute” (27). Other statements reinforce Brady’s credentials as an adept researcher: “when you worked outside the law, it seemed disputes were settled there, too” or, “if the rippers come, don’t risk your life. Get off the hill” (30); “...he swung open the door of the greenhouse to have a look at the girls, as growers call female plants” (31) and, “we need to acknowledge that we lost the war on marijuana” (47).

Brady writes about women who grow, about children brought up in the milieu of the underground economy and she explores the difficult terrain of small communities that operate the multi-billion dollar industry: “The man behind the counter had no idea that the indignant older woman in front of him had been growing pot since before he was born” (125) and, “unlike most growers, Mare didn’t trim her marijuana right after harvest. She used an old herbalist’s trick, leaving the outer leaves to form a protective barrier over the buds while they dried, which provided a cushion and helped preserve their scent during storage” (127).

These are fates and faces not routinely visible in the media and other forms of representation. The most appealing facet of Brady’s work is how exceptional it is in its portraiture. I found myself relating to the subjects in these pages and nodding in agreement at many lines as if to say, “Yes, that is a true rendering of what I myself saw.”

I asked Brady about public representations of marijuana industry personnel. She responded that she could not answer the question but, off the record, perhaps workers have too much to lose by self-identifying as workers.

### **Slavoj Zizek.**

In October 2012 philosopher and social/cultural theorist, Slavoj Zizek appeared on the CBC Radio program, *The Current*. Interviewer Anna Maria Tremonti steered their conversation to capitalism and malfunctioning systems of control. I include Zizek here exactly because his comments occur at the conjuncture of marijuana production in BC and considerations of social control: is it an accident that marijuana laws are the way they are? Is it simply a coincidence that workers are rendered invisible in the larger discourse? Zizek insists that this particular system provides the maximum benefit to the larger order of things, precisely as it is. He recounts his experiences coming of age in Communist Yugoslavia to illustrate how the underground economy fed into the larger, legitimate one, and permitted many people to survive. The transcript of part of their talk reads as follows:

**Tremonti:** I was in Victoria, British Columbia, where municipal officials from around the province were debating the decriminalization of marijuana (Sept. 26, 2012) and, um, take a listen to what one of the speakers had to say [plays recording of unidentified official speaking at a Union of BC Municipalities conference].

**Voice:** (in mocking tone) There's a lot of people employed in growing marijuana and trafficking it and transporting it. It also employs an *awful lot* of police and probation officers [audience laughter] and, uh, why, why would you devalue marijuana by making it decriminalized? What are all those *poor* people gonna do? [audience laughter, applause].

**T:** Now that, of course, is tongue-in-cheek, but the idea that a system, even a system that's not good, is functioning in a way that, I guess—

**Zizek:** (cutting her off) Now, you said something crucial, this is maybe the fundamental message: when something appears to be undermining the system or subverting it, look at it closely, maybe at a deeper level it's *part* of the system. That's the big lesson I took from my socialist youth, I mean when I was living in a communist country, how, you know, black markets and all those things that people in power were officially fighting, well, that's what enabled people to survive. Precisely through those illegal activities, the system maintained itself in a viable state.

This is profound analysis, the suggestion that things are the way they are for a reason. Marijuana is illegal but its illicit state is a complex one. Consumption is, de facto, almost entirely decriminalized. Production remains illegal and poses great risks for growers and workers alike. No other controlled substance enjoys such a bizarre status. Heroin is an excellent contrast. Producers face great risk, as do consumers. But with marijuana, the message is mixed. Public opinion of the drug includes the belief that it is similar to alcohol in terms of impact on community, personal health, social order, etc. Production is associated in media coverage with gangs and other forms of organized crime. Thus, it is the production of the substance that retains the stigma of gangsterism and because of this, workers and the growers they work for, as well as traffickers, transporters, middling personnel and so forth, continue to toil in the margins, unprotected by the rule of law. The curious nature of this arrangement keeps marijuana profitable, and, as Zizek has pointed out, these profits continue to flow into the legitimate economy with maximum benefit to the greater economy of BC and beyond. Legal marijuana would have decreased input into revenue strains of the greater economy, as do alcohol sales, generating, in fact, tax surpluses for the larger system that must then pay for the associated social costs.

But what is perhaps most significant in terms of Zizek's statements is that, marijuana may remain an illicit production commodity *because* that is where it does the most amount of good for the larger system. This plays out in the massive profitability but, in other ways, such as creating work for the criminal justice system (police, courts, lawyers, detention and correction facilities, media and so forth).

The unnamed official quoted above notes “there's a lot of people employed in growing marijuana and trafficking it, and transporting it. It also employs an *awful lot* of police and probation officers.” Although he is mocking these *people*, he does at least cast the light of discourse upon them. Further, he willingly notes the population of such people is a considerable one. But such overtures are rare indeed in the construction of public discourse.

### ***The New Yorker***

The phrase “a nod to the ambiguity inherent in studying illicit economies” (2013:40), sets the tone for Patrick Radden Keefe’s ten page article, “Buzzkill; Washington State discovers that it’s not so easy to create a legal marijuana economy.” No growers, legal or otherwise, are brought forth for our consideration, nor are workers. It is simply a function of the broader *market*, a structure represented as un-populated.

I wrote to Keefe, asking what his thoughts were on public representations of marijuana industry personnel. Were there workers? If so, how was it we never hear of them? Keefe, even though he had ample time to do so, declined to respond.

### ***The Walrus***

In his article, “Grow Industry: Marijuana prohibition is destined to end. Who will become the Seagrams of weed?” (*The Walrus* April 2013), Nicholas Hune-Brown proceeds to describe industry personnel as “pot producers” (32), “entrepreneurs” or “they” (34) when describing the interior of a large-scale grow operation in detail, except for one instance where the snapshot is nearly devoid of workers: “Open the door, and you’re overwhelmed by a blast of light, humidity, the skunky aroma of budding marijuana, and the sound of soft jazz or Peruvian pan pipes—the Spa Channel from Shaw on Demand, which Matt and his crew swear helps the plants grow” (34).

Of the legitimate marijuana-satellite businesses discussed in the article, facilities were more specifically referred to as “operations” (40) and personnel as “employees” or “consultant” (34), “growers” (36).

The assumption throughout the article, aside from the mention of the term “crew,” is that the entrepreneurs either do all the work or the plants grow themselves, softly stirring in the jazzy breeze. And yet, coverage of the quasi-legal, large-scale grow operations is precisely where one would expect to see representations of workers. Within this sector workers *are* covered by employer insurance policies, workers *are* eligible for injury compensation and workers *do* pay income tax. Yet, the myth continues: marijuana is either grown by the entrepreneur (a slick transition from gangster repeated ad nauseum in news items above) or it somehow grows and harvests itself. Yet the truth is that marijuana is labour-intensive. And we would expect to find workers in a report like this one.

I wrote to Hune-Brown, asking the same questions (and given the same generous seven weeks in which to respond) I put to reporters and journalists above: what of public representations of marijuana industry people? How did he see them portrayed? Were there workers? Or were they all criminals? Hune-Brown felt he had nothing to offer.

While recent technological advancements informing everything from the cloning of starts, through the introduction of automated watering systems during growth cycles, to the processing of the finished product via auto-trimmers, much human labour input is still required. This is due to the distinct nature of cultivation in the various market sectors. Illegal outdoor requires the clearing of sites and the carrying in of materials. Starts must be planted in places prepared for their arrival, nutrient inputs are required, watering systems constructed, stemming from year-round sources to the micro-drippers injecting into each individual growing container. These sites must be visited every few days, maintenance must be conducted, pest control systems must be established, tested, refined and perfected. Camouflaging must be undertaken to ensure sites are not advertising their presence to helicopters and airplanes. And, at the end of the season, the marijuana must be harvested, graded according to bud size, transported to drying/trimming facilities and, weighed and packed for shipping/sale.

Illegal indoor labour needs are dependent on the size of the operations. Small-scale facilities can be managed by one or two persons until harvesting, when at least a third worker if not more is brought on board to trim and prepare the finished product for market. Larger



facilities require larger staffs. The tension resulting from having an excess of unprocessed marijuana is simply too great (more often than not) and the grower will usually bring four or five trimmers (or more) on board to finish the job quickly.

Legal indoor is slightly different only insofar as the current system of regulations has created a grey market opportunity for growers. This translates into similar harvesting/processing patterns as illicit indoor, except in the case of having to process all the marijuana as quickly as possible. But anxieties over thieves have meant that legal indoor processing bears a striking resemblance to illicit indoor as legal growers are most often in favour of plowing through the material in an effort to get the marijuana processed and packed and moved to a secure location (preferably to market).

### **Ian Mulgrew's *Bud Inc.: Inside Canada's Marijuana Industry***

Looking specifically at the "Introduction" section in Mulgrew's book, he refers to a body of incarcerated marijuana industry workers as "offenders imprisoned for cultivation" (2006:3). Individuals interested in entering the profitable industry are described as "people lining up to get into the game" (5) and industry personnel as "people [who] have cultivated marijuana" (7). The most generic term for employment throughout the book is "grower," an unfortunate conflation of grower and worker, blending the two into a homogenous whole that unfortunately does little to recognize the vulnerable worker in this illicit industry. He uses the term "employees" (92) to describe legitimate industry workers, in this instance, manufacturers at Advanced Nutrients who make metal halide bulbs for indoor grow operations.

### **Eric Schlosser's *Reefer Madness***

Schlosser's text, *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs and Cheap Labour in the American Black Market* (2004) chronicles (among other things) the intensely political legal history of marijuana through the twentieth century, delving into hundreds of legal case studies astounding in their outcomes.

