Conceptualizing Silk Road as Countercultural Rebellion

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Abstract

Silk Road (SR) is an anonymous online illicit marketplace (OIM) that is often cited as an example of criminal innovation. I add that SR is more than just a marketplace and should be considered as a demonstration of rebellion. The aim of this research is to critically co-construct a definition of SR with the members of the discussion forum. Through a virtual ethnography of the SR discussion forum, I qualitatively analyzed the textual data in order to conceptualize SR as what Robert Merton (1938) describes as rebellion and what Howard Becker (1963) refers to as pure deviance. In addition, an epistemological *bricolage* with the works of Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault was established to guide explanations of cultural exchange, relational trust, and the spatial dynamics of SR. I postulate that SR is more than an online illicit marketplace; it is a virtual heterotopic space and cryptocommunity that exists in countercultural rebellion against the hegemony of control societies. The findings of this study provide a new qualitatively rich conceptualization of SR.

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1.0 **Chapter One: Introduction**

In the age of computer-mediated-communication (CMC), disembodied rebellion has permeated through cyberspace, most recently in the form of Silk Road (SR): a virtual cryptomovement for radical freedom from the oppressive War on Drugs. According to Ramos (2013), the politicized War on Drugs was officially declared by U.S. president Richard Nixon in 1971 to curb the use and abuse of illegal drugs. Illegal drugs such as Cannabis (Marijuana), Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and predominantly psychedelic drugs became a cornerstone "taste" of the counterculture that peaked in popularity in the summer of 1967. This youth counterculture can be labeled as the hippy subculture; this label, however, has incurred stigmatic properties since its first use. Nonetheless, the youth counterculture of the 1960s opposed the military industrial complex (more specifically, the war in Vietnam), mass incarceration, systemic racism and sexism, and other forms of oppression propagated by the State.

Simon (2014) in his qualitative archival research of "radical" discourse emerging out of Berkeley in the 1960s calls for the revalidation of the subaltern experience and a new justification for radical criminology. Subsequently, the tone and *telos* of this current study falls under the canopy of radical criminology in attempts to give voice to the SR cryptocommunity. The rationale for this partisan research standpoint is underpinned by the assumption that drug users are victims of the statist agenda for mass incarceration. The War on Drugs is just that, a war against subaltern, stigmatized and labeled bodies and countercultural discourses that embody rebellion in a post-1968 world. This countercultural rebellion has now transmigrated into the realm of CMC and cyberspace.

CMC has enabled a new form of sociocultural interaction that is unprecedented – especially in the example of Silk Road. The computer has reshaped the way individuals communicate, educate, and even participate politically in society. However, the computer is just a primitive stepping-stone to the larger digital revolution that is taking place. The Internet facilitates computerized connectivity, which has even been argued to blur the "real" with the "virtual" world (Jordan, 2009, p. 181). Jordan (2009) observes that, "a growing number of people now live in a hybrid world where the boundaries between what is physical (or actual) and what is digital (or electronic) continue to fade" (p. 181). This postmodern suggestion, that the actual and digital primacy of human experience are converging into an indiscernible unified digital domain, leaves realist legal scholars at a dead end for defining cybercrime. Cybercrime is therefore more complex than what was presupposed, which has left lawmakers and scholars contemplating the very nature of this sub-discipline and activity it purports to study (Wall, 2007).

Cybercrime is a field within criminology that has been fractionalized by competing camps of theory and research. This fractionalization is justified by considerable debate on the nature of cybercrime. Wall (2007) dichotomizes as computer-oriented and computer-mediated. As per Wall's (2007) recommendations, Silk Road (SR) falls under the category of computer-mediated cybercrime, where two parties can pseudonymously meet online to logistically organize and facilitate the commission of a real-life (RL) drug exchange.

The advancement of OIMs like SR provides new means of rebelling against formal social control and against governments who are perceived by the members of SR as problematic adversaries to drug use. According to the National Institute on Drug

Abuse (NIDA), illegal drugs incur approximately $193 billion in costs annually in the

United States of America (Drugabuse.gov, 2015). NIDA cites that such costs are

predominantly attributed to criminal justice programs in prevention and determent,

healthcare fees, and loss of labour productivity (Drugabuse.gov, 2015). The Federal

Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) reports that 48.7% of offenders who are incarcerated in a U.S

federal prison are convicted on drug offenses (Drugabuse.gov, 2015). Currently, 96 324

inmates are serving custodial sentences in federal prisons in the U.S. for committing

drug-related crimes (FBOP.gov, n.d.). In Canada, there has been a 39.5% rate of increase

in police-reported drug offences since 1998 (Government of Canada, 2013). These

statistics reveal a disconcerting trend in policing and imprisoning drug offenders.

Schlosser (1993) suggests the prison-industrial-complex is an industry of punishment that

thrives on the increasing rates of incarceration of drug "offenders." It can therefore be

suggested that punitive formal social control of drug "offenders" is the impetus for

rebellion.

Martin (2014) defines Silk Road as an online illicit marketplace (OIM) that relies

on computer-mediated-communications (CMC) to exist. Furthermore, Martin (2014)

conceptualizes SR as a type of website that relies on encryption services, such as the

TOR (The Onion Router) network and Bitcoin, to facilitate anonymous exchange. Thus,

"cryptomarket" has emerged as a term to define the primary feature of SR: the online

illicit marketplace (OIM). To be more specific, crypto terminology pertains to computer

encryption, which, "is the process of protecting information by rendering it unreadable by

anyone without the specific knowledge necessary to decipher it" (Ramage, 2009, p. 417).

This term, however, only defines the market component of SR; research on the SR online

community discussion forum remains sparse in recent literature. In the spirit of utilizing

crypto terminology, the most synonymous term for defining the online community

discussion forum would be the cryptocommunity. Cryptocommunity is defined as the

encrypted community discussion forum of SR. Much like any contemporary discussion

forum, the cryptocommunity is comprised of discussion topics known as "threads" where

members post text-based items of discussion thematically related to the topic thread.

Consequentially, SR is comprised of two components: (1) the cryptomarket; and (2) the

cryptocommunity (*ibid* forum).

Herein, I seek to unify the criminological conceptualization of the cryptomarket

with the cryptocommunity in reference to SR. In turn, I suggest that these distinct

components of SR overlap to serve as the platform for a cryptomovement. By exploring

the discourse of the cryptocommunity through an analysis of its components, mainly the

discussion posts, I will explore and develop this new conceptualization.

Although SR is analogous to that of an OIM, the ultimate *telos* of the SR OIM is

rebellion – entrenched in the philosophy of the cryptocommunity. SR is philosophically

marked by revolutionary rhetoric: "*Silk Road is not a marketplace. Silk Road is a global

revolt*" [announcement on SR main page]. Through a theoretical framework underpinned

by Merton (1938) and Becker (1963), the purpose of this research is to co-create with the

members of SR a critical representation of SR through the voice of the active participant.

In order to close a theoretical gap addressed by Aldrige and Décary-Hétu (2014), who

conceptualize SR as criminal innovation, I will examine the rhetoric and discourse of the

cryptocommunity to demonstrate how SR is instead an example of Merton's (1938)

adaptation of rebellion. In addition, Becker's (1963) labeling theory will better facilitate

the conceptualization of the drug culture and "deviant" social groups of SR as acts of rebellion against formal social control imposed by the State[1].

2.0 Chapter Two: Aims of Inquiry, Ontology, Structure and Research Questions

SR is largely understudied from a critical-constructivist perspective. Relying heavily on qualitative techniques of research and analysis, this study examines the text-based discussion forum – the cryptocommunity of SR – in order to conceptualize SR as cryptomovement through the voice of active members on the forum. Fundamentally, this inquiry's aim is to establish an understanding of culture through "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973; Geertz, Geertz & Rosen, 1979); close an existing gap between Merton, Becker, and the New Left perspective through qualitative research (Guba, 1996); and shed light on social conflict and oppression as a means for justifying policy change (Fay, 1987). The constructivist approach, in conjunction with critical aim of this inquiry, is presupposed by the conflict ontology (Giroux, 1982; Bernal, 2002; and Kilgore, 2001), where co-creating the discourse of these struggles in order to develop public understanding is a practical research goal (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Preissle, 2006), in addition to ethical and methodological reasons. This research thus adds to the body of literature on cybercrime criminology and online cultural studies by giving voice to the cryptocommunity of SR through qualitative ethnographic research.

In order to add structure to the research objectives outlined above, this paper is organized into five sections. First and foremost, the literature review includes a summary-critique of recent literature on SR in synthesis with a discussion on the theoretical

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[1] State refers to government of a given nation, whereas state represents disposition, condition, etc.

framework's purpose; I introduce the current research and analysis in greater detail. More specifically, Merton's (1938) strain theory and Becker's (1963) approach to labeling theory constitute the theoretical framework, which will be consolidated to accommodate the aforementioned aims of inquiry. Baudrillard's works will *bricolage* the sociology of deviance with the broader New Left epistemology. Subsequently, the second section discusses the epistemological, ethical, and methodological considerations of the current research. The third section is an overview of the methods, design/setting, and the specific techniques of virtual ethnography utilized. The fourth section includes the findings of virtual ethnography with a presentation and analysis of specific text-based quotes drawn from the data. The fifth and final section includes a discussion of the findings, limitations, and of critical research and policy recommendations – more specifically concluding with a discussion on SR as a heterotopic space (Foucault, 1984).

2.1 Research Questions.

In order to conceptualize SR as an online community underpinned by the philosophy of rebellion rather than that of criminal innovation, one must consider the following queries, presented from most general to specific: What roles and ranks of membership exist in the cryptocommunity? How does the cryptocommunity perceive formal social control? What are the social, cultural, and political values of cryptocommunity? What is the philosophical impetus behind SR? How does formal social control affect trust within the cryptocommunity? What textual evidence within discussion forum confirms SR as an example of rebellion rather than innovation?

 3.0 Chapter Three: Summary-critique of Theory and Research related to Silk Road

3.1 Defining Online Illicit Marketplace

   SR has remained relatively obscure with respect to scholarly inquiry. In an early

working paper produced by Christin (2012), he reports that the discussion forum of SR

emerged in February of 2011 in conjunction with the OIM, as seen in Table 1. Between

2011 and 2013, SR remained in a state of relative obscurity, receiving very little attention

from major media and law enforcement alike. However, in October of 2013, Silk Road's

accused founder and captain Ross Ulbricht, known to the cryptocommunity as captain

Dread Pirate Roberts (DPR), was arrested; this in turn resulted in an immediate seizure of

the SR online domain and closure of the cryptomarket (Templeton, 2013a). The

cryptocommunity remained accessible during this time. In November, 2013, roughly one

month after the illegal activities of SR were seemingly successfully discontinued by the

law enforcement efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), SR reemerged as

SR 2.0 under the leadership of a second DPR (Templeton, 2013b). SR 2.0 lasted one year

until it was once again seized in November, 2014 by law enforcement authorities.

Table 1. The timeline depicting major events of SR's history from creation to closure.

Date	Event	Version
xx/01/2011	Silk Road created	SR
02/10/2013	FBI shut down Silk Road	SR
07/10/2013	Silk Road 2 forum launched	SR2.0
06/11/2013	The launch of Silk Road 2	SR2.0
13/02/2014	Silk Road 2 hacked of all Bitcoin in ESCROW	SR2.0
06/11/2014	FBI shut down Silk Road 2	SR 2.0

The above timeline (Table 1) is an abbreviated report of events important to contextualize SR's resilient nature. According to Torres-Soriano's (2013) research on the creation, evolution, and eventual disappearance of Internet forums for terrorist groups, online communities remain resilient in the face of adversity by quickly acquiring new leaders. Without starkly equating SR to that of an online terrorist community, findings presented by Torres-Soriano (2013) are transferrable in understanding SR's resilience. When SR was seized in November, 2014, DPR the second quickly replaced the original DPR after the initial forced closure in 2013. Leadership structure, as suggested by Torres-Soriano (2013), is not the only hypothetical reason why a potential SR 3.0 failed to take off following the closure of SR 2.0; it may be more attributed to a diminished trust in the system of SR by members (Bierhoff & Vornefeld, 2004).

In January of 2015, a new Silk Road entitled Silk Road: Reloaded (SRR) emerged. SRR utilizes an alternative encryption network similar to that of the TOR network called the I2P network. According to Dolliver (2015), the TOR network was invented by the United States Navy to facilitate anonymity for users who installed the router on their computers in order to access the network (p. 1). The I2P network operates in a similar fashion, but utilizes alternative encryption protocol. Unlike TOR, the I2P network is entirely grassroots, originating from the Freenet peer-to-peer platform in 2003 by developers who sought to keep the Internet anonymous and free. Henceforth, the main purpose of these networks and routers is to provide anonymity for online users. Nonetheless, SRR is the next phase in SR's rapid evolution with more secure encryption and the acceptance of multiple cryptocurrencies (e.g. Bitcoin, Altcoin, Litecoin, and Darkcoin).

3.1.1 Problematizing the Definition of Online Illicit Marketplace

A major hallmark of recent literature pertaining to SR is the notion that SR is only used for aiding drug transactions (see Barratt, 2012; Christin, 2012; Dolliver, 2015 *et al.*). This oversimplification of the nature of SR is a consistent perspective among scholarly literature pertaining to SR and OIMs in general. For example, Monica Barratt (2012) in a letter to the publishers at *Addiction* first labels SR as an, "eBay for drugs". Although this label is somewhat accurate, substantively it falls short of being fully equipped to characterize the complexity of SR. Christen (2012) reaffirms this viewpoint with further analysis. He writes, "Silk Road is not, itself, a shop. Instead, it provides infrastructure for sellers and buyers to conduct transactions in an online environment" (Christen, 2012, p. 3). To outright reject this conceptualization of SR in practical terms would be difficult, as SR does, at least at *prima facie*, resemble that of an "eBay for drugs" (Barratt, 2012). Yet, upon further critical investigation SR can be conceptualized as much more.

In a letter to the publishers of *Addiction* by Barratt (2012), she illustrates SR as a facilitator of problematic public health issues (addiction, dependency, depression, etc.) that must be impeded – going beyond her initial belief that SR is solely an "eBay for drugs". Similarly, Christen (2012) proposes SR is a new threatening frontier to the online drug trade. This stance is problematic because it further alienates members of the cryptocommunity and affirms their existence as deviant. Becker (1963) first proposed in his seminal work, entitled *Outsiders; Studies in the sociology of deviance*, that deviance is not defined by the quality of the act itself, but by societal reaction. Empirical tests of labeling theory suggest that incarceration and condemnation induce negative life

experiences for the individual labeled "criminal" (Davies & Tanner, 2003; Bernburg & Krohn, 2003).

Since the eighteenth century, retribution as a moralistic philosophy for the punishment of criminal behaviour has been deeply ingrained as a theme in Western criminal justice. Retribution was prominent in penal reform during the European Enlightenment by retributivist philosophers Friedrich Hegel and Immanuel Kant (Grasmick, Davenport, Chamlin & Bursik, 1992; Gibbs, 1978; Packer, 1968). Emerging as an alternative to the philosophy of retribution and the ethic of punishment, the philosophies of Cesare Beccaria (1764/1986) and Jeremy Bentham (1830) advocate for a more humane approach to institutionalized methods of criminal deterrence. Young (1986) states that Beccaria, "…ultimately urged that law should be mild" (p. xiv) and in proportion to the crime committed in order to achieve successful criminal deterrence for the greater good. By this logic, labels associated with processes of social exclusion practices engrained in formal social control, such as arrest and incarceration, could factor into recidivism and harm. Although I borrow the lexicon and theoretical framework of existing literature, I utilize the principles outlined in Becker's (1963) sociology of deviance to guide my research. The overarching principle of non-alienation is an important ethical consideration in this current analysis of the SR cryptocommunity (Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000).

3.1.2 Defining Alienation

Alienation is a pertinent term to define in order to critique the current literature on SR. Sociologist Claude Fischer (1974) defines alienation as, "the state in which the actor

fails to perceive a positive interdependence between himself and social relationships or other objectifications" (p. 18). According to Gabriel (2011), perceived powerlessness and normlessness experienced by those individuals who then engage in political movements and rebellion do so in order to alleviate strain. Barratt, Ferris, and Winstock's (2014) empirical study of consumer habits has helped contextualize marketplace trends, but does not integrate analysis on cultural, social, or political aspects of the cryptocommunity, nor does this research acknowledge humanness or give voice to the community. The tone nonetheless promotes alienation through objectifying the SR experience in clinical terms. However, Barratt, Ferris, and Winstock (2014) make important contributions by reporting market-share per drug type and macro trends in consumption per nation (USA, UK, Australia). Again, this type of research exclusively regards SR as a singular concept – the OIM.

Other recent research suggests consumer satisfaction with the reliable availability to a wide range of high quality drugs has been a major indicator of SR's success as an OIM (Van Hout & Bingham, 2013a; Van Hout & Bingham, 2013b). Aldridge & Décary-Hétu (2014) posit that there was $89.7 million in revenue generated yearly for SR vendors collectively (p. 15). Emphasis placed on monetary trends in the encompassing research further reifies the conceptualization of SR as OIM. Further to this technical conceptualization, Aldridge and Décary-Hétu (2014) suggest SR to be an example of what Merton (1938) put forth as a criminal innovation. By using the same theoretical framework, I focus on SR as a community that subscribes to cryptoculture and that relies on new goals and new institutional means to achieve a "new social order" (Merton, 1938,

p. 678). In essence, the current summary of the literature demonstrates an *ethos* of "SR-as-marketplace", but SR is more than just a marketplace.

Moreover, the literature specifically pertaining to SR is mostly a theoretical consumer-based market research. Exceptions include contributions made by Martin (2014) and Aldridge and Décary-Hétu (2014). Martin (2014) seeks to define SR within a type of cybercrime introduced by Wall (2007), while Aldridge and Décary-Hétu (2014) provide an overview of SR and uses Merton's (1938) adaptation typology of innovation to define the underlying purpose of SR. My study seeks to fill a gap in the current literature by exploring SR by integrating Becker's (1963) labeling theory, but also from a related theoretical purview by borrowing from Aldridge and Décary-Hétu's (2014) study of SR. Thus, the epistemological *bricolage* unifies: Becker's (1963) labeling theory, Merton's (1938) theory from a different theoretical perspective used by Aldridge and Décary-Hétu (2014), with Baudrillard (2006) and Foucault (1984). Given the integrated nature of my theoretical and epistemological approach, I will first introduce the intellectual heritage of the incorporated theories in order to demonstrate how the current research on SR is guided.

In this thesis I draw on the formulation of *bricolage*, originally developed by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962). This is the work of a handy-person – a tinkerer, who patches together structures from signs and draws from events. Norman Denzin and Joe L. Kincheloe, who I borrow from in this thesis, have reconceived the concept of *bricolage* within qualitative social science. While praising the wiliness and synergistic outcomes of the structures created by borrowing concepts and patching them together, one of the known effects is that of the appearance

of a jumble. Seeming a jumble is not to be confused with producing a jumble, as the

critical intent of the assembling of concepts and arguments will be made clear in the

bricolage section.

4.0 Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework

4.1. Defining Theoretical Constructs

Within the criminological literature, there is much dissension between the

underlying constructs that support the consensus and critical ontologies within the

discipline. Criminology is best divided into the positivist, consensus, conflict, and

classical schools of thought. Agnew (2001) suggests that conflict and consensus

perspectives are commensurable with one another, where as positivist and classical

schools of criminology are diametrically opposed. According to Agnew (2001), the

polarity of these ontologies divides and prevents unity in criminological theory because

of incommensurable value schemas associated with each pole. I locate my epistemology

within the boundaries of the critical and consensus schools of criminology for the

purpose of studying SR. Therefore, in order to give voice to the cryptocommunity of SR,

while synonymously identifying critical parallels in theory to validate the SR experience,

I must first define the core theoretical constructs of the study.

The first two of the core theoretical constructs of this study is Merton's (1938)

concepts of strain and anomie. Agnew's (1985) general strain theory defines strain on

terms such as "negative stimuli" (Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Ven, 2002, p. 22), whereas

the intellectual heritage of Merton's (1938) strain theory is one that shares tradition with

Durkheim's (1893/1964) consensus framework of structural-functionalism. Colvin,

Cullen, and Vander Ven (2002) further define Merton's strain to be associated with that of frustration and failure within certain structures (see Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; and Merton, 1938). More specifically, Merton (1938) evolved Durkheim's (1893/1964) theoretical construct of anomie to be characterized by "means" and "goals," which can be social, cultural, and economic. In this sense, the inequalities produced by American capitalism are considered factors for anomie, strain, and therefore deviance. For example, Loïc Wacquant (2002) identifies the intersection between racism, post-industrialism as a structural factor, and the function of extra-peneological institutions that facilitate inequality.

Structural-functionalism as introduced by Durkheim (1938) in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* however, has been adumbrated in the Parsonian (1937/1968) tradition of structural-functionalism (Williams & McShane, 2014) to denote kinship. Claude Levi- Strauss (1976) also suggested that structural-functionalism proper encompasses that of myth, kinship, and beliefs (Thompson, 2002). Stine's (2010) ethnography on the clashes between radical left protestors at NATO's sixteenth annual summit in Strasbourg applies Durkheim's constructivist heritage. In his application of constructivist principles, the ethnography co-creates the *communitas* of the kettle in the scope of ritual and kinship. Unlike Lapovsky who put forth that material conditions define micro-cultural systems, derived from her extensive fieldwork on the Wounaan tribe (Durban-Albrecht & Galup, 2012), I suggest that materialism is of little practical importance because non-material symbols inform meaning in the virtual context of SR. SR is a cryptocommunity that can be reduced to each of these postulates, while also encompassing historical/structural considerations as well.

I further postulate that Merton (1938) considers the American Dream as a mythic force commensurable with the definition of structural-functionalism Durkheim (1938) put forth. However, for the purpose of this study, structural-functionalism, as envisaged by Durkheim (1938), is applied as a mid-range framework necessary for understanding the symbolic, value-based, and belief context of SR as a rebellion. Conversely, Becker's (1963) study, entitled *On marihuana use and social control,* discusses the process of the individual's socialization and assimilation into deviant peer groups – specifically the jazz cohort he was heavily immersed in as an ethnographer, which is also referenced for the purpose of this study. Alongside Becker's (1963) study, I add that SR is less envisaged as a means for alleviating economic strain, but a means for validating subaltern experience outside of criminal justice.

Reverting back to Merton (1938), the impetus of rebellion for SR is not clearly based in economic, social, or cultural strain individually, but apart of an all-encompassing strain that unites these three factors. Although Merton (1938) is fundamentally perceived as a positivist, he tangos with the conflict perspective in order to accommodate the notion that anomic forces are produced by capitalism and ultimately factor in strain (Worsley, 2002). In essence, Merton's (1938) theory of anomie and strain is a structural theory hinged on Marxist criticism of capitalism, but scripted in a positivist vernacular. Durkheim's (1893/1964) concept of anomie is integrated with Marxist ideals that intellectually underpin Merton's (1938) strain theory. In regards to the current inquiry, materialist dialectics on strain in connection to economic dysfunction are not emphasized, whereas the function of punitive criminal justice is a factor in connection to SR-as-rebellion. Based on this proposition, one may assume that the alienation and

anomie experienced by members on SR result of punitive criminal justice agendas. SR is therefore more than just a criminal innovation; SR is a cryptocommunity that sustained the arena for cultural rebellion and allowed for new institutional means for cultural exchange and validation.

Merton (1938) defines innovation as a typology of adaptation where institutional means of achieving cultural goals of "success" are rejected (p. 678), whereas Becker (1963) defines deviance as an act or behaviour that has been labeled "bad" by society. For SR to be understood as a rebellion, both the critical and labeling perspectives must be unpacked respectively. Becker (1963) contends that formal social control is a conduit of anomie and alienation for drug users. He refers to such "drug users" as pure deviants, who have fully accepted and integrated this label into their character. Through the lens of Lemert's (1967) theory of secondary deviance, the SR member who adopts deviant or otherwise rebellious behaviour in the cryptocommunity therefore reaffirms this deviance or rebellious character in the identity of the offender. Becker (1963) and Lemert (1967) pioneered axioms for what is known as the Societal Reaction School, a descendent of the Classical School, which fundamentally rejected the association of negative labels with drug users and other offenders prescribed by social entrepreneurs (Williams & McShane, 2014). Through this lens, the conceptualization of SR as solely a Mertonian criminal innovation therefore reinforces the pure deviance of SR members through an academical labeling process that also promotes alienation and in turn anomie.

According to Becker (1963), the surface-type of pure deviance is accepted and integrated into character and the behaviour of the perceived "deviant". Becker (1963) asserts that deviance is only actualized through societal reactions that classify and label

certain characters and behaviours as deviant. In order to reduce oppression associated

with the labeling process (Becker, 1963), I co-construct the *hexis* of the collective

cryptocommunity of SR to be that of rebellion against the State and the relativist ethical

imperative maintained by moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963). A *hexis* according to

Bourdieu's (1973) is:

> Bodily *hexis* is political mythology realised, em-bodied, turned into a permanent
>
> disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and
>
> thinking… The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of
>
> consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate
>
> transformation, cannot even be made explicit… [emphasis added] (p. 99).

Borrowing from Aristotle, Bourdieu (1973) manifests *hexis* a state of character that is

adopted at both the individual level and community level. In the context of SR, the

cryptocommunity is in solidarity against that of State oppression in the broadest sense.

With the *hexis* of SR in mind, the conflict perspective is therefore an important piece of

the theoretical framework for conceptualizing SR-as-rebellion. In the conceptualization

of SR, the *hexis* of rebellion is a challenge to qualify in a virtual setting; I will discuss in

greater depth how this can be achieved further in the study.

In order to conceptualize SR-as-rebellion, the intellectual heritage of the

perspective must be acknowledged and explicated. The intellectual heritage of the critical

perspective in this study is defined in Foucauldian terms. Deleuze postulates that the

general *ethos* of Foucault's critical perspective is derived from *La Pensée 68'*, which is a

post-1968 perspective about the persistence of power and resistance against ever-

transforming societies of control (Foucault & Kritzman, 1988; Deleuze, 1992;). In 1968,

the wildcat general strikes of university students and public workers reshaped the future

of social control and ways to resist such in French society. The Foucauldian critical

perspective subsequently underpins the theoretical framework of this study, however, the

aim of inquiry is fundamentally located within the critical criminological epistemology.

From this perspective to conceptualize SR-as-rebellion, much like the resistance of 68',

SR must be understood as a movement dedicated to problematizing power relations as

well.

      The structure of SR-as-rebellion invokes the possibility for members to achieve

status in the given context by fulfilling roles that facilitate the exchange of counter-

cultural capital of the cryptocommunity. Rank and role therefore equate to a valorized

labour output of the member that result in remuneration for services provided (via

Bitcoin), but also the gaining of counter-cultural status. The concept of the code, which is

both tech-speak for encryption, is also sociologically conceptualized in this study.

Baudrillard (2006) defines the code as precession of signs conditioned by pre-given

combinatorial possibility imposed by both economic and cultural capitalism to result in a

self-defeating agency with that of the system. Replication, simulation, and the simulacra

of objects in the online world are accounted by Adler and Adler (2011) to result in an

assemblage identity replicated outside of face-to-face (FTF) interaction – a type of

identity that is both individual and collective. The overall vagueness of Baudrillard's

(2006) concept therefore allows the code to encompass both a normative and semiotic

nature. Since meaning of this conceptual term is delineated with respect to genetics and

semio-marxism (structural exchange value), and therefore (re)signified to encompass

Durkheim's sociological concepts of agency and organization, I weave Baudrillard's

(2006) work into my critical-constructivist inquiry. Hence, I conceptualize that SR is a cryptocommunity that is founded on programmatic code, social code, and "the code." To summarize, the interdisciplinary nature of the theoretical framework encompasses the intellectual heritage of classical Durkheimian School, the Foucault led critical New Left perspective (including Baudrillard), and the intellectual heritage of the Societal Reaction School.