Schlosser describes David Lee Haynes, a young man who was "invited" to an indoor operation outside Louisville, Kentucky, to "come live at the cabin and tend the plants" and to "babysit" the operation" (30). His description of this case employs a trope used frequently to describe people tending, harvesting, and processing marijuana. Haynes notably states that "over

the summer they walked the fields” and “the group harvested the marijuana and cured it” and, perhaps most remarkably, “fan leaves were removed from the precious buds,” as well as, “now the group needed buyers” (31). Finally, he notes, “the last 200 pounds [was] either distributed to workers or sold to an acquaintance” (32). It is a welcome instance to see “workers” in Schlosser’s text. I wrote to Schlosser several months before the completion of this project, expecting him to weigh in, seeing as labour was an issue important enough to him to write about it. His agency forwarded my questions but he has yet to respond.

**Mark Haskell Smith’s *Heart of Dankness: Underground botanists, outlaw farmers and the race for the Cannabis Cup***

Smith laconically refers to marijuana workers in outdoors sites of the Sierras as “bud tenders” (2012:38), a disturbing metonym that ignores the superhuman labours and astounding complex of tasks required of workers to get plants in the ground, manage them throughout the growing season, harvest and process the crop and get the product to market.

**The RAND Corporation**

A few words about RAND. Initially an intelligence agency started in 1946 by the USAF, the RAND (Research ANd Development) Corporation has enjoyed influence in policy formation in American politics and is generally considered right-of-centre in terms of political ideology. Today, RAND operates as a nonprofit agency providing research on foreign policy areas, including U.S. foreign policy and national security issues. RAND’s work on U.S. domestic policy areas includes criminal justice, health, labour and other areas. RAND claims to espouse a mission for educational, scientific, charitable ends and to ensure public welfare and security for the U.S. Last year the RAND Corporation conducted a news briefing in Washington D.C. to discuss marijuana. On the table were several key issues, including the now-successful vote for legalization and decriminalization in November 2012, in the states of Washington and Colorado. Spokespersons at the briefing were Winfield Boerckel, Director, RAND Office of Congressional Relations, Rosalie Pacula, Co-Director, RAND Drug Policy Research Center, and, Jonathan Caulkins, Professor, Operations Research and Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University.

No mention was made of producers, growers, workers, retailers or anyone else in either direct text or insinuated description. Once more, marijuana simply appears in the marketplace.

This construction of the commodity's supply mechanism is nearly ubiquitous in the many examples presented herein; yet, such an assumption confounds capitalist logic so completely as to reveal how little policymakers, journalists and other spokespersons actually know about this industry.

### **National Public Radio**

On 13 February 2012, during its regular podcast of "All Things Considered," National Public Radio aired a special segment entitled, "Mendocino snuffing medical marijuana experiment." Broadcast journalist Michael Montgomery attempted to assess the state of the union for marijuana producers in California's Mendocino County, which is most notably the only county in California to attempt legalization for producers. In his piece, Montgomery states that marijuana is *produced*—close by a hair to saying "producers"—but then closes that specific representation by noting that some of the farming properties where the marijuana was produced were seized in federal raids. Thus, it was *property* that produced marijuana, not necessarily *people* and certainly not growers or their workers. I sent my query regarding representations to Montgomery through NPR over a month prior to the completion of this research but he has yet to respond.

### **Kootenay Pop Mag**

CBC Radio reporter Bob Keating's "Weeded Out" (*Kootenay Mountain Culture* magazine's Summer 2012 edition) is an exposé on B.C.'s outdoor marijuana industry as it stood that summer. He notes that, the latest figures prove that once-thriving outdoor grow-ops are starting to disappear. Yet Keating makes no overtures to workers in this article, a place where one would expect such an instance given the socio-economic impact of a collapsing industry sector on the region.

### **wheel of The Life**

The poem, "wheel of The Life" was the result of spending eight months in an illegal indoor operation with a fall-guy (in this instance, a fall-*girl*). After several years of studying outdoor grow operations, workers and growers, I found the switch to indoor a challenge. Foremost among my concerns, was that one is effectively trapped in a grow house whereas, in

the bush, you have the opportunity to run away should thieves or police come into your work zone. In a grow house, if rippers or police come to your door, you won't know it until they are either knocking or already inside. Another problem was how tied to the house my respondent seemed. She couldn't go into town for more than a few hours at a time before she would start worrying that the house was engulfed in flames. And, too, she worked for a grower/owner who would come by frequently to check on her progress, ensure plants were healthy and that all systems were running smoothly. If anything went wrong, she would not get paid. And, if it went really wrong, she could go to jail. As it turned out, the grower/owner fired the fall-girl and took over the house operation himself. One morning, a few short weeks after I left the site, a knock at the front door brought the owner out of the kitchen with a cup of coffee in his hand. Outside on the porch, RCMP officers waited for him to open the door so they could read him a search warrant. I never understood the willingness to accept such risks but I did come to learn that many illegal indoor grower/house owners started out as fall-guys/girls. If you were just out of high-school or fresh out of options and you knew someone who needed a caretaker, this could be your way in. With a lot of luck, you could someday own your own grow house. Is this a good thing?

*We discovered that to survive we had to protect,  
in fact advocate and encourage, our distinctiveness.  
How else could we possibly know who we were?*  
— Tom Dent, *Umbra Days* (1980)

the wheel, the “wheee!”  
<electric meter>  
spinning mad for all to see

another round  
in this  
house alone  
(in hand: a thin wad of twenties)

You, stranger.

one is used  
to leaving a trace  
but here  
you must be invisible, man.

partisan ghost  
set to fly  
o'er fences:  
the night woods

forget the plans you made  
the (deleted) you made, forget

that smell  
rain-soaked skunk  
crawls into everything

shave your head  
(good advice)  
or stink up the grocer's

skunk in your dream  
you sleep in his house  
huge AC units thunder  
perforate your dreamskunk

this stage set  
shammery  
fake life

cut-rate thrift store furnishings  
lamps, porch light on timers  
car in the drive  
(props for cops, for *normals*)

in this scene you are  
girl-down-the-block  
*arrived*  
upon the suburban dinner bell  
(but *you've* arrived at work!)

*Hamlet: the basement's the thing  
wherein you'll catch  
a sentence of the king.*

sea of green  
parts per million  
yellowy tips: shocked!  
flicker blue CO2  
half-wind oscillate

hum of ballasts  
“hmmmmmm...”

your constellations  
are the moving cars  
the night road

neighbour’s fluttering curtains  
the unmarked cars  
the unmarked car

unremarkable  
you *must* be.

## Chapter 6 Representatives of the State

An' everybody's doin' just what they're told to,  
An' nobody wants to go to jail!

— The Clash, *White Riot*

In this section we interrogate statements issued by both Health Canada as interpreted in the media, as well as quoted directly, in the case of Health Canada's Medical Marijuana Access Regulations (MMAR) and Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) rhetoric to look for discussions about workers and the growers for whom they labour.

The state—an abstraction of civil authoritarian power within a (sometimes) sovereign polity with a very non-abstract monopoly on violence—has interesting things to say about marijuana and the people who grow, sell, promote and consume it. Distinctions must be made between the abstraction noted above and both the legal entities of American states (such as Colorado) and the term “state” as it refers to Canada, a nation state. In the case below, Washington state law enforcement are quoted at length by *Washington Post* reporter Manuel Valdes on the subject of illicit outdoor production. Note that the article completely ignores the effects of industrial logging on the “local habitat.”

For years, teams of local, state and federal authorities have focused on finding clandestine marijuana-growing operations in forests and wilds across the country, using helicopters to search for plants hidden beneath the natural canopy. These marijuana-growing operations, authorities have said, feature irrigation systems from nearby creeks and fertilizers that damage the local habitat. Authorities believe that some of the growing operations are operated by branches of Mexican drug organizations using the forced labour of immigrants to tend the plants. Others are tended by locals (Valdes 5 August 2012)

One might assume plants hidden beneath a natural canopy might not be very productive. *Forced labour* is a specific representation of labour input, referring to slavery conditions. The real work, as stressed in the story, is the *finding* of clandestine operations, performed by teams of local,

state and federal authorities. The binary employed, then, is the work of civil authority (the state) opposed to the furtive works of slaves.

As noted throughout this thesis, the state (and other power elites) does not like to make overtures to the category of marijuana (or “marihuana”) *workers*. Health Canada writes:

In recent years, a wide range of stakeholders, including police and law enforcement, fire officials, physicians, municipalities and program participants and groups representing their interests, have identified concerns with the current (medical marihuana) program. Some of the key concerns include:

- \* the risk of abuse and exploitation by criminal elements; the complexity and length of the application process for individuals who wish to obtain an authorization to possess and/or a license to produce marihuana;

- \* the need for more current medical information for physicians pertaining to the risks and benefits associated with the use of marihuana for medical purposes; and,

- \* public health and safety risks associated with the cultivation of marihuana plants in homes, including electrical and fire hazards and the presence of excess mould and poor air quality. The proposed improvements would reduce the risk of abuse and exploitation by criminal elements and keep our children and communities safe (Health Canada 2012).

“Stakeholders” are mentioned in this selection but illicit workers and growers for whom they toil are not considered part of this category. Rather, they appear as the represented *other*, the “criminal elements,” who are “responsible for public health and safety risks.”

The MMPR (Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations) regulations page ([www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2013-119/page-4.html#h-5](http://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2013-119/page-4.html#h-5)) describes many types of persons as they relate to the new regulations. These include:

- “licensed producer” (throughout),
- “another licensed producer” (12.2.A),
- “a licensed dealer” (12.2.A),
- “the Minister” (12.2.A),



“another person” (12.2.A),  
 “a client” (12.4.A.i),  
 “a hospital employee” (12.4.A.ii),  
 “a member of a police force” (19.A)  
 (in the matter of destroying excess cannabis) “the presence of at least two persons who  
 are qualified to witness the destruction” (20.1.b),  
 “the senior person in charge, the responsible person in charge and, if applicable, the  
 alternate responsible person in charge” (20.2.a),  
 “a person who works for or provides services to the licensed producer and acts in a senior  
 position” (20.2.b),  
 “an adult” (21.a),  
 “a corporation” (21.b),  
 “quality assurance person” (23.4.h),  
 “an officer or director” (30.2.b),  
 “the applicant” (38.2.a),  
 “the personnel” (45.2),  
 “the holder of an import permit” (77),  
 “an individual” (89.b)  
 “applicant’s spouse or common-law partner” (90.i.i)  
 “person cohabitating” (90.2.4),  
 “a member of a criminal organization” (92.b.ii),  
 “an individual who is responsible for a client of the producer” (101.a.ii),  
 “a member of a Canadian police force”(101.2),  
 “the health care practitioner” (102.a),  
 “the person who placed the order” (131.4),  
 “the person from whom it was received” (134.a),  
 “the name of the individual recording the order” (137.c),  
 “the individual who returned it” (139.a),  
 “the witnesses to the destruction” (145.d).

I include these descriptions as it is important to view evidence of representations of growers and their workers in Health Canada documents, especially so in light of the fact that neither “grower” nor “worker” are overly featured.

As these are the legitimate persons associated with the production and/or consumption of medical marijuana, it is efficacious to look into how they are portrayed by Health Canada. The only persons mentioned by trade are in fact associated with civil authority or related functions, a member of a police force or a health care practitioner. Yet, the occupations of persons associated with the production of the legal marijuana are merely hinted at as persons who work for, or the holder of a permit, or the individual recording the order. Of these, only “two persons”— “the senior person in charge, the responsible person in charge and, if applicable, the alternate responsible person in charge,” and “a person who works for or provides services to the licensed

producer and acts in a senior position”—imply a workforce on location. Only once in the new or old regulations (MMAR) do we find any wording that might suggest an employee that is the person who works for or provides services to, and even then it is ambiguous usage.

This chapter has shown that, in the eyes of the state, marijuana workers barely exist. They are, along with growers, either rendered as criminal elements in illicit production or as component parts in a large-scale, legal industry that may produce taxation revenue streams.

Contrasting representations are necessary to illustrate other ways workers and growers could be presented in media and other formats. To seek these, I look to other sorts of workers and other sorts of criminals in the next chapter.

### **the Maltese Cock Fight**

This piece is a true account of a dispute between a grower and a worker over wages. I include it here to illustrate one of the problems of resolving labour disputes in an illicit industry: there is no labour board to provide mediation. In this instance, the grower took the greater beating but never did cough up the bonus dollars the worker so aggressively fought for.

The two men were drunk and had been fighting in the laneway for half an hour. It was now growing dark. Their brawling had gone beyond bloody and both were red in their swollen, bruised faces. The taller of the two had injured his arm and now cradled it against his body, swinging out his other in long curving arcs that sometimes hit the other man, most times did not. The shorter man, stockier, was thoroughly exhausted and stood wavering on his feet, spitting blood into the gravel and breathing hard through his torn mouth. As the long punches came at him he fell back, not bothering to swing anymore. The moment it seemed the violence would end, the stockier man lunged at his opponent, smashing into his torso and dropping them both to the ground. Minutes of grappling, punching, strangle holds and kicking ensued. All the while a strange sort of moaning came from the pair, almost sexual, loving.

A woman paced just beyond the fighting, circling the men, begging them to stop. Her concerns went beyond the welfare of her partner, the taller man. His opponent was her brother-in-law, and, too, the neighbours might hear the frantic melee and call the police. With a house full of pot plants, this last was her gravest concern. And as the fighting dragged on, with no help to stop it, she was worried one of them might be killed.

The cobalt light of evening settled on the scene. Up on the roadway the streetlights went on.

## Chapter 7 Contrast

I now wish to bring contrasting representations to bear on those purveyed in the dominant discourse discussed so far. To facilitate this leverage, by exploring Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (2011), I examine the representations of workers in BC's tree-planting industry, which is a remarkably similar form of employment as outdoor marijuana cultivation. Further, I explore various public representations of Okanagan region orchard workers to examine similarities and differences and to contribute insight into why marijuana workers are rendered invisible.

To compare forms of representation of illicit marijuana workers and growers with those of illicit non-marijuana industry workers, I have included an interrogation of Jerry Langton's historical fiction *The Notorious Bacon Brothers* (2013). The work follows the criminal career of three Abbotsford BC brothers, one of whom (Jonathan) was shot and killed 17 August 2011 outside the Grand Casino in Kelowna (as I was eating dinner two blocks away). The remaining two brothers have had (thus far) separate fates: Jamie is currently serving a seven-year sentence for his part in the Surrey Six killings (in which four enemy gang members and two innocent bystanders were murdered) of October 2007; Jarrod was cleared of weapons charges but is facing ongoing drug charges ("A history of the Bacon Brothers" *Globe and Mail* 2012: online). Further, to present alternative representations of marijuana growers and workers, I examine Molly Lynch's "The War on BC's Small Pot Farmer; Canada busts the mom n' pop grow-op while fostering the rise of biopharmaceutical marijuana" (*The Tyee* 16 December 2013). Also in this vein, I examine Bruce Barcott's "The Great Marijuana Experiment: A Tale of Two Drug Wars" (3 January 2014) to present an alternative, somewhat mainstream representation of production-to-retail marijuana story that, although typically does not appear in the dominant discourse, persists in engaging in an operational blind spot around marijuana workers.

## **the Great Outdoors**

*Eating Dirt; Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (2011) is an excellent contrast to popular forms of representation of marijuana workers. Charlotte Gill's non-fiction work depicts the lives of tree-planters in British Columbia and, as such, affords excellent examples of how a legal, and regulated, yet similar industry to unregulated outdoor marijuana production—in terms of the temporal arc of the growing season as well as the region, locales and grueling nature of both jobs—and its workers are represented.

Both worker types toil in the rugged BC interior mountains, face the same arduous climatological as well as geographical conditions, and both types sell their labour to the owners of the means of production. The similarities are striking: the injuries that become chronic from re-injury and never being permitted to fully heal; the seasonality of the work; the comraderie resulting from the intimate quarters and transportation, the drudgery, attendant with the work; the isolation imposed by the terrain and the strictures of the required repetitive tasks; even the pay, which is plummeting in both categories. Along with logging and associated work categories, these types represent the rural workforce of BC's mountainous interiors and their decline is a serious issue, reflected in the decline of rural communities and economies.

Differences between these two categories are clustered around the lack of regulation in the marijuana production industry. Workers haven't any rights an illicit grower is bound to respect and injury means the end of the job, no compensation, nor rehabilitation. The lucky marijuana worker is the one who has a foot in both legal and illicit employment categories for he or she may avail themselves of the benefits associated with the regulated labour market: Workers Compensation, free physiotherapy, retraining, etc.

Gill represents tree-planters as a hard-working tribe of outdoor types, who are well aware that they are never going to get rich at what they do but are, nevertheless, addicted to the relative freedom and adventure that come with the job. Gill achieves this dichotomy through her anecdotal descriptions of the history of plant species, the geology of British Columbia and the subjective experiences of hanging out in deep bush and logging towns that make up this non-fiction work. Of personal interest is the description of tree-planting company managers, a strikingly similar occupation to an outdoor marijuana manager. Gill provides as follows:

They deliver us home and then their night shift begins. The after-dark accounting, mapping, delivering and plotting, the reconnaissance runs for

tomorrow. The spare tire changes and the vehicle repairs. Every night, when they scheme for tomorrow, they face some logistical quandary. They need to move ten tons of seedlings to the top of a mountain, only the road's washed out, the map is wrong and their headlamps have run out of batteries. And at midnight, their truck's rad hose blows out. Or they meet a locked gate to which no one has a key. Or there is no road (90).

Gill's descriptions include: "we fall out of bed and into our rags, still crusted with the grime of yesterday. We're earth stained on our thighs and shoulders, and muddy bands circle our waists" (1); "it is an actual attack, a kind of green guerilla warfare" and, "he drives like a man on a suicide mission. No one complains. Speed is the jet fuel that runs our business" (2). These sketches are rife with a harsh comparison to the urban career set, such that the worker feels "to do such work is to give one's whole life, albeit temporarily" (5). There is a sense of urgency in these claims which sustains the worker both in the field as well as gaining inspiration for the next day, the next season. Even the gear that is required for the tree planter and for the marijuana planter is specific to the worker's environment, physical movement, and the harsh endurance required every day. One tree planter states, "we gear up for the daily grind, grope around in our vinyl backpacks for wetsuit shirts and watertight containers. Gear hijacked from other sports—shin pads, knee braces made of hinged aluminum and Neoprene" (10).

These are representations conspicuously absent from the discourse surrounding marijuana workers, especially in places where we would expect to find them such as texts on the marijuana industry in BC or magazine articles about the burgeoning indoor legal sector. The reality of labourers toiling away in an industry that grinds them, builds their cultural identity and supports them in seasonal cycles remains obscured by the cartoon caricatures of gangsters, as though they are all gangsters. Many workers and the growers they labour for more likely do battle with what Gill describes as "the bodily effect of a car crash in extreme slow motion" (12) through "the ambient complications [and] clouds of biting insects so thick and furious it is possible to end a day with your eyelids swollen shut and blood trickling from your ears" (13). Gill represents the tree planter in individual yet universal descriptions that provide a cultural representation of an experience otherwise unknown to those who have never been engrossed in such a lifestyle. This text celebrates the labourer as a human being who is working and learning and constantly dealing

with the pressures of unique environments. This is what I believe to be missing in the media and cultural representation of marijuana production. The people. The worker.