4.1.1 Defining Culture and Trust.

When an individual copes with anomie through ritualism and retreatism, "deviance" is achieved through rejecting cultural goals and institutional means (Merton, 1938). In addition, Cloward & Ohlin (1960) add that drug abuse is an example of retreatism in "delinquent youth" (p. 153); whereas the SR cryptocommunity reframes drug use and exchange as rebellion. Cloward & Ohlin (1960) engendered the link between delinquency, crime, and drug use and negative labels – effectively defining subculture within the discipline of criminology. I suggest that the criminal subculture as defined by Cloward and Ohlin (1960) is far less nascent by their definition in the cryptocommunity because drug use is closely associated with retreatism as opposed to rebellion.

Departing from Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) notion of delinquent subcultures, Bourdieu's (1984) contemplation of culture from anthropological and semiotic disciplines is far more robust for this analysis. Bourdieu's (1984) contributions to sociology are relevant to the definition of culture and include the distinction between field and habitus. In these terms, the cryptocommunity serves as the field, whereas the

habitus is a far more complex arrangement of cultural, political, and philosophical factors. Virtual habitus acquires its *hexis* from the discursive, stylized, and attitudinal posts that embody the spirit of rebellion. *Hexis* is also constituted by the manifest cryptovalues, linguistic nature, and anarchistic argot. Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital becomes more important in analyzing interaction within the field of the SR cryptocommunity than analyzing SR from purely a materialist perspective. For instance, rebellion is an element of SR's habitus, which is ideologically underpinned by a confluence of defiant worldviews, rather than that one that is purely economic or material in nature.

A Bourdieusian theory of relational trust, as put forward by Frederiksen (2014), suggests an analytical guideline for understanding what keeps the cryptocommunity of SR intact. Frederiksen's (2014) three-stage analytical strategy for understanding trust is outlined as follows:

(1) Trust is a disposition produced by socialized structures known as the 'habitus';

(2) trust as relationship; (3) trust as constituted by diachronous and synchronous elements in the processes. (p. 173)

Frederiksen (2014) borrows from Bourdieu who, in his anthropological studies on cultural consumption (1986) and cultural capital (1993), eventually unifies agency and structure in order to end a significant dilemma in the theory of relational trust as distinct aspects (2000). According to Frederiksen (2014), "This means abandoning the substantialist assumptions entailed in concepts of agency and structure and approaching social phenomena as dynamic, temporal processes of symbolic and material relations" (p. 171). All of this is essential for understanding what unifies SR as a community (or

"deviant" social group) and the potential link with trust as a dynamic pillar within the community. SR as space must first be defined, however, in order to understand how relations are structured.

4.1.2 Defining SR as a Virtual Space.

In order to understand SR as a virtual space and not just as an online community, Foucault's (1984) work entitled *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* and Deleuze's (1992) *Post Script on Control Societies* must be referenced to critically interrogate the definition of space. Foucault (1984) first introduced the concept of heterotopia for the basis of a lecture in 1967 (Macey, 1993). Heterotopia is a space other than dystopia or utopia that is characterized by non-hegemonic textures (Foucault, 1984). Much as Foucault (1984) ascertains about heterotopia, Hook, Finway, and Vrdoljak (2002) reaffirm the co-creation of a materialized space in where space is experienced at the counter-site. The counter-site is described in the analogy of the mirror as an example of heterotopia. Foucault (1984) explains further:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (p. 49)

Hetherington (1997) subsequently suggests that heterotopia is a space defined by reassigned meaning, which subsequently vitalizes the assumptions of Baudrillard as commensurate with the idea that SR is a space of constant sign-play. However, as much

as the fundamental texture or quality of heterotopia, which is rebellion, SR as non-hegemonic has it's idealism enthralled into disrepute by its cathartic subscription to the capitalist code.

In reverting back to the concept of heterotopia, the mirror (or the space beyond the counter-site/reflection) retains many of the qualities that computers have, in that the computer screen is a virtual point that connects the real being with the unreal of cyberspace (or TOR Network). By this definition, SR is a space of heterotopia that can either be negotiated as a three-dimensional or two-dimensional text-based space via encrypted networking. Deleuze (1992) further adds that networks effectively engendered the transformation of discipline into control, in which I argue that SR (in conjunction with a constellation of other TOR sites) operates in opposition to.

To clarify, Foucault (1995) defines the societal preclusion to discipline as the carceral code that in turn produces carceral textures through the following ways that have now become pervasive means control:

> The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power (p. 304).

Deleuze (1992) suggests this textural phenomenon to be indicative of societies of control – not societies of discipline. Rather than using technical power to discipline, SR members have speculated that the State's reservation to exhibit control has been done so through Distributive Denial of Service (DDOS) and other means to close the heterotopic space of SR. Fundamentally, the concept of societies of control as introduced by Deleuze (1992) envisages the inversion and explosion of Foucault's societies of discipline into societies

of control. Heterotopia is therefore discursively expressed in the textscape of SR as a

heterotopia evading control, but this requires further interrogation.

In more detail, this definition of heterotopia includes the preconditions of

deviation and crises that are commensurable with Deleuze's (1992) concept of networks.

However, the advent of CMC still requires that heterotopia must be interrogated from the

preconditions and principles assigned by Foucault (1984) in order to define SR as a space

regardless if this space is expressed in-text or otherwise. Foucault's (1984) six principles

are outlined below and guide the analysis of SR as cryptocommunity:

- 1) Heterotopias are universal to every human culture as a space of *otherness*,

  places that are neither *here* nor *there.*

- 2) Synchrony of otherness: proximity and cultural interpretation

- 3) Heterotopia is a place where several counter-sites converge at one fixed point.

- 4) Heterotopia departs from traditional time.

- 5) Heterotopia is a space that has barriers and doors to other spaces of exclusivity.

- 6) Heterotopia can either be a space of (1) illusion or (2) compensation.

According to Foucault (1984), "The ship is the heterotopia par excellence" (p. 49). Many

community members describe SR as the ship, which metaphorically applies to the sixth

principle of heterotopia: illusion. This will be examined further in this section

Foucault (1984) proposes that utopias cannot exist and therefore heterotopic

spaces exist as counter-sites to a control society. The cryptocommunity of SR fulfills the

first principle of heterotopia, which entails the precondition of deviation in that most

active members participate in the revolt of SR, which is fundamentally in deviation from

existing laws and norms. Deleuze (1992) cites the abstruse nature of code in control

societies outside of Baudrillard's (2006) concept of code, that of sociological normative

definition of code as social code, and outside of the context of Foucault's (1984)

heterotopia:

> In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either
>
> a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a password, while on the other
>
> hand disciplinary societies are regulated by watchwords (as much from the point
>
> of view of integration as from that of resistance). (p. 5)

The heterotopia of SR in this light is a space programmed into existence as a CMC space

and marketplace that is dependent on Bitcoin, a currency based in programmer's code,

and other forms of coding via encryption (e.g. TOR).

> Deleuze (1992) further divulges the immediate distinctions and fundamental

aspects of encryption for access control (and means of resisting control imposed by State

institutions), while also contextualizing human experience from within the frame of

social sciences, marketing, and other modes of control:

> The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to
>
> information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the
>
> mass/individual pair. Individuals have become "dividuals," and masses, samples,
>
> data, markets, or "banks." (p. 5)

Baudrillard's (2006) concept of the code puts SR onto the same sign horizon imposed by

capitalism in that Bitcoin and SR as a marketplace are reproductions of the very spaces

that implore oppression naturally. However, the existence of SR as a counter-site/non-

hegemonic heterotopia by nature is a space that uses the same parameters inscribed by

societies of control, but also as new weapons against societies of control. Encryption is a

new a new weapon insomuch that it provides the ability to evade insidious forms of control taking over both online and offline worlds. Weaponization in this context represents defensive loopholes in the closed system in the form of heterotopia of rebellious deviation form rather than the actual use of weapons such as guns. The conflict in this code war is over encryption – where community networks are utilizing encryption to evade institutional/hegemonic control and where institutions, such as the State, rely on encryption for the opposite reasons.

In addition, SR houses heterotopic spaces that possess qualities of normlessness with members who deviate from the normative "Code of The Road", which is unspoken, but alternate to the synonymous means and goals proposed by Merton (1938). Expressed in the discourse of the cryptocommunity, SR is normalized as a rebellion, but competing market interests have created instability in the space. This phenomenon can be associated with the precondition of crisis realized by Foucault (1984); however, the "hidden presence of the sacred" (p. 47) is not taken in account to understanding this space in this regard. Nonetheless, the sacredness of freedom of speech and human liberty could possibly defend this consideration.

The second principle of heterotopia according to Foucault (1984) is that aesthetic function of a specific heterotopic space is multifaceted and varied over different cultures. The cemetery as a space where the conventions of proximity and time come into consideration is an example explicating this principle. Distance between spaces of the city centre with the cemetery as a space of otherness is determined by the cultural interpretation of death of the given culture. This solidifies notion of co-creation of space

via internal mental processes (Foucault, 1984), much in the same way SR was devised and interpreted by members.

The cultural interpretation of death by the 19th century Victorian British was in connection to illness, much in the same that prisons signify crime, however, Upper Canada, present day Kingston Ontario, planned for the heterotopia of Kingston Penitentiary (KP) to be located in the centre of town (McElligott, 2008) much in the same way the French honoured their dead at the heart of Paris (Foucault, 1984). SR has been associated with the dark net as a network of spaces that are in deviation and proximally located outside of the Internet of contemporary sites, much like the heterotopias of the Parisian cemetery and KP, but simultaneously nestled within and dependent on the Internet as well.

The third principle of heterotopia according to Foucault (1967) is that, "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (p. 48). The assemblage of cryptoculture that assembles in SR is a testament to this element of "incompatibility" cited by Foucault (1967) in that multiple forms of anarchistic and libertarian worldviews find discursive expression. In contrary to anarchism and libertarianism, other lesser-defined cryptocultures collide in the discussion forum. However, the third principle of heterotopia is best fit for describing the overarching heterotopic space of dark net, with scam-markets, such as Project Black Flag (PBF) competing and converging with SR and other OIMs in cycles of crisis.

The fourth principle of heterotopia is the principle of heterochrony. According the Foucault (1984) heterotopias accumulate time, hence heterochronous spaces are cited as

libraries and mausoleums. The disappearance of the corpse in quasi-eternal states of decay and the archiving of classical works are embodied by the essence of heterochrony. Like most items of discussion posted in online forums or any other media for that matter communicated over the Internet has a slower decay rate in comparison to the spoken word. Textual data, whether in a fragmented form or not, accumulates like artifacts by the grace of other hosts who redistribute/recreate the content. The data/artifacts I have collected act as both fragmented spaces and discourse, with broken .gif avatar images, and missing context. Hence, heterochrony is inseparable from the heterotopic space of the SR cryptocommunity and sites on the Internet for that matter. This will be further discussed in the methods section.

The fifth principle of heterotopia according to Foucault (1984) is that, "[h]eterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (p. 49). The fifth principle is actualized by SR's registration component, in which access may only be granted on the grounds that this registration be complete, which makes it impenetrable to those without the proclivity and technical understanding of an advanced computer user – or virtual ethnographer for that matter. Once inside SR, there is a cryptocommunity, vendor space, and administrator's office, with each having varying levels of security and accessibility.

The sixth and final principle has two polar qualities that underpin the essence of heterotopia: (1) quality of absolute control and the (2) quality of anarchy. Bridging these two qualities, SR acts much in the same that the vehicle of the ship does. According to Foucault (1984) the ship, which SR is heavily referred to as such in the discourse of the cryptocommunity, was instrumental to civilization, economic development, trade,

commerce, and as a space entirely untethered to land implies the *sine qua non* of

heterotopia or at least non-hegemony. With the ship of SR in mighty competition and

conflict with other dark markets and the State itself, the space acts perfectly as a

heterotopia in that all the aforementioned preconditions and principles are fulfilled. With

both qualities of anarchy and control, the ship of SR traverses unchartered territory as

explicated in the discourse of the cryptocommunity and the metaphors of captain DPR. In

Foucault's (1984) own words: "The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations

without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take

the place of pirates" (p. 49). Therefore SR is most that of a space of illusion and

deviation, rather than compensation and crisis.

4.1.3 Defining Code

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard (1993) bridges Marxian concepts

with the counter-concepts of simulation and implosion. Baudrillard recognizes the

departure from the dialectics of consumption/production and binary relations in the

transition to postmodernism, which is dominated by simulation, which is a signifier of

virtual cryptocommunity. Kellner (2005) echoes Baudrillard (1993) by stating,

"Technology thus replaces capital in this story and semiurgy (interpreted by Baudrillard

as proliferation of images, information, and signs) replaces production" (p. 263).

Implosion is the downward pressure that the physics of simulation apply, where all

meanings represented by contemporary codes and signs are merged and social, cultural,

and economic distinctions combined (Kellner, 2005). In essence, consumer capitalism

seems to have overarched the SR cryptocommunity as well. Yet, resistance against an

overarching system of alienation and exploitation through the exchange of illegal drugs, which is a symbolic revolt against oppressive institutions, is still evident. However, Baudrillard constantly problematizes this idea of symbolic revolt in that there is a distinction between the symbolic and semiotic, which I conflate due to the textual nature of the research objects.

Moreover, Genosko (1999) suggests resistance is actualized in the transformation of textual-numerical codes in the process of encryption and decryption, which is essential to the existence of SR, but also integral SR's (re)production of capital(ism) through new meaning in-text. Therefore, the overarching code proliferates new meaning and transformation of the form, which in this case is resistance, but only within a limited combinatorial predisposition of possibilities prescribed by the capitalist model. I would like to emphasize, SR is both a conduit of the code and a rebellion against such predispositions.

Baudrillard (1993) subsequently postulates that capitalism has expressed itself through new codes and sign-play. Sign-play was introduced by Baudrillard (1993) as an example of an object's association with a sign of imploded meaning. I add that such new codes and sign-play are concretely expressed through Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, as well as the encryption mechanisms common to the darknet as a cyberspace. In turn, the alternative conventions of counter-capitalism have emerged in the rituals, culture, and tradition of anarchocapitalism of SR, which is positioned securely in the philosophy of libertarianism. SR also plays out as an *agora* in which the emancipatory imagery and rhetoric of the left is played out in the economic and symbolic violence of the politically rightist anarchocapitalist.