An examination of Okanagan region-specific public accounts of workers yielded some interesting results. In Vivian Luk's "Growth slows in face of fierce international competition; But as Canadian consumers learn more about quality wines, premium B.C. wines will flourish, growers say" (*The Vancouver Sun* 26 January 2013) we find Ross Fitzpatrick, vineyard founder, described as a man who, in the late 1980s "planted several hundred acres of grape vines and produced about 2,000 cases a year" (J6), presumably single-handedly although "A Mexican vineyard crew in an Okanagan vineyard" (reviewed below) notes that ten workers are required to maintain eighty acres. Luk's story goes on to praise Fitzpatrick as the founder of Cedar Creek Estate, a successful winery located in Kelowna. But then the worker appears: "Vineyards in countries like Chile and Argentina can pay workers for a full day's work with what B.C. workers get paid for an hour, says Fitzpatrick" (J6). The point, subtly made by Luk, is Okanagan wine has a hard time competing internationally because Canadian labour costs more than in Chile and Argentina. This is a good time to introduce the migrant Mexican labourer into the narrative.

In "Coalition to fight for migrant workers; New group says Canada below standard" (*The Vancouver Province* 19 April 2011) Sarah Douziech notes "poor housing conditions, barriers to health care, disregard for workplace safety and a lack of employment standards are some of the problems [migrant] workers face" (A4). "Mexican labourers keeps B.C. wine flowing" (Wendy Stueck *The Globe and Mail* 6 September 2012) adds, "the growing number of Mexican workers in the Okanagan is troubling, and part of a broader pattern of Canada outsourcing agricultural labour to workers vulnerable to exploitation and abuse". Troubling to the point that WorkSafe BC has suggested targeting agricultural operations that employ Mexican workers for safety awareness initiatives. WorkSafe justifies this by citing a disturbing lack of reports on farm-based incidents [injuries or deaths] from facilities where Mexican workers are employed. But the story goes on to suggest Mexicans are happy to work in Okanagan orchards for sub-standard wages, "The Mexicans have only to walk out the front door to be at work".

"A Mexican vineyard crew in an Okanagan vineyard" (Blue Mountain Vineyard and Cellars webpages 2014) describes the vineyard's migrant workers as "hard working" and "highly efficient and skilled". Yet in, "Migrant farm workers to get new Okanagan digs," writer Kathy Michaels (*Kelowna Capital News* 26 June 2012) spends the article reassuring readers that high-

density occupancy trailers intended for Mexican agricultural workers will not lead to a drop in area property values, stating outright that the property owner has been ordered by the city to “construct a wall that will buffer the visual impact to neighbouring residences”.

Elsewhere, Okanagan Life magazine archives yielded zero search results for “migrant workers”, “Mexican workers”, “agricultural labourer”, “vineyard labour.” And “vineyard workers” yielded just one result for the 2014 Okanagan Salary Survey in which no mention of migrant or Mexican labour is made (*Okanagan Life* webpages 2014).

*Our Times*, an independent Canadian labour periodical, notes working and living conditions are not optimal for many migrants and of “the 200,000 temporary foreign workers who arrive under the federal Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program there are about 115 deaths and 1,500 serious injuries each year among agriculture workers, but migrant workers risk being blacklisted and not invited back to Canada if they try to organize (unionize)” (Dugdale 2009).

As contentious as it may be to conduct public discourse around such an issue the reportage does happen. And on the table are some serious bones of contention: the question of why domestic workers are not paid a living wage in many labour contexts; the problem of abuses by Canadian employers of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program which range from the Royal Bank of Canada hiring IT workers from abroad to replace domestic IT workers (Flecker 29 November 2013) to the lack of protection from workplace hazards for migrant mining and agricultural workers (i.e. working in orchard conditions where active chemical spraying is taking place in the immediate vicinity); the fact that migrant workers pay into CPP, EI, and other deductions yet lack the appropriate means to avail themselves of these benefits; and the black-listing of workers should they attempt to organize. Further, 2008 BC Human Rights Tribunal found “migrant workers faced discriminatory and adverse treatment on the job, in terms of salary, accommodation, meals and expenses” (Flecker January 2013).

Marijuana workers (and the growers for whom they toil) fail to make an appearance in the public discourse (or they are represented as gangsters). Given the statistics on workplace morbidity and mortality for migrant workers, similar occurrences must afflict the marijuana production industry—indeed, we hear of them when a “drug-related murder” takes place, but we seldom associate the death with a workplace environment or a worker.

### **All cooked, nothing raw.**

Jerry Langton's *The Notorious Bacon Brothers: Inside Gang Warfare on Vancouver Streets* (2013) opens with negative portraiture and he never relents except to describe law enforcement personnel and other official representatives of the state. His opening two sentences set the pace: "'You're just going to buy crack!' the woman screamed. The toddler she was holding looked terrified, but the man she was shouting at only looked bothered and a bit embarrassed" (3). Here we have a symbolic family destroyed by gangster-purveyed crack cocaine. We might ask after the symbolic family destroyed by state-purveyed alcohol, but we would not find it in Langton's pages.

Examples of phrases that reveal the sort of representations of criminals Langton purveys in his book are as follows: "known to police" (5) "a shadowy street gang" (8) "connections to known gangs" (23), framing individuals thusly: "started getting in trouble again" (51) "Dhaliwal was, like most victims, well known to police" (54). Langton constructs the image of a violent, gang-centric world careening out of control: "breaking such rules meant capital punishment" (70); "a Kelowna-based Hell's Angels puppet gang" (89); "she was going to trade some weed for Oxycontin" (119) and, "a bad man" (120). A criminal, Langton contends, chooses such a life after watching Snoop Dogg videos.

One description deserves singling out: an all-encompassing objectification of drug-trade executive criminals. Langton writes, "The drug trade, at least at the top end, is extremely lucrative and is one of the increasingly rare career choices for those who are not educated or bright enough to establish a legitimate career" (49). Rather than structural barriers or a lack of social programming that push people into illicit careers, they choose crime because they are daydreamers or, worse, unintelligent.

In contrast, Langton celebrates "the police, listening to all the phone conversations" (83) as heroes, rather than functionaries of a surveillance state. He happily speaks *for* civil authorities: "'we're targeting the people who are the highest risk to public safety'" (119) without the slightest consideration for what it might mean when an armed organization *targets* anyone. Not surprisingly, illicitly produced marijuana plays a significant role in Langton's story. "Grow op" appears throughout the book, as does "weed," when associated with criminals and "marijuana" in the depictions of law enforcement initiatives. As well, linkages between marijuana production and gangsters appear throughout the book:



Albert Jackman started shouting questions, asked them what they knew about the \$50,000 stolen from the grow-op next door. When Barber told him he didn't know anything, Jackman tried to intimidate him by telling him he was in the Red Scorpions, showing tattoos (including one on his neck) to back up his claims ... Later Barber identified Jackman from photographs the police had of known gang members (62).

In his description of crime reporter Kim Bolan, Langton is again rather unkind to civil authorities, noting the reporter "had been covering the Lower Mainland's underworld for years and probably knew more about organized crime than law enforcement" (72). But the general representation of law enforcement throughout the book is of those who are pervasive in the *world out there*, as undercover police officers always listening, as in "he was heard discussing it on an unrelated wiretap" or "he later told an undercover officer" (60).

I asked Langton what he thought about the representation of marijuana workers (and the growers for whom they toil) in public discourse and he did not respond to that question but, instead, spoke about workers in that industry being ordinary people who see a chance to make some money. This description was in stark contrast to the characters appearing in his book.

### **Why we fight.**

In Molly Lynch's article, "The War on BC's Small Pot Farmer" (*The Tyee* 16 December 2013) the reporter focuses on two factors driving the mom-and-pop small-scale marijuana growers out of the business. The 2005 BC Civil Forfeiture Act, operating under the civil code, permits the anonymous director of the Civil Forfeiture Office to seize assets before individuals see a day in court, "even if no person has been charged with an offence that constitutes unlawful activity or if a person charged with an offence was acquitted of all charges." Lynch notes that,

while judges used to hand out mild sentences to small-scale growers on trial, the new act means punishment for these offences is determined behind closed doors. Even those who used to grow legally have been shut down by the Harper government's new medical marijuana regulations, which will

prohibit individuals from growing. Since the Civil Forfeiture Act was implemented, the CFO, whose stated purpose is to 'take the profit out of crime,' has hauled in \$41 million.

Does this initiative take the profit out of crime? A small-scale grower with a closet-sized indoor operation (cited early in Lynch's story) can lose their home. But what of this same disincentive directed at organized crime? It is likely such a legal environment would drive organized crime interests into the commercial-scale operations being sanctioned should the new MMPR go into effect. What is accomplished by such a potentiality as losing one's home is for the mom-and-pop growers to get out of the business while they can.

Representations in this article are refreshingly distinct from those found in the mainstream media, especially when Lynch focuses on the Wrights (fictional name), a Kootenay family of growers who have lost their home to the Civil Forfeiture Office and are awaiting criminal proceedings. Their lives are turned upside down and, while this is in part a cautionary tale that supports the larger discourse of marijuana as a problematic enterprise, we are privileged to see non-gangster human faces represented in a news item. For instance, "After the government laid claim to their log house, Emma Wright and her kids went to live with Emma's sister while Peter went to work in the oil fields of Fort McMurray, a place about as culturally remote from the Kootenays as you can get." What's more is that the Wright's are represented as victims of the larger and not necessarily justifiable structural forces surrounding them. "'Production will no longer take place in homes and municipal zoning laws will need to be respected,' said Leona Aglukkaq, then Health Minister, in the June press release announcing the new plan, intended to enhance public safety" (*The Tyee* 16 December 2013). While workers are conspicuously absent from this article, the focus on the small-scale grower is novel and the plight of an entire generation of marijuana producers is writ large: marijuana production is being given to big money.

### **Stoned, rolling.**

Of interest here is the article from *Rolling Stone* magazine, Bruce Barcott's "The Great Marijuana Experiment: A Tale of Two Drug Wars" (3 January 2014). It is included in this contrasting representations section because of its focus on the problem of marijuana legalization

on the horizon in the U.S. and that long-term industry professionals will be driven out of business by big money. This is very much the same phenomenon we are seeing with the possibility of Canada's MMPR. Sadly, even with this insight, Barcott fails to see growers and their workers as legitimate industry specialists. He stutters on the threshold and retreats to the standard representations found so often in media constructions, of gangsters and pundits, incapable of capitalizing on the bold new economic tomorrow of corporate marijuana. An example being the comment, "That will require risk-taking entrepreneurs, not movement leaders" (Barcott *Rolling Stone* 2014). It strikes me that marijuana growers *are* entrepreneurs, risking jail for financial gain in an unregulated economy where people can lose everything.

Perhaps the saddest representation in Barcott's arsenal is the simple omission of the grower and worker from the production chain, suggesting marijuana simply appears on retail shelves out of thin air. He writes, "we'll be able to mark 2014 as the year control of marijuana passed from drug cartels and weed dealers to government inspectors and shopkeepers" (Barcott *Rolling Stone* 2014). Sadly, workers are here rendered invisible when they could be painted as farmers or marijuana workers.

### **Take drugs, see Satan.**

*pt.1: a constant cannot explain variation*

- > pick up clones at the place
- > bug be gone dip
- > sulphur spray
- > extra hose
- > ph testing wand
- > ppm meter
- > 12 bales soil
- > fulvic acid at Grower's Supply business of  
telling this particular  
*telling* is a form of tell-nothing "Speak  
not of what you have seen," as the respondents would  
have it respondents or GROWERS one must ask  
the questions questions questions

questions GROWERS don't want to be asked they'd  
rather take you to Mexico to reward your  
loyalty or omerta which is  
the not-telling that comes out of 16<sup>th</sup>

century Italy when natives (the Italians)  
resolved NOT TO SPEAK of anything  
to their rulers (the Spanish) NOT  
TO INVOLVE THE AUTHORITIES  
in any civil matter but  
rather  
deal with it themselves thus begat  
the Mafiosi but let's not get hung up  
on those grim gallows  
the POINT

was a rigid anti-discursive  
practice a firewall  
so you see the INITIAL PROBLEM with  
this form of ethnographic silence  
if not I should make it plain:

when the ethnographer staggers from  
the bush her/his raiments torn his/her  
emaciated figure an eerie ghost  
of the Fulbright Scholar who  
entered that same bush—albeit  
via a different road—a year  
and a half earlier  
but now  
her/his field notes bulge with  
thick description  
well, we expect he/she will have  
something for us  
we expect she/he  
will SAY SOMETHING about the people  
the places the practices behaviors  
labrettes papusa preparations Yoruba  
wood carving fertility taco smoking  
liminal wand weaving brutal cassowary jerky chewing  
male sex worker cosmology singing sacred  
Wal-Mart employee brow-beating he or she  
has been a party to—  
*DO WE NOT?!!*

we do I do you do they too  
and at a dinner recently my advisor  
said I should look into autoethnography

and I did but in that way  
where first I invented what I thought it  
should be and THEN I looked it up

and of course it turned out  
to be the logical anthropological  
conclusion to the OCD West  
and its fetishization of the cult of  
personality but I AM TIRED OF CLAYTON MCCANN  
would rather conduct fieldwork  
without him am not interested  
in his spoiled childhood  
his life of privilege  
his whitey cracker-ass  
his organic-steak-fed bulk  
his heteronormative lusting  
his perennial membership renewal in Plutarch's patriarchy  
his...

BUT APPARENTLY I CAN'T GET FUNDING WITHOUT HIM  
HE SITS IN ON MY COMMITTEE MEETINGS  
HE WAXES POEMIC  
and I'm overly familiar  
with his brand of  
half-regurgitated poesy  
his lungful of lazy verse and organic tobacco products

IF HE HAS ANYTHING TO OFFER IT IS TO BE CONSIDERED SUSPECT.  
Plagiarized.  
More invention than convention.  
A product of anti-method.  
A product of the method that involves  
a case of beer a guitar a bonfire  
at the respondent's ranch  
holding respondents hostage  
as he rangles through  
the John Prine songbook  
the tequila burning a bright blue octane  
from his tarry tonsils.

*Not that this method is found wanting:*  
IF IT IS PRODUCTIVE.  
But I have seen him crawl out of the recycling bin  
in the acid-head EMPTY of morning  
unsure of where his car might be

and as for field notes  
he MAY have scribbled “Cellar Tropic” on the back of his hand  
but by dawn it is difficult to discern the smear  
from the other bits of char and ash  
peppering his face and clothing.

*IS THIS METHOD?!!*

(btw: my invented definition of autoethnography included a robot that followed you around, recording your epithets, mixing black rum and ginger beer, answering your emails, fleshing out your CV, and generally repackaging the gonzo myth of loose triggers and the pornography of casino capitalism)

*pt.2: the solid gold dancers*

STD clinic  
pick up Drip Clean  
hose fittings for condensate pump  
fertilizer spigots  
zippers for entryways  
work gloves  
the Great Grocery Hunt

no, I do not mean “grocery”  
I mean “bullion”  
asked by a wealthy grower  
to enter the systolic streets  
of Vancouver

handed a large box  
packed tight with  
twenties stacks of fifties  
bundles of hundreds all in  
pre-counted piles of five  
ten and twenty thousand clams

loaned a testing device which measures diameter,  
mass, thickness  
(under no circumstances should one *bite* the coin in question)

asked to speed down half-remembered streets

asked to speed down half-remembered streets  
visit certain offices  
whose form or function  
struck one as nebulous  
whose employees  
buzzed you through the jarring  
security gate  
who spoke softly  
offered you a private room  
answers to your questions

“How many gold maples  
may one purchase in cash?”  
and  
“Do you require identification?”  
and  
“What is your policy regarding payment in twenties?”

and proceeded  
by your leave  
to count re-count  
the bills  
each clerk with a different way of reapplying the elastic bands  
each with a novel manner in their affected silences  
something ancient in these places  
arid passages of Catal Huyuk  
linked laneways of Tyre  
concentric offices of Constantinople  
as the machines flipped through the fiat  
with a spitting sound

notified at one locale  
that only terrorists  
*or* organized crime (you *must* choose!)  
paid in twenties  
and asked for identification  
the narrator shook his head  
“May I ask your profession?”  
“Whatever for?”  
“It is policy.”  
“Fictional graduate student.”  
“I see... we can accept the twenties today but in future please ask  
your financial institution for fifties or hundreds.”  
“Of course, I’m sure he’ll oblige.”

Apparently fictional graduate students frequently buy bullion in bulk.

*pt.3: Take drugs, see Satan*

my girl at the time  
asked me to find her some work  
some industry work  
and I asked around  
and this guy I know

we'll call him "Pill"  
says "I'm lookin' for trimmers,  
\$20/hr."  
"Oh yeah?"  
"You hafta camp on-site, no leaving."  
"Okay, how much work is there?"  
"Three weeks, maybe a month."  
"Food included?"  
"Of course, organic."  
"I know this girl."

"Does she have experience?"  
"Tons," (a lie).  
"Alright, bring her out."

On the drive she says,  
"Why don't you work, too?"  
"I hate trimming."  
"Why?"  
I left that unanswered.  
"Alright, maybe. Let's see what the place is like."  
A house on a bench overlooking the river,  
the most dammed river in the world.  
An unassuming house, with what  
appeared to be a handyman in the drive  
"Hi, is Pill around?"  
"Not until tonight" (his rapid assessment of  
my girl and myself).  
"Well, we're just gonna put our stuff in the house,"  
"Suits me fine...s'good to have renters. 'Been a while. I had to put  
twenny grand into the place after the last people." He spoke fast,  
too fast, like a veteran speed freak, permanently in high gear.  
"Oh?"  
"They were *growing* in the basement, mold all up in the joists and  
upstairs flooring, left all kinds of gear, a total mess."



(what had Pill told this guy? were me and my girl at the time to pose as renters? and how was Pill going to process a month's supply of outdoor at this trim house without this handyman/owner knowing about it?)

After we unpacked  
and loaded up the fridge with our territorial markers  
—raw foods, organic chocolate almonds, a pound bag of shake—  
my girl at the time said, “I’m going to make ghee and maybe we could have some brownies tonight...”

The whole house filled with the smell of buttery marijuana  
and Oetker’s brownie mix came out  
we soon were testing the little brown squares  
just to see how strong they were  
and finding out  
THE BROWNIES WERE VERY STRONG

My field notes from that afternoon  
read as follows:

BUT: we ate a special brownie...some time...back  
...about an hour ago...difficult...to...use thispen...  
“Girl: What’s happening?  
Guy: I don’t know.  
Girl: Why are you writing this down?  
(the remainder is unintelligible)”

As the soaring surge came on  
my girl at the time started wandering the house  
talking to herself  
I played guitar until the strings seemed like  
fence rails and the Botticellian body of the thing  
began to feel as wobbly as a wardrobe  
then we got into bed  
and my girl at the time  
started to panic  
“Everything is stop-motion,  
I feel like I’m wrapped in thick blankets of wool,  
my tongue is getting slippery as hell”  
And. it. WAS. stop. motion.  
I looked over at the pile of painter supplies left in the closet  
my eyes making a series of static aperture closures and opening  
along the way  
each photo accompanied by a thudding DROM!  
I realized this was the sound of my eyelids smashing down and up

like old sash-mashed windows:  
DROM! DROM! DROM!

No sense could be made of it  
I forgot my identity for a spell  
forgot I had forgotten  
went free over the diamond-mine galaxy rotating behind my  
clenched eyes, lost direction,  
spun like a spider in the toilet flush hurricane,  
longed for home, childhood home at Christmas,  
had to pee, to not pee, had to pee again  
DROM! DROM! DROM! DROM!  
A face appeared to me out of the  
black velvet painting of a paisley cosmos  
neither benevolent nor evil  
more a curious observer  
an otherworldly anthropologist  
perhaps he was taking notes  
I couldn't see his hands

When my girl at the time started shivering  
tears rolling on her cheeks  
I said, "Let's get out of it,  
go back to your place,  
the anxiety here is too much."  
"Yes, please."