On the spectrum of anarchism, "deviance" and rebellion is inherent, both strongly relate to the facticity of SR. When a "deviant" social group or individual engenders the adaptation of rebellion, new goals and new means are instituted. In this regard, conventional cultural goals and institutional means become irrelevant – hence, rebellion manifests (Merton, 1938). Like any effective rebellion, the elements of agency, structure, and identity are important. Hobbes (1651/2008) in *Leviathan* contends that rebellion is akin to war and those that beget violence unto the sovereign, beget violence unto them by returning to a state of nature. SR is therefore a virtual rebellion that wages symbolic/semiotic resistance through cryptoexchange, by circumventing law enforcement control strategies, and by communicating successes in the War on Drugs within the cryptocommunity.

5.0 Chapter Five: Cryptoculture and Online community

5.1 Defining Cryptoculture and Online Community

As early as the 1970s, the emergence of what Michael Ogden (1994) referred to as "cyberspace" began to emerge. In this network of Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) exists a virtual sphere of interrelated online communities and what could be classified as an archaic pretext to the blogosphere (Hookway, 2008). In addition to these findings, Ogden (1994) discusses what he refers to as the emergence of a "cyberdemocracy," comprised of a wide variety of text-based online discussion boards unified under a forum entitled *Usenet* in conjunction with the early rumblings of "virtual mercantilism" (p. 720).

Forecasting the evermore immersive nature of the upcoming Internet, O'

Loughlin (2001) makes theoretical and practical suggestions on improving the Internet,

from de-privatization of cyberspace to the enhancement of civic participation through

technical advancements, such as encryption. With such technological innovation emerged

Usenet, which gave forth the discourse that predicated the crypto-ontologies of

"cryptoanarchy", "anarchocaptalism", and "hactivism" (Ogden, 1994, p. 720). Associated

with extended self in cyberspace, ontology is defined by its disposition, acquired set of

proclivities, etc. Capurro (2006) refers to digital ontology as an extension of the

corporeal-self, where an individual being is both here (in RL) and there (virtual space or

cyberspace) simultaneously. Being-There in time and the contemplation of the corporeal

self in virtual environments evokes new ethical considerations for online research

(Capurro, 2006), as well as how online community and cryptoculture ought to be defined.

The definition of crypto-ontology in this sense is that of a worldview.

According to Noonan (2008), "In the contemporary period, ontology, or more

particularly, social ontology remains essential as a critical *propaeduetic* to empirical

research" [emphasis added] (p. 178). Although this definition is a highly commensurable

reflection of the critical-constructivist aim of inquiry of this current research, the

Aristotelian (1993) understanding of ontology is described as belonging to a predicated

set of assumptions that define nature (Palencar, 2009). Ontology, in this sense, is a set of

assumptions that correspond with the nature of the cultural ideals of an online community

(or even an ethic, see Downing, 2011). Ontological disposition therefore corresponds

with the character (*hexis*) of the community, which is an expression of habitus according

to Bourdieu (1973): the *hexis* of SR is rebellion.

5.1.1 Defining Trust Online.

The aphorism of "trust no one" in the habitus and space of SR seems to bear significance, especially because it is a potentially volatile domain in the face of the current War on Drugs. In the current inquiry, I note that anonymity in this particular setting is a major reason for volatility yet anonymity is a mechanism that ensures the security of all members. Trust in anonymous online environments, specifically the cryptocommunity of SR and thematically similar spaces, is sparsely investigated. The dual purpose of SR as a cryptomarket and cryptocommunity moves the topic of relational trust into the scope of research conducted on online exchanges (Diekmann & Wyder, 2002; Cheshire, Gerbasi, & Cook, 2010). Cheshire *et al*., (2010) suggest that negotiated reciprocity, where a third-party or mechanism mediates a material exchange in an anonymous environment, is a marker of assurance in a domain that lacks trust. SR utilizes the ESCROW service moderated by several administrators in order to ensure consumer satisfaction. However, trust in the "system" implemented by SR is a completely different line of research that extends well beyond branding as suggested by market research (see Cheshire, 2011; Broutsou & Fitsilis, 2012). Research into online communities suggests that identity, dyadic commitment, and solidarity are important components to its successful continuance (Bierhoff & Vornefeld, 2004; Turilli, Vaccaro, & Taddeo, 2010; Rodogno, 2012; Schultze, 2014; Farrall, 2012; Briggle, 2008).

Sociological research on trust is derived from varying analytical frameworks, paradigms, and perspectives. From the rational choice paradigm emerges the suggestion that risk, gain, and assurance are central elements of trust (Coleman, 1990; Cook, Hardin,

& Levi, 2005). Another element of interpersonal trust is facilitated by the regulation of

relations through mechanical means of institution and social system (Bachmann &

Inkpen, 2011; Barber, 1983; Kroeger, 2012; Luhmann, 1979; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008;

Sztompka, 1999). Coleman (1990) adds that relational trust between persons exists in

what Frederiksen (2014) more succinctly classifies as "community networks" (p.169).

From a phenomenological perspective, trust is an evolving process between persons who

share commitments to community (Williamson, 1993). Finally, trust as a process between

relational points within a field is in constant flux, with trust lost and gained (Weber and

Carter, 2010), with and or without justification from the parties (Luhmann, 1979).

5.1.2 Defining Cryptoanarchy.

It is fruitful to define the habitus and community of SR in loose alignment with

the ontological dispositions mentioned above. Cryptoanarchy is therefore one of many

crypto-ontologies of the habitus and is an ontology predicated by cryptography and the

ideals of capitalism. Bigalke (2011) defines cryptography as follows: "*Cryptography,*

from the Greek *krupto-,* meaning "to conceal," and *grapho-,* meaning "to write," is the

science of concealed writing; it is a technical term referring to the translation of messages

into ciphers or codes" (p. 354). Cryptoanarchy is outlined in Timothy C. May's (1992,

November 22) *The Crypto Anarchist Manifesto*:

> The technology for this revolution--and it surely will be both a social and
>
> economic revolution--has existed in theory for the past decade. The methods are
>
> based upon public-key encryption, zero-knowledge interactive proof systems, and
>
> various software protocols for interaction, authentication, and verification. (p. n/a)

SR relies on much of the aforementioned encryption technologies, embodying both the philosophy of "social and economic" revolution associated with anarchy.

Peter Coy (1972) eloquently refers to anarchist revolution as, "…the revolt against the tyranny of machines and the inhumanity of the State" (p. 148). However, May (1992, November 22) also asserts that cryptoanarchy is not associated with the 19th century labour movement of Russia, which inspired Mikael Bakunin, but rather a cultural-political movement rooted in free-market ideology more closely associated with anarchocapitalism.

In the contrary leftist politic, Bakunin in 1867 published his treatise entitled, *Power Corrupts the Best,* which laid the ontological foundations for what would later become 'social anarchism'. Social anarchism is the post-capitalist variant of anarchy in contrast with other branches that stem from the foundational dispositions of decentralization, post-government, and liberated societies (White, 2011). SR embodies this same revolt through anarchocapitalist ideals. Much in the way that May (1992, November 22) outlines cryptoanarchy is synonymous with the habitus and space of SR:

> The State will of course try to slow or halt the spread of this technology, citing national security concerns, use of the technology by drug dealers and tax evaders, and fears of societal disintegration. Many of these concerns will be valid; crypto anarchy will allow national secrets to be traded freely and will allow illicit and stolen materials to be traded. An anonymous computerized market will even make possible abhorrent markets for assassinations and extortion. Various criminal and foreign elements will be active users of CryptoNet. But this will not halt the spread of crypto anarchy. (p. n/a)

SR as a community is driven by a similar philosophical impetus, with the ideal of free

exchange underpinning its *hexis*. Anarchocapitalism and libertarianism therefore

constitute the ideological basis of SR.

5.1.3 Defining Anarchocapitalism and Libertarianism.

In stark contrast to the far-left communitarian and social anarchies exists a more

palatable version to modern American societies called anarchocapitalism. Morriss (2008)

states that, "Although most anarchists oppose all large institutions, public or private,

anarchocapitalists oppose the state, but not private actors with significant market power"

(p. 14). Furthermore, Murray N. Rothbard, the father of modern libertarianism, in the

Libertarian Manifesto (1976) supports this notion. The core ontological assumption of

anarchocapitalism and modern libertarianism is that private agents will always be able to

provide better services than the State. This logic is very much based in the politics of

anarchism of the far right, however, this notion gave way for the more leftist anarchical

doctrine of 'agorism' to emerge. To this point, Sapon and Robino (2009) importantly

note the following about counter-economics and the emergence of SR:

> …the so-called "agorism", which was inspirited by Murray Rothbard, put forward
>
> an alternative economy ("counter-economics") as a transition strategy to
>
> statelessness. The essence of this strategy, as well as the "leftist" essence of the
>
> agorism supporters, lies in the fact that they "encourage" revolutionary (illegal)
>
> activities, particularly the operations of the black and gray markets as a
>
> counterbalance to unfree, taxable market. (p. 138)

This definition is very important as it corresponds with the operational vision of SR as a

cryptomarket. In fact, the founder of SR, Dread Pirate Roberts (DPR) praises Rothbard's

ideological suggestions in many of his discussion posts made public in the

cryptocommunity.

5.1.4 Defining Silk Road: Another Ship in the Pirate Utopia.

Peter Ludlow, a renowned linguist and philosopher who worked closely with

Noam Chomsky at MIT defined what he called a 'piracy utopia' (Gelder, 2007, p. 150).

According to Downing (2011), digital piracy is an illegal activity that is connected to

online subcultures and in turn through its own existence is the contestation of moral and

social boundaries. Cryptoanarchy and the imagery of piracy therefore fall under the

umbrella of the cryptomovement such as SR. This imagery is also analogous in a sense to

that of the classical ethnographic expeditions of Malinowski in the Western Pacific;

however, I posit that *dark net* or any other esoteric Internet network, be defined not by

islands, but by moving ships as captain Dread Pirate Roberts' textual representation of

SR is of a ship entering unchartered waters:

> *I want to reiterate that we are in UNCHARTED waters. Silk Road has gone*
> *through many phases and we have grown stronger each time. This won't be the*
> *last time we are challenged I can assure you. This much I can say: we will*
> *overcome this obstacle and any other set before us.*

However, there still remains an important question in defining SR: when does an OIM

become a cryptomovement? According to Tepperman and Curtis (2009), "A social

movement's goals must be seen as a threat to another group" (p. 363). The concepts of in-

group and out-group may be fruitful in facilitating a distinction between SR

cryptomovement and the State.

6.0 Chapter Six: Methodology

Bronislaw Malinowski (1978) markedly expresses the very important conclusions that ethnography can produce on the, "… origin of human customs, beliefs and institutions; on the history of cultures, and their spread and contact; on the laws of human behaviour in society; and of the human mind" (p. xv). In my virtual ethnography of the SR cryptocommunity, I seek to reconcile ethical interpretations and representations of the virtual 'Other' – contrary to understanding "them" as savages. Moreover, this methods section includes ethical and methodological considerations on how to properly approach SR as a virtual space and cryptocommunity. The section is concluded with design, setting, and specific methods applied.

6.1 Analytical Framework

6.1.1 Weaving the *Bricolage.*

Bricolage is an opaque term; the word *bricolage* as a linguistic object synthesizes the fricative brick and the art of collage into one item of imagery. The opacity of *bricolage* as a term is evident from the work of Claude-Levi Strauss (1962), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), and Kincheloe (2005). The initial conceptualization of *bricolage* characterized by Claude-Levi-Strauss (1962) as the praxis of forming myth. In the *Savage Mind,* the untenable dialectical materials of the oral tribe were woven into myth through the praxis of *bricolage*. The *bricoleur* in this context is the shaman who in unsystematic ways defines reality.

The *bricoleur* of Denzin and Lincoln (2000) contributes to Joe Kincheloe's (2005) conceptualization of *bricolage*. The applicable definition of *bricoleur* is that of a

handyperson or "do-it-yourselfer." Although I do not present myself as a novice
"*bricoleur"* in my current inquiry, the integration-art of methodology and theoretical
framework does suggest this. Moving forward, I dislike using the term framework in
bricolage because such terminology is uncharacteristic to the act of weaving and rather
performs the imagery of construction in its topical meaning. Nonetheless, the imagery of
construction is relatable to critical constructivist aim of inquiry of my research.

The *bricolage* thus becomes a multiperspectival, multillogical, and critical
methodology that unsystematically offer a shared plateau between seemingly
incommensurable theory, political logics, and philosophical perspectives. Imagine the
bricolage not as a tapestry woven smoothly into a systematized model, but as a pixel art
constructed as disparate and seemingly independent pixels. This fragmentation is also
true to the presentation of *bricolage* in a written format as well.

Staying true to the form of *bricolage,* I offer a do-it-yourself inquiry that is hinged
on the premise of becoming. Unlike the form that exists as an abstract universal
according to Plato, the *bricolage* is an act of becoming. The *bricoleur* as the performer of
bricolage becomes an object of criticism, academic partisan, and one with the politicized
anti-disciplinary ontology of Joe Kincheloe. Fundamentally, my research is hinged on the
idea that *bricolage* is antithetical to the analytical problem-solution schemata adopted by
reductionist social sciences. Authentic dedication as a *bricoleur* to weave disparate theory
in a non-conventional and unsystematic way posed significant ethical challenges.

The micro decisions I myself as the researcher made were guided by the principle
of non-alienation. I postulate that unobtrusive ethnography and observation of the SR
community forum is a highly inclusionary space in SR, however; because non-consenting

participants contribute to my analysis I therefore give voice to the cryptocommunity to negate alienation of the space.

SR is a digital enclosure modulated by programmatic coding and encryption; this enclosure is a two-dimensional space with heterotopic qualities. Furthermore, SR is a space within the overarching enclosure of the TOR Network. The medievalist notion of the hierarchy of substance incorporates that the substance of Being is thus extended outwards into spaces of otherness through mental processes and information flows. Buroway (2003) proposes this as an autocentric approach to the ethnographic imagination, in which for Foucault the prison inspired virtual ethnography and for Durkheim the historical grounding to justify his constructs. SR is a text-based two-dimensional CMC space created and populated by beings, who through the assemblage of lexical items, construct meaning.