Pill showed up while I was packing up the car  
"Where are you going?"  
"We're leaving."  
"What?"  
"Look, we took some brownies... she kinda wiggled out...  
me as well. I have to take her home. The prospect of staying in a  
trim shack is freaking her out..."  
"Why don't you at least stay until the buzz wears off and make a  
rational decision?"  
"Fine. But I'm gonna keep packing the car."

An hour later we drove the river road with our giant  
foamy on the roof, each of us holding it in place  
as we had no straps. Pill shaking his head in the rear-view.  
The sun flickered off the water  
like the ten thousand loonies we had just given up

## Chapter 8 Portraiture

### *Rant from the top*

Below we find a series of headlines engaging in descriptions of marijuana workers and the growers they labour for. In most cases we find the sex of the suspect but not his or her occupation. They are rendered as faceless *people*, presumably in the wrong place at the wrong time, rather than workers *at work* when police swooped in. And while it is likely individuals are portrayed this way largely due to space and time constraints in print and other media as well as legal obligations, it is interesting to look upon these examples nonetheless as uniformly nonentities and, persistently, non-workers.

“A 45 years old [sic] man”—RCMP in B.C. web page, 16 Oct. 2013

“The people working as the gardeners”—The Vancouver Sun, 16 Oct. 2013

“Suspected of being the caretakers”—CBC News, 5 Jun. 2013

“A 52-year-old man”—Victoria Times Colonist, 10 Feb. 2013

“Three men, the suspects”—The Globe and Mail, 4 May 2012

“Four men”—The Province, 6 Dec. 2011

“A resident”—Kamloops Daily News, 18 Jul. 2011

“A 78-year-old Falkland man and his 75-year-old wife”—CHBC News Kelowna, 14 December. 2010

“One man, a caretaker”—*Kamloops Daily News*; 29 November 2010

“Two adult males”—*CanWest* wire, 13 October 2010

“Four people have been arrested”—*Kamloops Daily News* 25 June 2011

“Eight adults”—*Vancouver Province* 28 June 2009

Postmedia and Glacier Media Group, in their regional permutations, comprise the majority of the above references. Glacier Media directly controls over ninety publications in western Canada alone, many of them, like *Kamloops Daily News*, are dailies. Their B.C. flagship is likely Victoria’s *Times-Colonist*. Postmedia (a division of Canwest-Global) owns a compelling list of

news outlets, most notably, *The National Post*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, *The Calgary Herald*, *The Edmonton Journal*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, and *The Gazette* (Montréal).

Corporate media produce the overwhelming majority of news items relating to marijuana busts simply because corporate media comprise the overwhelming majority of media sources. The result is discourse generating out of central hierarchies of information-disseminating mechanisms that, on the ground, reads something like a LexisNexis search for the phrase “marijuana workers” that will yield zero results. Workers in this business simply do not exist as far as media are concerned. Even the mention of “a caretaker” above doesn’t really imply a worker, as much as it casts an image of a kindly, elderly gentleman who looks in on the plants once a week as a favour to the elusive grower (“Cops bust grow-op behind Total Pet store” in *Kamloops Daily News* 29 November 2010).

Curiously, another form of worker is absent in this discourse, the reporter. A glance at the works cited pages here reveals nearly every news item cited at the beginning of this section written by unidentified individuals. And of identified reporters, whose works were examined in earlier chapters, few have anything to offer in terms of motives for such representations. What remains is the abject entity: the non-worker, the invisible worker, or the gangster.

The marijuana industry is truly labour-intensive. Many workers are employed to go about their agricultural or their transportation work (to be circumspect, many are exploited also). Others are paid commissions in marijuana sales, from several hundred-kilo helicopter loads to street dealers selling loose joints. But these folks simply do not regularly show up in media accounts. And it is much harder to discuss the complex truth that many are employed in the marijuana industry in B.C. (Penfold 2010) or that

folks involved in the marijuana industry also go to restaurants, get haircuts, go skiing and golfing, buy houses and cars, all the things that the rest of us do. They just get to pay for it in cash! And, it’s not just about gangs. A lot of marijuana is grown by our neighbours who have a day job and a room in the basement that makes them another \$40k or more a year. And the contractor who does your home renovations during the day may be doing grow-op conversions for cash at night (Penfold 2010:12).

**Sidebar Rant:**

*I return to  
Michael,  
arrested in a major  
bust in February 2012.  
In the interrogation  
room, RCMP  
officers stated bluntly,  
“We know you are just  
a worker at this facility  
—your employer has  
already made a state-  
ment to this effect.”  
Yet the media coverage,  
as already pointed out,  
makes no mention of  
workers. It seems to me  
that the state—and by  
extension, the media—  
cannot talk about work-  
ers in this context. It  
would mean conceding  
that the legitimate econ-  
omy cannot provide for  
British Columbians,  
that structural controls  
aren't really effective.  
Powerful elites do  
not permit such discourse.  
So: no such thing as*

*(clouds) (storm clouds)(clouds)*  
  
/ / / / /  
/ / (rain) / /  
/ / / / /  
/ / /  
workers.

In an attempt to dig deeper into these representations, I conducted a case study that might, with its abundance of media coverage, reveal a different stretch of discourse than we typically find in the one-off sort of documents that comprise so much of media’s marijuana content.

The event was the arrest for marijuana smuggling and apparent suicide of a young Kootenay man, Sam Brown, in a Spokane holding cell on 27 February 2009. Brown’s death and the ensuing five days of silence from Washington State authorities produced an avalanche of media coverage, including *The Fifth Estate*’s video documentary piece, “Over The Edge” (13 November 2009) and *Rolling Stone* magazine’s “Death of A Free-rider” (6 August 2009).

***Hold my machine gun, these plants need micronutrients and pH-balanced water.***

Full participation in illicit activities ‘has been employed from the perspective of various subjectivist and critical theoretical frameworks (e.g. symbolic interactionism, cultural criminology, and conflict perspectives)’ to immerse the researcher in activities and interactions ‘sufficient to develop rapport to the point of being able to exercise free movement and open discourse’ (Miller and Tewkesbury 2010:493).

Sunday

Spear Lake: Antler Hill patch

I want you guys to joke and have fun but I also want you to concentrate before you get out of the truck.

Rack your brains and talk about the job. Don’t forget shit.

bring: Clif Bar for rat traps

28-14-14 ferts

Skoot and sprayer

ppm stick – mix to 500 ppm

Timer: add day – Wednesday; add 90 min.

Check timer, fill injector, pull weeds from inside of pots, spray Skoot

Spear Lake: The Knuckle

water 500 ppm, add CalMag, add VermiTea

weed inside pots

spray Skoot

*Not Tommy Hilfiger*

After driving THE THING to THE PLACE, you stand outside the car in the drugstore parking lot, waiting for it to open. And you go over the series of movements that will lead up to passing THE THING across the counter: ACT NORMAL; pass the box CASUALLY; refuse postal insurance. And it is only later, in your car that you notice a small, bright bit of pot leaf is stuck to the breast of your dark brown shirt. And then the ANGUISH sets in. You were paid \$300 to mail a \$10,000 box and now IT WILL NEVER ARRIVE AT ITS DESTINATION. Worse: YOU HAVE TO REPORT THIS TO YOUR EMPLOYER WITHOUT DELAY. Worse still: THE PEOPLE AT THE DESTINATION ARE NOW COMPROMISED. As the months roll by and no-one is arrested your employer lets you down easy: “The posties stole the product, it happens sometimes.” Now you just have to pay back the ten grand. Have a nice day.

*Monday*

Kirkland Lake: Far Away trap-line

The truck has a bag of blue, and CalMag and Skoot. 2 sprayers in the kayak.

Only bring what you need for the day.

bring: utility grade ½ inch poly x 2

2 x ½ inch connectors

Skoot and sprayer

make: intake hood

water: 500 ppm, add CalMag, VermiTea,  
weed pots, spray, spike with Ozmo-coat

Kirkland Lake: Suicide Swamp

water: 500 ppm unless flooded out

weed pots, spray, check rat traps, spike with Ozmo-coat

*the 4<sup>th</sup> life of organic toxins*

As he reached from the bed to the tumbler of water a small tussle of black thread beside the glass startled into a spider. He felt the wall bulge out with his eyes, press and heave as the plywood bowed and sucked in again slowly, slowly. Yet upon inspection no rent nails were to be found, no cracked boards, no splinters. He climbed the loft ladder down into the kitchen of the cabin. A day off. And a Babylon of dirty dishes stared back at him. His head wracked with a fierce pain. He found it difficult to maintain his balance. Hands trembling, he sat on the bench by the door. "Poisoned," he reasoned with himself as he looked out onto the deck where his work bundle lay. Among his belongings were the bottle of Skoot and the spray canister. "Poisoned by pesticides," he moaned. And tried to climb the ladder. The spider reached down a hairy arm to help him up. She spoke in low tones, "I'll go to town and pick up the mail, do the laundry. May I borrow your car?"

"What a relief," he sighed, and fell awkwardly to the ether sheets. A senseless sort of slow-motion train accident.

*Wednesday*

Beliveau: Breezy trap-line

Park at regular spot. Top site has a replacement timer on-site. Don't worry about it for site 2 as plants have been well watered and will be okay until I get back Friday.

bring: fencing

28-14-14

procal

ppm stick

Skoot and sprayer

fence, spray Skoot, check emitters, refill injectors, check timers,  
clean filters, check settling ponds

Was this what you wanted? The people that you met, those phantasms of exoticism, what did they have for you, to give you? What words did they speak? “We are exploited,” some said. “We are the exploiters,” spoke the others. And was it necessary, to your mind, to get outside the corporate university framework, to “ask the more fundamental questions” (Rose 1993:215)? To arrive in some new land? To uncover “new cultural formations and identities” (216)? Was a permanent back injury and renal damage part of the plan? Bearing witness to the grand theft of human welfare—are these your fundamental answers?