Gatson (2011) introduces multi-sited ethnography as more complex than traditional ethnography in the sense that it is a research method that merges the offline and online research sites, as well as multiple virtual spaces through one ethnographic inquiry. In my virtual ethnography, I seek to explore primarily the micro-mundane world of the SR cryptocommunity (Burawoy, 1991, 2000), but also consider the macro system through post-discourse in order to merge the critical paradigm with an interpretive approach to the textual artifacts as empirical materials being examined. Dissimilar to multi-sited ethnography, I am considering the broader space of darknet, although the ethnography I am conducting is purely focusing on SR – primarily the SR discussion forum.

To justify how this study is commensurable with the theoretical framework aforementioned above, the concept of *bricolage* must be discussed. For the purpose of this study, I borrow from Denzin & Lincoln (2000) and Kincheloe (2001) to describe the *bricolage* as an interdisciplinary approach – theoretically and methodologically. The theoretical framework is thus a *bricolage* of theory to negate the bias, assumptions, and shortcomings of a singular framework. Merton (1938) with corresponding Durkheimian assumptions, integrated with critical social theory of the New Left, and the labeling theory of Becker (1968) justifies theoretical *bricolage,* but does not extend to the methodological.

As a critical qualitative researcher, the *bricolage* as an emancipatory research construct (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg 2011; Lincoln, 2001) is the most concisely defined as a methodological term indicative of the type of inquiry conducted in this study. In essence, "research becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness" (Kincheloe *et al*., 2011, p. 164). I attempt to loosely unify virtual ethnography, more specifically unobtrusive observations (see Spradley, 1980), and critical discourse analysis in an epistemological *bricolage* between the critical and constructivist paradigms.

According to Kincheloe *et al*., (2011), the *bricolage* is more than just a qualitative method, but a genre of inquiry – an emancipatory research construct – that as aforementioned is ideologically grounded in the critical paradigm. The *bricoleur* essentially addresses, "the ideological and informational needs of individuals and groups" (Kincheloe *et al*., 2011, p. 169). In addition, the *bricolage* as an emancipatory research

construct enters the realm of methodological complexity. The researcher-as-*bricoleur* was first introduced by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and denotes a craftsman or craftswoman whom not only actively borrow, but reproduce, reshape, and augment existing theoretical constructs and methods from an array of disciplines, rather than borrowing from a strict universal concept of each method as a means of attaining naïve realism. The researcher-as-*bricoleur* also co-creates discourse within the pantomime of power-relations, historical oppression, and research as a power driven act within academia (Kincheloe *et al*., 2011).

I reconcile the agency of the cryptocommunity of SR through co-creation involved with analysis of artifacts chosen. Shaw (2013) conducts a virtual ethnography of the online Australian feminist community and in doing so, "encourage an ethics of listening and respect for difference that includes considerations of affect, inequality and power relations…" (p. 19). The ethical considerations cited by Shaw (2013) subsequently brings into view both agency and empowerment. This consideration is also aligned with the principle of non-alienation in that the participants' agency with SR is co-created through the analysis to represent the cryptocommunity's best interest. The post-subcultural approach and *bricolage* are elaborated to explain how empowerment and respect for agency are considered for the analysis.

6.1.2 Epistemological Considerations

Since theory in turn expresses itself as a cultural item or artifact, much like the textual data I am analyzing, it inherently reflects the biases, political directives, and underlying assumptions through the tone, style, and discipline of its assertions. Some of

the ontological assumptions of the critical paradigm, in research and pedagogy, are that language renders subjective formations. Also assuming that oppression is multifaceted, historically constituted, and socially driven, and that neutral academic culture and practices vitiate emancipation and unwittingly reproduce oppression (De Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Gresson, 2006; Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 1997; Rodriguez and Villaverde, 2000; Steinberg, 2009; Villaverde, 2007).

Howard Becker's (1963) seminal work entitled *Outsiders* introduced the aforementioned assumptions to Chicago School sociology by first suggesting the propensity for stigma in the labeling of deviant behaviour. For Becker (1963), deviance is not bad by nature, but rendered so by moral condemnation of outside parties of such particular (anti)social behaviour. This postulate has been taken into consideration as a means to guiding the tone and findings of my research in conjunction with directing my ethics. I subsequently argue that the usage of the word subculture in sociology automatically demotes individuals and groups to that of lesser rank or deviant status, whether unwittingly or purposively. The problem with this theoretical terminology is that it signifies otherness, which is the antithesis to the *bricolage*, yet traditionally present in ethnography. This consideration ultimately pivoted my research towards that of a critical-constructivist inquiry, rather than a mode of inquiry that further accommodates a degree of naïve realism and neutrality. The post subcultural approach thereafter compliments the respective facets of *bricolage* in that the *telos* of the current inquiry reflects the *hexis* of the cryptocommunity and individual respectfully.

According to Bennett (2007) the post subcultural approach had emerged in the 1990s as a Weberian and postmodern approach to understanding youth subculture,

identity, style, and communication. Redhead (1990) as a post subcultural theorist invited

youth culture to be an object of study that is in constant transformation. Muggleton

(2000) denotes youth culture through terms of fragmentation, proliferation, and hybridity.

The ever-fragmenting frontier of youth culture seems to be in constant flux from this

standpoint, which is postmodern by nature. According to Maffesoli (1996) the *hexis* of

the neo-tribe emerged in the light of postmodern thought, which naturally, "…is

preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (p. 98).

Hexis or habitus as explained by Bourdieu is expressed through taste, which in the

current study is represented through discourse. This current study on SR respects the

boundaries of the post-cultural epistemology, but is more so located within conflict

perspective because of the nature of SR.

6.1.3 Ethical Considerations for Examining Virtual Spaces.

Virtual communities are marked by temporal and existential precariousness and

typically express cultural transformation within interconnected spaces (Gupta &

Ferguson, 1992), but are also overshadowed by the possibility of disappearing overnight

(Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011). The FBI investigation resulting in members of SR

metaphorically 'bailing ship' inadvertently accelerated cultural transformation in new

interconnected spaces such as Project Black Flag (PBF), which is an OIM ("scam

market") that arose after the collapse of SR. Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011) also

suggest that the virtual collapse's atypical boundaries between communities further

diversify a specific site of research non-reflective of any offline environment.

Accordingly, the method of virtual ethnography is met with new ethical, political and

methodological challenges imposed by the virtual dimension of participant/environment interaction.

The SR community forums and discussion board constitute the site of current ethnographic interest, where observations will draw from in-text communication. This method poses ethical implications for online research in general, but more specifically, for potential social harm to uninformed participants on discussion boards. Flicker, Haans, and Skinner (2004) however identify that observation of message boards is "fair research game" (Finn & Lavitt, 1994; Salem, Bogat, & Reid, 1997; Sharf, 1997) because they exist as public discourse by nature and therefore negate the need for consent. Brownlow and O'Dell (2002) propose that online researchers must "protect and respect" all participants (p. 685) and be conscious of disclaimers which are disclosed as footers on the webpage of some forums to ensure the privacy of those participating in CMC discussions.

Brownlow and O'Dell (2002) explicitly claim that naturalistic observation of synchronous communications, like peer-to-peer chatting and the act of 'lurking' listservs, are unethical because of a potential invasion of privacy. Frankel and Siang (1999) point out that it is difficult to discern private from public domains online. With this discrepancy, Bakardjieva and Feenberg (2000) caution researchers that uninformed participants may be naïve to the public nature of online discussion boards. Regardless of such potential naivety, Bassett (2002) argues that a group or individual should regard a discussion board as parallel in nature to that of traditional print media.

DeLorme, Zinkham & French (2001) propose a unified model for the ethics of qualitative online research, and in turn, posit that the researcher must maintain the dignity

of and respect for the privacy of participants. Given the anonymity of SR users, ethical

concern surrounding the privacy of forum members is somewhat quelled due to

participants utilizing pseudonyms and false IP addresses for privacy/security purposes.

Hewson (2003) highlights the importance of informed consent for 'Internet-mediated

research' (IMR), specifically for participatory methods (e.g., interviews, online focus

groups, etc.), but does not imply the need for informed consent for ethnographic

observation. An important ethical concern of non-obtrusive observation as a method of

data collection resonates not only around informed consent, but also in how research

findings could misrepresent the observed, contradicting what Bakardjieva and Feenberg

(2000) propose as the ethic of non-alienation.

Capurro (2006) proposes that ethical dilemmas in IMR emerge not out of the

indiscernibility of private and public, but out of the tensions between bodily existence

and ontological edification via cultural-textual output in online environments. Marcus

(1997) suggests that environments like the SR community forums exist as a particular site

of research similar in nature to what Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011) refer to as a locus

for "cultural transformation" (p. 469). Cultural transformation is expressed through a

textual output (Capurro, 2006; Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011), which constitutes digital

objects simulating corporeal ontological worldviews respective of the individual

community members. Capurro (2006) elaborates in his own words:

> This ontological or, to put it in Thomas Kuhn's terminology, paradigmatic
>
> dimension does not just concern the fact that we create digital objects and
>
> processes or that we are able to create digital models of non-digital objects and

processes but the very possibility of a digital casting of the world or a *digital ontology* [emphasis included]. (p. 189)

Capurro (2006) ultimately emphasizes that text uploaded into discussion forums or through any other type of CMC for that matter is an extension of a Being's ontological disposition into the virtual and should therefore be respected as a version of self rather than just text.

The ethical dilemma lies in the obfuscation between the bodily being and digital ontology in such a domain, where perhaps research processes/outcomes incur social harm for the 'digital-being' without necessarily incurring obtrusive harm for the actual individual. Steinmetz (2012) also suggests the ethical importance of considering that participants of online bulletin boards are very much coping with corporeal stresses and barriers. In consideration of the creation of 'digital castings', the ethnographer's best ethical practices should include respect for both the digital and the actual being through the principle of non-alienation (Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2002). The principle of non-alienation is just that – an unspoken guiding principle in online research that all community members on the Internet are entitled to. That entitlement is the *sine qua non* of respect and dignity.

Research ethics online vary from ethics in the offline world because of the non-localized nature of Internet community characterized by normative incongruences (Wittel, 2000); however, regardless of normative differences, there exists a universal ethic of respect that encompasses all research. Normative incongruences are the overlapping issue of privacy and data protection that may seem reasonable in the offline world, but are counter normative in the online world. In light of the ethical dilemmas

pertaining to informational privacy in the non-localized, virtual, amorphous context of

online communities, Elgesem (2002) posits that particular context (e.g., the *agora* vs.

private homes) facilitate restrictions "to the flow of sensitive information" (p. 201). In

essence, accessibility relative to the degree of informational privacy should guide the

researcher to ethical decisions online. Interlocutors in the context of an individual's home

are entitled to private dialogue, whereas the dynamics of a particular setting, such as a

public park, may therefore lower the degree of expected privacy. This same reasoning is

applied in virtual ethnography, where the community forum is not immune from

weakened expectations around privacy, and is expected to experience outsider

observations.

6.1.4 Virtual ethnography.

There are many examples of virtual ethnography in the recent literature. Some

ethnography is entirely based in the text-based field, whereas others are conducted in

graphical worlds. For example, Carter (2005) utilized classic ethnographic techniques,

such as building field contacts as a means to better navigate the multi-user dimension

(MUD) of Cybercity. The graphical and face-to-face MUD qualities provided more

conventional data collection opportunities familiar to classic ethnography, whereas

naturalistic observation of the SR cryptocommunity must be reconfigured to account for

observations of purely textual space and interaction.

However, Fine (1993) posits, "Ethnography is nothing until inscribed: sensory

experiences become text" (p. 288). SR as a virtual field is entirely comprised of texts,

which conveys social relations (Smith, 1990) and engender the sensory experience, but

because of the nature of the field and habitus of SR, where researchers once relied heavily on sensory experience to gather data and to document subtle nuances of face-to-face communication, they must adapt to the virtual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Nonetheless, ethnographic research has been conducted on purely textual spaces. For example, Downing (2011) examines online retro gaming (sub)culture through virtual ethnography with criminology based subcultural theories to explain deviance and the formation of moral imperatives and ethics within online piracy communities.

6.2 Methods

This study is an explorative virtual ethnography that focuses on the cryptocommunity, in search of a connection between Merton's (1938) adaptation of rebellion and SR. I first entered the ethnographic field of research, referred to as the cryptocommunity, in early June of 2013. The data collection process began in September of 2013 and continued into December of 2015. The ethnographic data for this research is constituted by text-based discussion posts made by members and was collected via unobtrusive observation, a technique of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; Steinmetz, 2012). The novelty of this research is derived from the uniqueness of the methodology, ethic, and aims of inquiry. Whereas the recent literature conceptualizes SR as an OIM and focuses on consumer trends of the market, I focus on the cryptocommunity as the ethnographic site of research. Therefore, SR discussion posts made in the cryptocommunity constitute the data approached in this analysis of this study.

In keeping with the societal reaction school and Howard Becker's work, I argue that defining cryptoculture and online community is an onerous task insomuch that SR

members are respected and not alienated (Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2006). However, the

hexis of SR is in contradiction and therefore in deviation to that of State control. This is

evidenced by discursive and direct quotes excerpted from the data. Barry (1996) cites the

symbolic-constructivist approach with the research goal to determine the symbol as, "sign

like, form(s), meaning(s), and use(s) and that acts as a gateway to other understandings"

(p. 415). However, the objects of my study exist as textual artifacts rather than art. The

text-based nature of SR, which Capurro (2006) suggests facilitate ontological castings of

Being in two-dimensional space, exists as discourse. With text as discourse, lexical items

signify meaning in semiotic terms, but also symbolic artifact shaped intrinsically by the

medium.

The ethical principle of non-alienation should not limit the rigor of the analysis

and instead guide the research to findings that are least alienating to the community.

Examining the hierarchical organization of SR membership in the cryptocommunity,

defining the habitus of the cryptocommunity, and impetus of the members in search for

the *telos* of rebellion will naturally include analysis driven by the research questions.

In order to structure analysis of what is traditionally referred to as a "sample" in

the nomothetic ethnographic tradition, I employ Spradley's (1980) domain analysis to

guide my ethnography. From the nine types of semantic relationships I specifically use:

(1) function (x is used for y); (2) location for action (x is a place to do y); and (3)

rationale (x is a reason for y). This assists in coding and structuring as mentioned.