You realized, all too late, that you had gone nowhere, discovered nothing.

*Thursday*

Tap-Hastings: main office

10am meeting with Marketing

I want you guys to push the new survey results; note the stats for 2015 agr. data

bring: corporate accounts data, copies of divisional financials, survey data

Tap-Hastings: Georgia St. office

2:30 meeting with VPFO: present survey data

See you Friday.

### **Sam Brown**

As the helicopter neared the American border, Brown flew low, hugging the treelined ridges and jagged cliffs of the Selkirk range to avoid detection. He knew that DEA and U.S. Customs patrolled the border, sometimes with Black Hawk helicopters, and he had sketched out a route that avoided the airstrips and dirt roads they used. Not that anyone would be out tonight: the snow was coming down in flurries and the fog was closing in. [Hyde 2009: 59].

Samuel Lindsay Brown was arrested 23 February 2009 in Washington State by DEA officers and taken to the Spokane County Jail (63). Four days later he would be found dead in his cell by a guard (*The Fifth Estate* 2009), purportedly the result of a suicide. Brown was a 24-year-old from B.C., an extreme sport enthusiast and a drug smuggler. He was widely respected in the free-riding community (PinkBike 2009) and remembered as a “gentle spirit” (CBC News 2009). His death was widely regarded in the Kootenays and in national media, such as *The Fifth Estate*, *Rolling Stone* magazine, many mountain biking journals and web-sites, as a tragedy. Brown’s



story, though compelling and truly sad, is not the locus of analysis here. *The Fifth Estate* piece, an excellent overview of events and Brown's thrill-seeking character, can be found there: [http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/TV+Shows/the+fifth+estate/ID/133035436\\_1/?page3D8](http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/TV+Shows/the+fifth+estate/ID/133035436_1/?page3D8). Please enjoy responsibly.

I am concerned with the manner Brown was represented in the media. He presents a challenging figure for journalists. On the one hand he is just a kid, "not involved with gangs" who, nonetheless, became "mixed up in the wrong crowd" (CBC News 2009). On the other, a professional smuggler, "someone who could get himself out of any jam" (Hyde 2009:60), a "B.C. man accused of drug-smuggling" (*Vancouver Sun* 24 March 2009). How is one to make sense of this enigmatic figure? I contend that *two* Browns emerged from the media discourse generated around his life and death.

In all, I considered 36 documents appropriate for my analysis, several originating in the U.S. The reason for this was simple; Brown was apprehended in Washington State and he died in Spokane. Though Spokane and surrounding wilds are American environs, they are geographically and, more importantly, economically linked to the Kootenay region in this context. Therefore, stories generating from, say, *The Spokane Spokesman-Review* dealing with Brown were deemed as relevant as those emanating from the *Nelson Daily News*.

The majority of news items examined in this case study were blurb-type short pieces, a considerable portion (almost half) generated immediately after Spokane County Jail officials reported Brown's death. This occurred, curiously, a full five days after his body was discovered. "Immediately" is defined here as within the first week; that is, by or on 11 March 2009. The remainder came after the initial sensational value of the story waned. Of these, few took the dramatic road (10 per cent) of describing Brown's youthful, gentle heart or his bright future in extreme sports or his decision as revealed to close friends and family shortly before his death to quitting the smuggling business altogether (*The Fifth Estate* 2009).

More typical coverage grouped Brown in with organized crime, as in *The Province* piece, "Seven Canadians arrested in drug bust," wherein the article states, "One of the alleged helicopter pilots, Samuel Lindsay-Brown, 24, of Nelson committed suicide in a Spokane jail four days after his arrest" (25 March 2009). Or, consider the *Vancouver Sun* coverage in, "Four B.C. men face extradition to U.S. over cocaine, pot-smuggling charges" (2 May 2012): "All four are alleged to be part of a major smuggling operation headed by Martin involving hundreds of

kilograms of marijuana and cocaine and at least two helicopters to transport their illicit product. In fact, the pilot of one of those helicopters, Sam Brown, hanged himself in a Spokane jail after being arrested in February 2009 in the midst of a cross-border run” (Author unknown).

As indicated, many of the articles were this sort of blurb-style, embedded into larger, organized crime-trope items. Some variations occurred, as in the *Nelson Daily News* item: “Former Nelson resident caught trafficking dies in Spokane jail; Lindsay-Brown had stolen helicopter to smuggle marijuana over Canada-U.S. border” (Payne 11 March 2009). Here, the usual smuggling-organized crime links are constructed; yet, this is one of very few news items to suggest a “suspicious nature of ... death” and even more suspicious behaviour of Spokane County Jail officials, who released information of Brown's death only five days after the fact:

As for the investigation, Lou Brown shied away from referring to his son's death as a conspiracy, but did say that what happened to Sam in his last hours remains ‘inconclusive’. “(The investigation) is very inconclusive ... at this point on how he died,” said Brown, who indicated that there are still other investigations that are ongoing. ‘Their autopsy is pretty suspect,’ said Lou Brown in a later interview. ‘Everybody is speculating that it has more twists and turns than anybody knows about.’ [Adams 16 March 2009]

No other media item beyond the two mentioned above pursued the ‘suspicious death’ theme. Yet Kootenay locals speculate Brown's pot cargo—an inconclusive mass, appearing in news items ranging from 81 to 400 kgs—belonged to the Vancouver-based gang United Nations and that Brown was murdered in retaliation for the loss of the marijuana.

Of news items taking the dramatic road, the two most significant are *The Fifth Estate* piece, “Over the Edge” and the *Rolling Stone* article, “Death of a Freerider.” These are exposé pieces, exploring both Brown's journey into smuggling and his tragic death. *The Fifth Estate* piece pays a moment's awareness to the worker in the marijuana smuggling business when investigative reporter Linden MacIntyre states, “sometimes little regard is given to the guy doing the work” in an industry driven by excellent profits and extreme risks.

More tellingly, MacIntyre describes Brown in the following tones: “he seemed prepared for any eventuality but one: getting caught” “not (a) criminal ... he got addicted to the money...

that's where it did him wrong;" "young daredevil," "resourcefulness" and "naiveté" "capable, trustworthy" "gallantry" "tempted fate repeatedly" and "gambled with his freedom and lost" "scared to death (by DEA interrogators)" "by-gone innocence and freedom" (2009). The image generated is one of a young man in over his head, misguided and talented but on the wrong path. Conversely, Jesse Hyde's *Rolling Stone* article builds a picture of Brown as someone who had graduated from innocence and knowingly moved into extreme risk and organized crime. Some key phrases from the article that reinforce my reading are as follows:

"he had no fear:" "a mathematical brain;"; "abandoned and alone (at the end)";  
"often hard to understand"; "he had this purity, this innocence... really mature";  
"strong"; "At first he grew some pot, then he ran it across the border" "he was  
experimenting with drugs" and "it was like he was hopped up on speed, going  
crazy";  
"he would talk about life as a smuggler" and,  
"a guy who courted danger at every turn;" "a kid chasing a thrill." [2009]

Each of these phrases permit a complex reading of a person who has been convicted of a crime related to drugs and who committed suicide in the aftermath. As complex and, often as contradictory as these phrases are, they call upon stereotypical characteristics reinforced by (and in turn used in) the media to straddle the line between what is described as a "criminal," while also being sensitive to his imminent suicide. "Danger," "experimenting," "innocence," "kid," "crazy"—these terms could be attributed to any twenty-four year old person or, rather, any person going through a transitory place in their life. And yet, they serve to differentiate who Brown was from what Brown did.

These items are important in that they locate the subject in the larger discourse, whereas the blurb-style bits do nothing to bring Brown to life. The larger structural forces at work are portrayed as fateful and the young Brown as no match for the power of the state(s) involved. Indeed, in most drug bust pieces covered in earlier sections here, individuals remain anonymous cogs in the drug machine, represented as gun-toting gangsters. But is this a different stretch of discourse? Perhaps it is more explicit, with overtures of caution for the young risk-taker who would follow in Brown's footsteps but, it is, ultimately, merely a more elaborate representation of the criminal.

## The Archduke Trio

The subject of pay was included in an overwhelming majority of my field notes resulting from casual conversations with workers. The reasons varied, from workers having laboured for unreliable employers, to the work itself being so arduous that workers consistently felt under-compensated for their efforts. This duality, under-paid/over-worked, led to the construction of “The Archduke Trio,” a post-modernist piece of writing incorporating testimonial, phenomenological experience of worker reality and relevant quotations from scholars. The title comes from Beethoven’s Piano Trio, Op. 97 and is intended as an ironic statement, as Beethoven wrote the piece in honour of one of his patrons, the Archduke Rudolf of Austria. The *patrons* in industrial-scale illicit marijuana were frequently considered exploiters by the workers I spoke with, taking the lion’s share of the wealth for themselves and doling out *bonuses* that were, in fact, already built into the wage structure and cost the grower nothing.