Furthermore, Fetterman's (1989) concepts of culture, symbol, structure, function, and

ritual are considered in this emic perspective of virtual ethnography.

In accompaniment with unobtrusive observation of asynchronous discussion posts made on the forum, I employ an interpretive/critical analysis of the data. I specifically focus on the meso-level of analysis – examining how cultural texts are created and consumed in the cryptocommunity of SR. I consider manifest and latent meanings in the discourse of the forum. The ethnographic technique of observation is non-obtrusvie or what some scholars may refer to as 'lurking' (see Steinmetz, 2012). The lack of interaction with participants in an asynchronous environment brings my research into line with that of Christine Hine (2000), who refers to as the 'Internet as cultural artifact'. Jon Snow, Benford, and Anderson (1986) propose that the textual continuity of discourse with historical and cultural relations is examinable with ethnographic techniques of analysis.

6.2.1 Design and Setting

The data of this current study is drawn from the SR cryptocommunity, where SR members posted publicly. I do not examine any private messages that may have been exchanged between members during the timeframe of research. Ethnographic data was collected purely through unobtrusive observations. I joined SR as a community member in early June of 2013 and maintained lurker status as a scholarly observer until September, 2013. Barker (2008) suggests that data scraping online forums is a valid method of unobtrusive observation, however, in order to archive my data, I manually saved each forum page, as suggested by Steinmetz (2012). As Barker (2008) suggests data scraping degrades context and therefore meaning, I maintain lurker status as a researcher to avoid influencing discourse, while remaining in an advantageous unobtrusive ethnographic position.

Throughout my study, I observed that the membership had grown significantly between June of 2013 and January of 2014. The general forum statistics read that as of January 3rd, 2014, a total of 17 603 members share the cryptocommunity (see Figure 1) whereas in November 6th, 2013, only 3 227 members were a part of SR (see Figure 2). In addition to the growing membership of the SR cryptocommunity, average posts multiplied, as did the average online, and total amount of page views. In the analysis, I do not attribute any numerical or alphabetical coding to the data excerpts because the actual identity of the individual behind the anonymous handle (username) in the cryptocommunity is unknown. Administrators or hired trolls could have published a series of comments made from different anonymous handles in the cryptocommunity to facilitate fake discussion, however, this is unlikely due to compositional and style variations between user comments. Therefore, attributing data to usernames was not necessary.

Silk Road Forums - Statistics Center   **Silk Road Forums - Statistics Center**

General Statistics   **General Statistics**

Total Members: Total Members:
 17603   3227
Total Posts: Total Posts:
 194543   29170
Total Topics: Total Topics:
 12231   1968
Total Categories: Total Categories:
 4   4
Users Online: Users Online:
 206   115
Most Online: Most Online:
 378 - December 29, 2013, 12:20:07 am   168 - **Yesterday** at 06:00:12 pm
Online Today: Online Today:
 264   132
Total page views: Total page views:
 12160215   1956331
Average registrations per day: Average registrations per day:
 202.37   104.69
Average posts per day: Average posts per day:
 2939.18   998.78
Average topics per day: Average topics per day:
 154.60   72.56
Total Boards: Total Boards:
 23   20
Latest Member: Latest Member:
 Fufa   -Cindelle-
Average online per day: Average online per day:
 167.40   86.94
Male to Female Ratio: Male to Female Ratio:
 1:1   1:1
Average page views per day: Average page views per day:
 136631.63   61135.34

Figure 1. Image depicting general statistics for Silk Road forums as of January 3rd, 2013.

Figure 2. Image depicting general statistics for Silk Road forums as of November 6th, 2013.

This study is primarily ethnographic, rather than purely that of a content analysis, due to my personal involvement within the cryptocommunity as a by-stander rather than archiving all of the data with a web crawler. Passive involvement within the cryptocommunity has led me to adopt a critical reflexive standpoint, without influencing social outcomes during my research. This technique allows for "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) that facilitates specific (technical, substantive) and broader interpretations of the setting and data. I purposefully focus solely on the SR community forums as my research setting (site of research) and avoid a multi-site approach traditional to virtual ethnography because of the nature of my research. I report data as fragments without any

mention of the forum member's name unless otherwise stated as an administrator or

DPR.

7.0 Chapter Seven: Findings

7.1 Running a Tight Ship.

The founding principle of SR's autonomy is technologically intertwined with the

individual means of preserving anonymity (via proxies, cryptography, etc.) and

ideologically embedded in conflict, libertarian, and anarchistic ideology. The idea of free

and unimpeded markets to DPR reflects that if the customer is satisfied by the services

provided, a happier, ethical and more prosperous relationship can only result from deeper

regulation that ultimately degrades the autonomy of the cryptocommunity. However,

regulation has endured as a priority by administrators of SR to administer justice,

distribute punishment, and enforce market rules as means to sustaining the continuance

and preserve the ethicality/trustworthiness of its intended services. This is expressed in

the social division of the cryptocommunity and the powers that certain administrators

have to secure SR. Fundamentally, DPR outlines that SR can only be successful through

trusting relationships and collectivity:

> *'Sure, you are free to operate in isolation if you wish, but one benefits from
> collaboration and cooperation with others, so there is incentive to do so. Also, in
> an agorist society, individuals are free to pursue their own ends, provided those
> ends are not to harm others.*

The habitus or *hexis* (used interchangeably) sets the cornerstone value of non-coercion by

DPR in the cryptocommunity of SR. Such a cornerstone value is founded in

Libertarianism and subsequently a reason why weapons were banned on the cryptomarket

and why drugs were so emphasized. According to Libertarian logic, illegal drugs like

Marijuana and other hallucinogens were substances to be consumed by informed adults on their own accord, whereas weapons could be used to coerce and infringe on the rights and freedoms of others. However, DPR and SR administrators allowed all drugs, which included those that could be used as poisons against others, in order to refrain from impinging on the autonomy of the cryptocommunity as an *agora*.

DPR introduces the concept of the agorist, which is Greek for 'market goer'. DPR defines the *hexis* of an agorist society as anarchistic and governed - individuated and collective. The ethical code of the community has been implemented through the Charter, which I refer to as the "Code of the Road;" it prescribes rules, and regulations that serve for the efficiency of the cryptomarket. DPR adds:

> *I love people and seeing them empowered and free, so part of the profit I gain from this venture is that satisfaction. The difference is that a true agorist will never force a collectivist agenda on people who want no part in it. The ends DO NOT justify the means, so if people voluntarily form a collective and are free to leave at will, then I see no contradiction there with agorism.*

DPR is establishing the *hexis* of SR as a cryptocommunity defined by absolute freedom – a virtual state of nature.

SR from a pragmatic perspective is the technological and social marketplace that serves as a hub for the transaction of drugs between private members known as vendors and their buyers (purchasers). In order for SR to operate successfully, trust within this dichotomous vendor-buyer relationship must be sustained by equal competency, respect to the responsibilities during trading, and in compliance with the unwritten rule of confidentiality. In order to maintain trust in the system of SR, members must abide by the overarching values and codes or else the violator risks banishment. However, DPR asserts a *laissez-faire* approach to governance of SR: *Instead of trying to control this*

development, a big part of my job is staying out of the way and letting the pattern

emerge.

SR can be interpreted as more than just a mere market; it is a movement at the

confluence of technological empowerment for the individual and political rejection

against the oppressive State. The State as an ominous villain in the conflict narrative

reflects how the community culture of SR is an embattled entity and victim to the

institutional War on Drugs. In fact, this is iterated in the rhetoric of DPR's trust-building

message:

> *Granted I play a unique role, but part of that role is continually earning the trust*
> *of the community to make the right choices going forward, and to serve each of*
> *you as best I can. Silk Road was built to serve you, your needs and desires are the*
> *wind that fills its sails. Without you, we are dead in the water. So sure, it's my job*
> *to steer and chart the course, and I am ultimately responsible for the outcome of*
> *this experiment, but never forget where the real power lies. It's where it always*
> *has been, in your hands.*

The purposeful description of SR-as-ship corresponds with the definition of heterotopia

put forward by Foucault (1984) insomuch that SR is not bounded to any rigid, inflexible,

state of hegemon as a heterotopia of illusion.

DPR as "the captain" of SR refers to the OIM in conjunction with the

cryptocommunity as "the ship". DPR's identity also coalesces with this nautical analogy

(of "the ship"), especially with how he self-valorizes his efforts to circumnavigate the

perils of threat and the uncertainty that could wreck his ship. Social and countercultural

capital is thus acquired by successfully overcoming perils that lurk in the unchartered

waters of the deep web. Ultimately, trust in the ship can only be reaffirmed to members

through informal and formal social control, social division, and motivating rhetoric and

discourse. Additional rhetoric signifies SR as the ship as a cradle for revolution and

resistance:

Our movement's strength has been tested more in the recent months than across our previous two years combined. I am deeply honored to fight alongside thousands of determined warriors, and fight we will. This past week our ship suffered major damage. Three of our crew were lost, and our Captain was forced into exile. Unfortunately as contingency plans were engaged, an even graver situation reared its head below deck. Will this be the end of everything we've fought for? Will our movement be remembered as a cypherpunk fad, or as an unstoppable force? I'm here to fight.

The *hexis* of the community is clearly outlined here. In the discourse, fighting for the

rights of all members establishes the overarching habitus of the community. Habitus and

hexis are interchangeable in this sense and are underpinned by defiance, resistance, and

rebellion. According to Narayanan (2013), the defiance, resistance, and rebellion as

activities associated with a coalition of hacktivists, academics, and other "code rebels"

derived from the cypherpunk movement that originated in the 1980s. The renaissance or

rebirth of the crypto dream as Narayanan (2013) cites could be discursively expressed

through that of SR and Bitcoin. Although I contend that SR is a symptom of the code that

in turn produces a unique discursive expression of countercultural *hexis*, SR's

philosophical origins are intertwined with that of cryptoanarchy. However, SR is a space

that expresses social division and therefore the antithesis of anarchism is certain respects.

7.1.1 The Layout and Social Division of the Road.

SR as the virtual field has distinct structuring features, functions, and an

underlying rationale. The virtual field is constituted by encrypted spaces, each with a

degree of access based on status. As a general member of SR, I only had access to the

public spaces of cryptomarket and cryptocommunity (forum). The cryptomarket, at the

user interface level for a general member is a TOR page, which contains a list of vendors

who advertise materials and services for exchange (see Figure 3). In the upper right

corner of the TOR browser on the homepage of SR, one could find the hyperlink to the

cryptocommunity. Unlike the cryptomarket, the cryptocommunity layout is that of an

assortment of bulletin boards – each with its own theme – for the creation of a silent text-

based community (see Figure 4). These two spaces in conjunction constitute the totality

of SR as an *agora.* However, there are alternate spaces of the OIM and cryptocommunity

for vendors that cannot be accessed through a general member's account. Additionally,

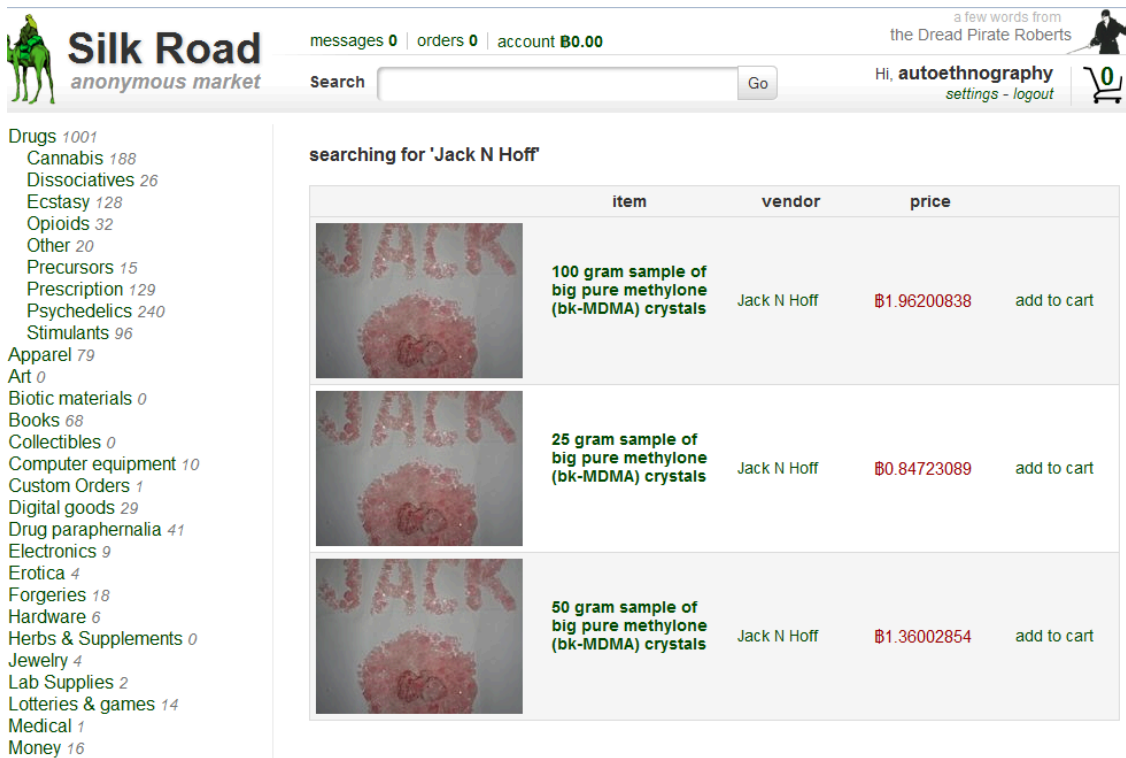administration has powers and access to control all spaces of SR.

Figure 3. Screenshot depicting services and items for sale in addition with vendor listing.
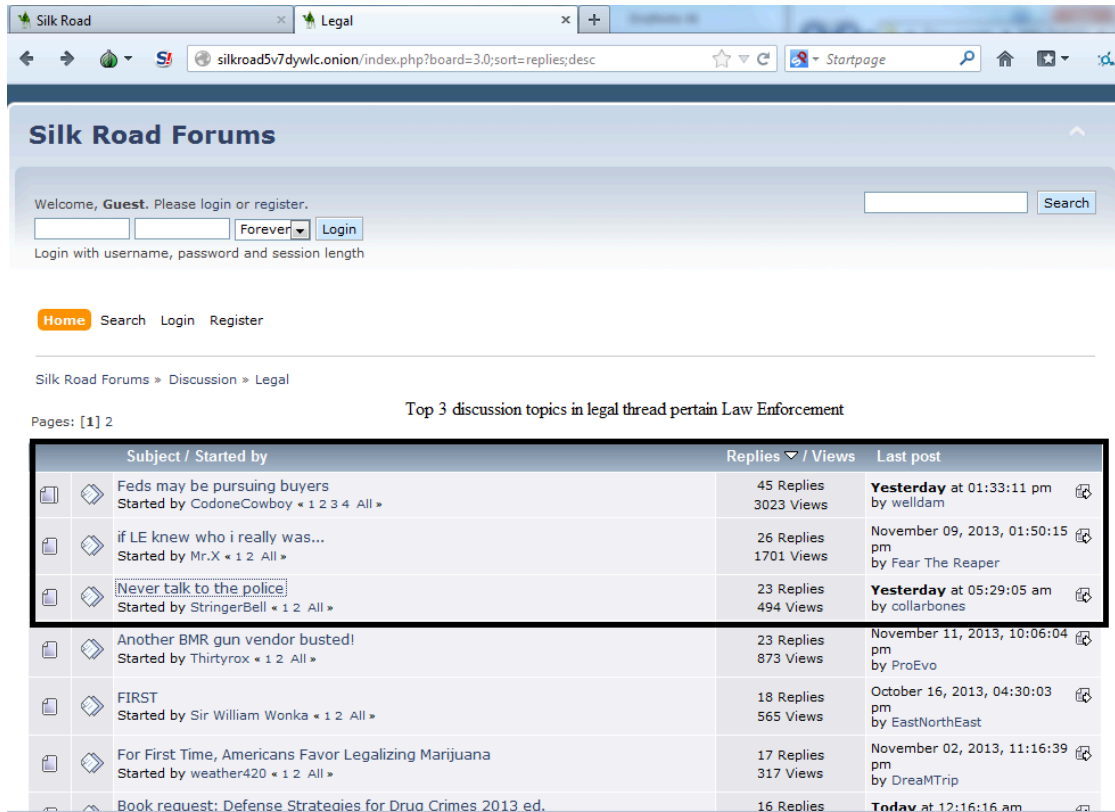
Figure 4. Screenshot of the SR cryptocommunity discussion forum threads.

Spaces are controlled through how the features are structured, such as how the

market is constituted, which always corresponds to a rationale predicated by the

assumptions of cryptoanarchy – with administrators having little control (only when

necessary). Encryption for security and anonymity are part in parcel with the guiding

principles of both SR and cryptoanarchy. Informal functions of social control are

exercised through rating systems, which are instrumental in deciding individual rank. The

informal function of "karma points" (+/-) is instrumental for the community to report the

character, trustworthiness, political disposition, etc. of a member. DPR elaborates how

such a system works for vendors:

> *In addition to this, we've developed a ranking system that takes into account not
> only the average feedback for the seller, but also how experienced they are so you
> can quickly find the best sellers who have both good feedback and lots of it.*

As much as the heterotopia of SR is described as an autonomous *agora,* social division is still in place to facilitate logistical operations required – such as security. Subsequently, trust on SR is established through the peer-review system. Trust in the system is therefore just as important as relational trust, which is dyadic, derived from temporal context, and based in the habitus (Frederiksen, 2014).

Members who peer-review the comments made in the forum rely on the titles and scales instituted by the administration to represent rank/status. In Durkheimian terms, division of labour is more indicative of organic solidarity produced by the valorization of services rather than that of conscience collective driving the *telos* of rebellion. The valorization of services and the division of labour are both constructs of capitalism by which the majority SR cryptocommunity members do not oppose. Administration is the only entity that can exercise formal functions of social control to carry out the banishment of a member. The rationale behind these structuring features and functions is to establish successful rebellion by barring dissidents and scammers, while simultaneously giving praise to members of good standing. Below, Table 2 depicts the social division of SR:

Table 2. The hierarchal social division of Silk Road (SR) based on membership rank/title and role.

Rank/Title	Role
Captain	This title was solely attributed to DPR. DPR's role was to maintain the integrity and accessibility of all features of the TOR site.
Administrator	Administrators are assistants to that of the captain. Admins play a multifaceted role between the market and forum.
Global Moderator	Moderators play the role of managing the SR community forum. Removing spam and regulating communications are duties.

Newb Guide	Someone that assists new members around the forum and market. The Newb Guide is an honourary position usually fulfilled by mods.
Vendor	Vendors are members who export illicit materials. Vendor status and rank is determined by karma points and written reviews on service.
Full Member	Full members are members that have elevated to this status by reputation earned through karma points as a metric for rank, status, etc.
Junior Member	Rank and title based on the number and the quality of comments made on the forum.
Newbie	New member

As illustrated above, SR is not in a state of nature or pure anarchy. SR is an organized community; it is an *agora*, where administrators establish the structuring features and formal functions that guide the community. Unlike in Hobbes' (1651/2008) *Leviathan,* however, there is no formally instituted code or social contract prescribed by the sovereign, but rather promulgated as a charter representative of the assemblage of values introduced in the discourse and rhetoric of DPR that are optionally followed. Therefore, as opposed to being an entirely anarchistic enterprise, SR is an online community that is governed by an assemblage of values that are represented in a loose social code, which I refer to as the "Code of the Road" (see Figure 5). In this context, commitment to the code is demonstrated when members of every rank fulfill their roles as immaterial labourers in the construction of a cryptocommunity. Contributing to discourse, regulating spam, providing security solutions, and administrating the marketplace are all roles that have ascribed rank in SR.

You are Silk Road

Though our enemies may seize our servers, impound our coins, and arrest our friends, they cannot stop you: our people.

You are writing history with every item purchased here.

It is unprecedented for any entity, darknet or clearnet, to completely repay the victims of a Bitcoin hack.

We are sending a clear message of integrity and justice, louder than the slander our oppressors can push into the news. History will prove that we are not criminals, we are revolutionaries.

We do not steal the People's money like Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, and Morgan Stanley.
We bail each other out with our own sweat.
We are not puppets of fear or greed.
We do not run like the cowards at MtGox, TorMarket, or Sheep.

Silk Road is not here to scam, we are here to end economic oppression.
Silk Road is not here to promote violence, we are here to end the unjust War on Drugs.
Silk Road is not here to submit to authority, we are here to defend a foundational human right: freedom of choice.

Silk Road is not a marketplace,
Silk Road is a global revolt.

The idea of freedom is immortal.

Figure 5. A screenshot depicting the manifesto of SR

7.1.2 The Code of the Road.

The "Code of the Road" is the social and cultural foundation for SR. After some weeks in the field, I came across discursive posts made by community members; here is one that I consider to be strong evidence for the existence of a formal code:

> *Silk Road Charter*
> *Silk Road is a global enterprise whose purpose is to empower people to live as free individuals. We provide systems and platforms that allow our customers to defend their basic human rights and pursue their own ends, provided those ends do not infringe on the rights of others. Our mission is to have voluntary interaction between individuals be the foundation of human civilization.*

The aforementioned overview of the charter outlines the anarchocapitalist doctrine upon which SR is founded – but is not drafted by DPR. Another member of the community, who is of a lesser status/rank, scripted the charter. This is an example of egalitarian contribution by all members, which eschews the social divisions as decided by karma points – a formal rating system. To complete this thought, Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan (2007) substantiate the link and distinction between a brand community, subculture of consumption, and subculture in positing that the latter of the two integrate social division, distribution of labour, and utilize other mechanisms for solidarity, whereas the prior do not. Furthermore, ''to understand a subculture or a counterculture it is necessary to understand its relationship to both the dominant culture and to the social class within which the subculture or counterculture is emerging'' (Crane, 1992, p. 89).

In the counterculture of anarchism, actors emerge as free and independent members of SR. This concept of self-ownership and equality is promoted by DPR in his commentary: "*Individuals own their bodies, thoughts and will. Anything they create with their property or obtain without coercion is also theirs.*" The charter, which was not created by DPR, also promotes autonomy and respect, which are loosely defined below. The tenets stated below can be linked back to DPR's guiding discourse:

> *We conduct ourselves and our enterprise from the following fundamental values that are at the heart of who we are:*
>
> *Responsibility*
> *People are responsible for their actions. If one infringes on another's rights, they should be held accountable.*
>
> *Integrity*
> *Honoring one's word as one's self. Word, thought, and action are aligned.*
>
> *Virtue*
> *Striving to improve one's self and the lives of others in all actions. To create*

value.

These three core tenets – responsibility, integrity, and virtue – are important for the establishment of community identity and moral communal character. Further to this point, DPR suggests that, "*In short, Silk Road is an example of a moral culture where peace, cooperation and ethical competition are the norm, and violence and fraud are found only on the margin.*" At a manifest level of interpretation, these values are not in absolute terms entirely distinct from the values held in contemporary society. Classifying SR as a community immersed in an online drug subculture is thus not entirely representative, whereas defining SR as an assemblage of countercultural agents of change is more appropriate. The division of immaterial labour distributed between rank and role moves the cryptomovemnt of SR forward.

Durkheim (1893/1964) defines the function of the division of labour in terms of movements that serve the individual and then reciprocate and relate to a larger system. These movements are in turn the production of collective conscience and the individual conscience. SR as a cryptomovement is therefore considered a "crime", an act of immorality in relation to the collective conscience of a control society, just as movements towards individual conscience in the cyptomovement itself lead to the undercutting of order that keeps SR mobile. The libertarian rhetoric of DPR identifies in non-contextual terms the corruption that sustains inequality – and in turn, anomie – as a means of justifying the individual conscience in the symbolic war against the War on Drugs:

> *The way of the state is the way of violence, oppression and death. The way of the market is freedom, dignity and peace. If you understand this, it is your moral duty to protect the victims of the state in any way you can. Drug users have been victimize*[d] *for too long and it's time everyone start treating them with some respect.*

This rhetoric produces imagery of SR and State as diametric opposites, which highlights on the issue of victimization to appeal to emotion as a means to define SR as a justified movement for the oppressed.

In solidarity against the State, the SR cryptocommunity adopts a moralistic discourse and rhetoric in order to justify the "way of the market" and draw on the War on Drugs as an example of a violent agenda imposed by the State. This activates the countercultural assemblage of the cryptocommunity. The crypto-ontologies that derive from anarchism justify the impetus behind SR. Sykes and Matza (1957) contend that the individual's rationalization of the crime, or deviance, as a human "right" is denoted as a variant of neutralization. Furthermore, one could substantiate the argument that SR is neutralizing deviance by shrouding innovation in countercultural discourse and rhetoric. However, the label of innovation is highly skeptical as the currency used in the OIM is Bitcoin, which is not instituted by a centralized authority and derives its store of value from countercultural capital associated with rebellion. This does not impede nor deny the discourse could be interpreted as one that is underpinned by the theme of conflict:

> *In USA you have two choices, you can be robbed by people who want to expand the state to insane degrees to the point they force you to buy healthcare "for your own good" and want to "help rehabilitate people" from drugs while funding the shitty near-brain-dead social science and prison industrial complex, or you can be robbed to a lesser degree by people who want to force you to follow the bizarre and completely illogical moral standards that were created two thousand years ago and largely based on a fairytale obviously no more real than any of the Greek or Roman or other myths from ages past.*

Logically, the aforementioned statement is a false dichotomy; however, the rhetoric establishes the overall cryptocommunity sentiment about the War on Drugs. Rebellion is a symptom of marginalization induced by punitive formal social control and related sanctions, rather than induced by class-status frustration.

Instead of SR existing as an example of subcultural innovation for coping with status frustration within the locality of a lower class (Cohen, 1956; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960), SR is a virtual counter-hegemon that is not tethered to a physical location, instead existing everywhere simultaneously. Status frustration has little to do with economic achievement in this regard, but more so to do with conflict and stigma induced by labels:

> *Hey kooper, when did 50+% of the country decide to make drugs illegal? You need to seriously look past your statist indoctrination and to the FACTS. The US government started making propaganda demonizing drug use PRIOR to any majority of citizens wanting to make drugs illegal. Only after being BOMBARDED with LIES and PROPAGANDA through the mainstream media, from politicians, etc, did people become AFRAID of drugs and drug users.*

In this user's post, Becker's (1963) concept of the political or moral entrepreneur is speculated as a reason to why and how drug prohibition has affected people. According to this comment, the War on Drugs is an ideological conflict, which therefore stigmatizes the drug users labeled as deviant.

Ideological conflict is the impetus behind SR where waging symbolic war against state oppressors is inherent to the *hexis* of the community. Becker's (1963) concept of pure deviance is reified by the labeling and stigma of societal reaction – societal reaction that is articulated through policy response, media, and other forms of political demonization. Furthermore, the *telos* is thus reaffirmed as rebellion in the following posts made by members of the SR cryptocommunity:

> *Oppressive policies are always met with resistance, and throughout history humans has shown time and time again a tenancy to overthrow repressive regimes and stand up for their personal freedoms. The amount of people who believe that drugs should be legal is greatly increasing, and more and more people who used to be pro-criminalization are now sitting on the fence and debating whether our current drug laws are working.*

The *telos* of revolution deep seeded in the principles of libertarianism – where the

individual liberates oneself from the clutches of centralized government – is also founded

by the *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who worshipped the state of nature much in

the same way Rothbardian libertarians do. In the spirit of libertarianism, laws are thus

proposed by this user to be repressive and therefore should be resisted.

> *You tell someone they can't have something it makes them want it all the more you tell someone not to do something they'll do it all the more so the moral to this story is the day they legalise drugs so there's no need for dealers that's when we've really won the war but untill that time we break through by other means ie SR which is literally showing them it doesn't work give it up so long live SR for laughing in the face of resistance and out rite buffoonery cheers SR. as this here SilkRoad site will be a massive stepping stone in history for the rites of man and woman alike.*

The quote above characterizes the collective *hexis* of the SR as a humanitarian initiative

towards the diminution of drug cartels through the legalization of illegal drugs.

Legalization in this case is perceived as governmental responsibility and therefore not

purely libertarian.