*The singer stopped singing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed in his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.*  
— Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues* (1994)

### 1. Cello

The Marxian model does accommodate change, even revolutionary change. Such change is a product of the dialectical play between contradictions in society, such as the divergent interests of wage earners and the owners of the means of production in capitalism. [Barrett 1997:96]

for it was not the overtures of quarreling that stuck in mind but the endless unresolved pay injustices which tormented one and that were carried, muttering, into every experience of the work. Blind rage at the toxic plume of chemical sprays as one staggered under the canister and the darkened thickets of the interiors, the plants drooping under the weight of dank, milky spray. Each labour was built upon the sham, this con, and it drove the worker into bitter imaginings. The work one performed earned huge profits for the employer yet the labourer would never take home more than \$25/hr, \$28 with a bonus. And so, the reasoning went—with each day of watering, dragging the ever-kinking hose through the maze of potted plants, the scalding glare of lights searing the eyes, the bat-wings smashing into one at every step—the drudgery made one man rich and another reliant on more and more drudgery. Should you fall ill or be injured, you would be cast aside, replaced with another generic labour input. No medical insurance, no compensation, without so much as a “by your leave,”

we're hanging out with Billy Corker one evening, over a case of Cut-throat. The talk turned to pay in the marijuana business for workers. Corker made quick sense of the situation based on his own experiences, "It is legitimate businesses that are forced to pay a standardized wage. The grower is exempt from this. He has to distance himself from the workers because he is uncomfortable with how much he is keeping for himself." Of course

it's easy to be a socialist with someone else's money, but

the "instrumentalizing way of seeing the world as a resource has become habitual, even conventional, part of modern life, as evident in the commodification of art as it is in the dehumanizing regime of the assembly line. People and things are valued, not for their intrinsic wealth, but for their potential to create wealth or promote" (Kester 2004:27).

what the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board describes as "customary hours. This means that shepherds should be available to work around the clock, seven days a week" (Gray 2003:230).

## 2. *Violin.*

"It is the pride of the drudge—the one who is equal to no matter what quantity of work. At that level, the mere power to go on working like an ox is about the only virtue attainable. *Debrouillard* is what every *plongeur* wants to be called. A *debrouillard* is one who is told to do the impossible, will *debrouiller*—get it done somehow" (Orwell 1968:81)

stagger under the load wondering if the trail will ever come to its logical conclusion. Following a track that is no track, the late April sun thin and ineffectual, thank Christ. The bearded pines shaking off the last of winter, a shocking blue above us as the flat chaos of the clear-cut—one missed step and the seventy pound load would break your leg—gives way to the black shade thicket of the forest. Bits of remaining snowpack trip us up. This is Oasis, along Nancy Greene, and we've taken to calling the place Three Bears, a brute hike over the peak and down to the massive south-facing slope where a sprawling swamp begins its spring revival. The work is twelve hours of such stumbling, reaching the site cache, dumping the load, running the two kilometers back to the road cache, and on, on until well past dark. The frame-pack straps grind the collarbones raw and we're reeling, almost passing out from dehydration, exhaustion, low branches scathing the face as

"Zag-zag was not in his pack. How could he not be loaded already? He'd gotten to the cache first and I was loaded and leaning for a stack of seven-gallon pots when I noticed he was reaching into his lunch kit, withdrawing his thermos, and pouring a cup of (by now) cold coffee. We regarded one another. He smiled, indicating an informal cheers (we were perilously close to the road) and sipping away. It struck me that this was a silent protest against the unceasing labours of the day, that he was taking an unsanctioned break, that each sip, in no way rapid yet neither were they relaxed, was in fact a small performative gesture, 'this moment is mine, and this, and this ...' He had soon emptied the cup. The moments had passed between us, he conducting a silent work stoppage, his agency expressed in the frozen minute, with me as a witness, a complicit partisan in the fracturing of our work party into boss and workers. We put off the..."

chiropractor appointment for my back. Feeling a bit improved and tremendously optimistic. I had counted myself out after the agony toppled me, sliding off the wet, slick log, unable to move for several minutes before crawling in measured, frail clutchings at roots and rocks, toward where I imagined the truck to be

too tired to write tonight.

### 3. *Piano.*

*“Do we not, too, half believe that the ‘good man’,  
the successful man, is he who has cheated another of his place?”*

— Clifford Geertz (1998:112)

“...this tired. Word came from on high that the insurance company’s electrical inspector was to arrive in the morning and calamity of having the man in the house sent Sturmer into a frenzy. He had me tear down the entire basement (two large grow rooms) and move all the plants to the Hangar and Barn. Hours of frantic, bent-double, sprinting from grow room to trailer, from trailer to Hangar—smashed my head horribly on the trailer frame, knocked senseless—pulling wires, hauling lights out into the shed two at a time, pulling down the black and white, dismantling the box frames, vacuuming, steam-cleaning. Then on to transplanting 730 plants from 4-inch to 2-gallon pots. Passed out on the basement couch after the inspector looked fleetingly at the wiring and departed, ‘Looks fine.’ Not even a glance at the now-vacant grow rooms. I woke after half an hour to take a piss and Sturmer grabs me as I come out of the can. ‘Set it all back up,’ he says, and fucks off for town.”

## Chapter 9 Discussion and Conclusions

### Discussion.

Small-scale growers, gangsters and Mom-and-Pops alike, may yet have the productive capacities of their land, their property and their labour taken away by Health Canada. Large-scale grow corporations might well be the direct beneficiaries. And so far, workers remain invisible. Best-case scenario is they remain invisible, worst-case is a stint in prison. In B.C. it means a continuation of what Thomas Jefferson described as holding a wolf by the ears—you don't like it, but you dare not let it go. Working in oftentimes-hazardous environments, these folks can be exposed to life-threatening, toxic environments, have no recourse to worker compensation if injured or rendered ill on the job, no mechanism in place to advocate for their rights, nor any judiciary in which to seek justice. There are no official statistics accounting for their number but we do know that they are out there. Those who are visible in the popular discourse tend to be represented as gangsters, gun-toting, house-wrecking persons.

Yet greater structural forces are afoot. Legalization south of the border may have disastrous economic effects on thousands of British Columbians. And open, informed discussion of what is at stake in terms of the massive drop in provincial economic activity strikes George E. Penfold, former Regional Innovation Chair at Selkirk College, as a relative impossibility:

We can't seem to find a way to talk about this as a serious issue. So, because it's illegal we focus on gangs as the issue rather than our neighbours, or even our own or our kid's behaviour or involvement in the industry either directly, or indirectly as consumers. We rarely talk about our dependence on the marijuana trade as a support for the health of our retail and services sectors ... We are all in a very real way addicted to the benefits of pot economy and are complicit in its continuing existence. We can't discuss the possible need for 'Pot Renewal BC' or 'The Pot Action Coalition' as we have done in forestry, or sit down with growers, pruners or gang members and talk about 'job transition training' (2010).

In not being able to “find a way to talk about this as a serious issue,” we have largely left the discourse up to government ideologues and corporate media, whose representatives, as shown above, continue to render marijuana workers as two-dimensional gangsters or invisible nonentities. Exceptions in the mainstream are to be found, such as Molly Lynch’s “The war on BC’s small pot farmer” (*The Tyee* 16 December 2013) but they are scarce. The result is that a greater public finds itself quite misinformed.

### **Conclusions: The results of mis-representation**

This study has endeavored to assess representations of growers and the workers for whom they toil in the marijuana industry as they appear in public discourse. Much is written here about workers, how they are represented, mis-taken—as in portraiture—as phantasms of exoticism, rendered invisible. A continuum of actors persists within these occupational categories and although I highlight the public representations of workers and growers throughout this thesis as either gangsters or non-entities, *all* types are found therein, in varying proportions contingent on the nature of industry subsectors.

For the larger social structure, such grievous rendering has come at great cost. We remain ignorant to the nuances of the marijuana industry, to its true contributions to the larger economy and, as a result, we remain unaware of the costs associated with legalization. The actual number of growers, workers, grow-operations, transporters, industry-related sales figures, economic spin-offs—all elude our grasp. The agricultural aggregate of marijuana produced in the province, indeed in the country, is unknown to us. And truly one of the most grievous side-effects of such enduring ignorance is the pretense that marijuana production fails to contribute to community health.

Thinking of everyone who grows marijuana or works in the industry as an armed gangster is a terribly mobcentric way to comprehend this industry, but it is also a horribly frightening way to think about the community and the country in which one resides.

Especially so, given that one result of our ignorance of marijuana workers and their grower employers is the fact that their stories remain unknown to us; their collective knowledge and wisdom gained through decades of experience elude us; their true identities, as hard working farm labourers, as risk-takers, as entrepreneurs, as single parents, as recovering addicts, as MA students, as your aunt and uncle, son or daughter, remain obscured; the knowledge that our



communities and government programming fail to help a considerable portion of our population eludes us when we permit an entire industry to be painted as a monster. To be clear: there are gangsters in the marijuana industry. But they are not the sole constituents of that category. And it is unfortunate that statistics are not available to know for certain the ratio of peaceful workers and growers to violent gangsters but, in the end, that's not really the point. The elision of the peaceful folk persists, the blind spot holds and we are all the poorer because of it.

### Poem while you wait for the reservoir to fill

Fuck, but the hose

t  
r  
i  
c  
k  
l  
e  
s

(a \$2 million facility with a \$200 watering system)  
as your summer

*surges*

and the mind

w  
a  
n  
d  
e  
r  
s...

what was it?

that you have forgotten?

that we are out of Drip Clean?

no.

that the mold threatens the kolas?

no.

that this lost

T I M E  
is irretrievable?

you stink of  
WEED resin  
and  
SWEAT  
and  
CHEMICALS  
and  
A LITTLE LIKE SHIT  
(the heavy-labourer's perfumerie)

but  
the 'rez' is almost suddenly fully full  
and now only the time  
for one last thought remains:

these plants  
bound for slaughter  
seem to cry out,

"RUN from this place  
while  
you  
still  
can!  
RUN! You have legs!  
And are slave to no-one!"

but you stay, don't you?  
the GREED has you,  
down  
to  
the  
roots.

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## **Appendix A: Study Protocol**

The protocol is defined as the construction of categories to guide data collection via the use of a data collection sheet was designed to enable the assessment of two chief aspects of any document: 1. process, context and significance; 2. how the document helps define meaning. In relation to the assessment of representations, then, I designed a protocol that looked to how a document proceeded, what was its context and how was the document significant. Finally, the protocol must be designed to ask how meaning is defined and, why.

Thus, process: What sort of narrative was employed? What sort of constructionist employment of differences was engaged?,

Context: i.e. Was it concerning medical marijuana? Was it concerning marijuana-related gang violence?

Significance: What makes this an important document? And why?