As noted above, SR cryptocommunity members articulate the difference between

SR and other OIMs. SR members affirm that repressive regimes incur labels of pure

deviance and that SR as a cryptocommunity seeks to shed new light on the age-old debate

of drug prohibition. Furthermore, members suggest that SR as an OIM is performing a

moral duty of protecting freedom of choice, fighting for the cause *per se*, whereas certain

vendors and other OIMs exist to make a profit: *I guess the only thing we can do is to*

continue to use prohibition to make money just like those slimy fucks are with our insane

private prison industry. In addition, another member articulates how the vendors are

involved with SR as means of business:

> *I agree with DPR as well for the most part, BUT I don't see feds ever giving up, for the simple fact that they DO use so much money they make "fighting against" drugs for many other agendas.*
>
> *It's a business for them just as much as it is for a vendor.*
> *Not saying I agree with feds, but I can see it from both sides of the fence.*

In contradiction, another member addresses how the War on Drugs promotes artificial scarcity of illegal drugs and therefore profit in the sale of illegal drugs. The member argues that the capitalist code undermines the true "Code of The Road", which is revolt:

> *Some drug-users are selfish and do not care one bit about winning this war or their friends/fellow users getting locked up daily. Unlike majority of us on these forums, some just don't care about the cause...*

The "cause" or underlying *telos* of SR is winning the War on Drugs and freeing those who are oppressed by existing State drug policies. One member states, "*I am devoting my life to fighting and winning the war on freedom, and the "war on drugs" is more like just a battle in that war.*" To summarize simply in the words of an SR cryptocommunity member, "*Silk Road is not a marketplace. Silk Road is a global Revolt.*"

7.1.3 *"Silk Road is not a marketplace. Silk Road is a global Revolt."*

The title of this section is a quote excerpted from the SR mission statement created by an administrator. Revolution, revolt, and defiance are themes, or rather items of discourse, for the SR cryptocommunity. This phenomenon affirms SR as a political demonstration, rather than an apolitical OIM such as other dark markets including Agora, Black Market Reloaded, etc. Alleviating status frustration through illegal activity is not the underlying *telos* of the cryptocommunity, but counter-economics as a means of liberating free choice is:

Take PRIDE in your admirable participation in counter-economics. You are driving a free market force outside of the governments greedy reach. The only pure economy not being raped by scumbags who want to dominate and own it. Do not feel guilty! Your actions are worthy of praise and respect. YOU are a true revolutionary doing your part to free the world.

As much as SR is underpinned by anarchism, counter-economics, and rebellion, SR is ideologically paradoxical.

SR's economic and cultural liberation ideology is expressed through the exchange of a variety of illegal goods. The displacement of alienation and otherness from the corporeal into the virtual is product of technology and symptom of the capitalist code. Baudrillard, as the founder of this concept, never fully elaborates what is meant by the capitalist code. By the term "code" Baudrillard references the rules governing the combinatorial possibilities of a closed system (Genosko, 1999); the term is derived from linguistics and semiotics and linked by Baudrillard to genetics. Every combination is played out in advance by the code in the strongest sense, suggesting that resistance, rebellion, and revolution are prefixed to the code, emanating its own authenticity in revolt. I contend that the capitalist code is a schema that ascribes rules of consumption, essential to the survival of SR as a cryptomovement against politicized oppression of individual autonomy by control societies (See Deleuze, 1992). The essence of SR as a cryptomovement against the politicized oppression of individual autonomy is emancipation from State rules and enforcement. Ultimately, it is the exhibit of free choice, in this case utilized to ingest illegal drugs. Ingestion is consumption, which occurs in the processes of capital exchange of a currency completely based in code – both cryptographically and culturally.

Bitcoin, the cryptocurrency used to purchase the illegal goods on SR, is not an element of criminal innovation, as it completely rejects the institutional hierarchy, division of labour, and exploitation/coercion – as does the SR culture. Bitcoin was not invented solely for the purpose of SR. Bitcoin is not inherently associated with rebellion or deviance, but is in opposition to centralized fiat currencies because of its decentralized nature. This decentralized nature facilitates rebellion, which is more prevalent in this context of SR, rather than innovation, because of strain facilitated by unjust laws and enforcement/punishment practices of the State that central banking institutions are assumed to enable. SR is a rebellion against capitalist oppression, neoliberalism, and State interventionism that provides protected cultural exchange between individuals, but also facilitates the reproduction of the code of capitalism while simultaneously resisting a society of control. This is a paradox associated with SR.

The exchange-value of a new economic system is only a simulacrum to that of the capitalist code is crystallized in the anarcho-rhetoric of the libertarian tradition of SR and through the utilization of Bitcoin. The implosion of anarchy with cryptography and capitalism on the dark net evokes a lot of discussion about the (re)production of capitalism as a mechanism of formal social control, where the virtual resistance actually exists as a precondition to the survival of machine-based system – plotting its own cathartic submission only to rebound stronger. The multiple reincarnations of SR after being seized and closed by the FBI only speaks to its resilience as a virtual assemblage that survives in a dance with State suppression and other methods of formal social control and reciprocates symbolically. The code of economic dominance is therefore played out even in the counter-economics of SR. Baudrillard's idea of social integration through

consumption (Kellner, 2005) raises questions regarding how the SR community distances itself from the society of consumption. By maintaining a countercultural code as a type of sign-play signifying resistance against dominant institutions, such as the banks and State, the SR community in-turn reproduces the code of capitalism, *malgré lui*. The code of capitalism is signified by the Bitcoin exchange

7.1.4 Bitcoin in Context.

In 2008, an author by the pseudonym of "Satoshi Nakamoto" published a technical article outlining the feasibility of Bitcoin as a medium of exchange and unit of account. Bitcoin is therefore a virtual currency that relies on encryption to establish its store of value as a medium of exchange. In this article, Nakamoto (2008) proposes the basics of transaction privacy, mining instructions and incentives, and ultimately the nature of the cryptographic currency. Cryptography in the subtlest of definitions is the study of ciphers, encryption, and code. Khan (1996) postulates that Leon Battista Alberti's[2] encryption put cryptography "on the road to modern complexity" for discovering the first polyalphabetic cipher (pp. 128-129). In relation to Bitcoin, encryption is less to do with secrecy (and the romanticisms that surround this notion) and more to do with the ordering of numbers (DuPont, 2014). As Nakamoto (2008) describes his/her invention of the Bitcoin cryptocurrency, "We have proposed a system for electronic transactions without relying on trust (p. 8)."

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[2] Leon Battista Alberti, renowned architect and cryptographer (among other professions) invented the first polyalphabetic cypher disk in 1467. Alberti et. al, (1997) explains the invention as two concentric (rotating outer: plaintext, stable inner: ciphertext) disks, each attached with a common pin, which when operated could produce encrypted messages.

Bitcoin is most simply defined as a currency that relies on a cryptographic

notational system that produces data files, which each possess a unit of account through

the principles of supply-and-demand and that can then be exchanged in an online peer-to-

peer (P2P) computer network (Nakamoto, 2008; DuPont, 2014). Although cryptographic,

Bitcoin is not a secret currency, nor is its purpose for secretive – or perhaps illegal –

activities. In the context of Bitcoin, Dupont (2014) elaborates that encryption through the

use of public key cryptography[3] prevents counterfeiting; reducing double spending[4],

while crypto-based mining protocols eliminate hyperinflation.

Bitcoin assumedly became the accepted medium of exchange on SR because of its

latent philosophical association to the libertarian tradition, which is played out in the

technical nature of being a decentralized, highly anonymous, and a "trusted" non-

regulated cryptocurrency. Bitcoin constitutes three basic technical components: (1)

mining; (2) networking/exchange (P2P ledger); and (3) security. Mining is the process of

extracting the unit of account that is a single Bitcoin. Courtois, Grajek, and Naik (2013)

describes the process of mining as follows:

> Mining consists in repeatedly computing hashes of variants of a data structure
>
> called a block header, until one is found whose numerical value is low enough.
>
> When this happens it allows releasing a valid block, for which the miner is
>
> rewarded with bitcoins… (p. 1)

The unstable infrastructure of Bitcoin storage is all related to the security

concerns that increase volatility and uncertainty for the Bitcoin economy as well as SR.

As of January, 2015, SRR has made significant strides in eliminating reliance on

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[3] Referred to formally as its technical name: asymmetric cryptography.
[4] Double spending is the act of using a batch or single Bitcoin in multiple transactions.

cryptocurrency. The hacking of a major Bitcoin exchange, known as Mt. Gox, did not

end the existence of this cryptocurrency, but perhaps deflated its store of value

temporarily. For whatever the reason may be, trust in that Bitcoin will rebound as a major

cryptocurrency remains in existence because it is a system ordered by cryptography

(DuPont, 2014). In this regard, cryptography is a tool for ordering and control, but also a

tool for eluding what Deleuze (1992) refers to as control society.

Deleuze (1992) introduces a meta-structural analysis of production, the mutation

of capitalism, and the introduction of 'computers for control'. According to Deleuze

(1992), the factory as a confined space of discipline is an analogy for power and

production of the nineteenth century that is not adequate to describe the emergence of

virtual spaces. In these terms, everyday life on the Internet is regulated by an economy

that can no longer be explained nor interpreted by the worldview of Marxism or Foucault,

as there is a more complex discussion required to understand control societies. The TOR

network and other encrypted means of communication therefore become the very last

frontier for virtual resistance against control societies, which focus on the control of

individual autonomy within dominant institutions of centralized banking and under the

oppression of State authority rather than relying purely on institutional discipline as a

means of formal control. I add that the TOR and I2P networks facilitate a politically,

socially, and culturally liberating realm of not subcultural, but countercultural resistance

– with rebellion at the core of the encrypted network:

> *The government and corporate powers have it strongly in their interests to keep
> drugs illegal[…]The politicians love the war on drugs because it directly funds a
> lot of their friends, in the case of republicans it funds their friends in the private
> prison industry, in the case of the democrats it funds a huge portion of people who
> go to college for sociology and social services degrees. In fact, a lot of
> sociologists and people in social services have absolutely no skills and make the*

bulk of their money by teaching classes that people who are arrested with drugs are court ordered to attend, or by being "drug abuse specialists" and working at facilities that people who are arrested with drugs are sentenced to be held at. Many millions of jobs will be lost if drugs are legalized, and billions of dollars going to private industry will no longer be going there, and these are the same private industries that pump tons of money into the campaigns of politicians.

Countercultural resistance is realized through SR not only by the discourse of the community, but also in its ability to sustain the illegal drug trade through encrypted networks and Bitcoin.

SR's essence is therefore that of an *agora* within an encrypted network of loosely associated marketplaces and virtual forums. However, through brief observation of other cryptomarkets (other cryptomarkets such as Agora, Evolution, Sheep, etc.) on the darknet, it is evident that none have expressed and developed a discourse that signifies cultural distaste for the ongoing War on Drugs and oppressive institutions of big government and corporate corruption to the extent that SR has. This is what makes SR unique. According to my observations, social relations of SR ultimately oscillate around the premise of resistance, but are primarily expressed through the consumptive habits facilitated through the cryptomarket. Relational trust is therefore the glue that keeps the community bound to the commitment of overcoming State oppression by keeping the cryptomarket functioning without absolute closure, even given ongoing attempts by government agencies – until November, 2014. As indicated earlier, trust can be a facilitator of dynamic community restructuring, such as reduction and expansion. Lack of commitment to SR 3.0 (which is now extinct) and SRR indicate clear examples of shrinkage of the SR cryptomovement, however, SRR is still young has the propensity to develop into the vision that was put forth in its earliest stages.

7.1.5 *"Trust No One"*: Understanding the Paradox of Trust on SR

Trust is an essential dynamic required for the functionality of any community or marketplace. SR is a completely virtual and anonymous cryptocommunity and cryptomarket that sustains itself solely by the trust invested in vendors, users, and even administrators of the site. However, with that said, a common mantra that satisfies the cultural *ethos* of the SR is, "trust no one". Van Hout and Bingham (2013) posit in their research that, "developing trusted social media connections between chosen vendors and other users, prior to selecting both a product and sourcing route" (p. 389) was central to the multiple successful transactions their participant spoke to. Trust is therefore a mercurial concept in the SR cryptocommunity that needs to be interrogated critically.

In regards to trust on SR, one member states: *Trust in the darknet is more volatile than any currency, and it cannot be exchanged. It must be earned personally.* Trust is earned by abiding by the "Code of the Road." Contributing to the discussion forum with discourse that is sympathetic to the cause is also a means of earning trust – ungraded trust, however, that isn't assigned points. For vendors, trust is earned by positive peer review and by the aforementioned activity of posting in the discussion forum. When SR2.0 was hacked in 2014, trust was earned by repaying Bitcoin that was lost by administrators in a hack. Some members responded with:

> *I'm very impressed with how this has been handled by the staff. A sticky situation to be sure, but there is no better way to instill trust than to jump right in there with the vendors who are affected and give up their pay until the issue is all sorted.*

Another member adds:

Terrapin uses personal experience to express his rediscovered confidence with SR. Because confidence was restored, Terrapin can now rebuild trust in administrators of SR.

Restoring faith in SR as a whole was completed by not repaying the cryptocommunity of lost Bitcoin, but by instilling confidence in the system through the discourse of recompense. This type of discourse reinforces trust in the system by appealing to the habitus of the cryptocommunity. The discourse and rhetoric of hope in overcoming oppression became central to restoring faith in the system. An administrator who goes by the pseudonym of Defcon appeals to the cryptocommunity after the major hack:

> *Merely three months have passed since our marketplace's first incarnation was captured by our oppressors. This was a brutal blow, but we are very proud that such a devastating compromise only resulted in one month of downtime. I chalk it up to an incredible crew surrounded by a fiercely passionate and supportive community.*

In response, members of SR react to this community building rhetoric by stating:

> *Never did lose faith, even if I got to admit things were starting to look shaky at times.*

> *The good times are coming . . . Thanks Defcon a lot for keeping the ship at sea :)*

Another members adds:

> *Wow massive +1 on the repayment from the cold storage. This is why I love SR! Not sure on the no-escrow option though... will be interesting to see how that plays out. I probabaly won't ever use it unless I have built a high (and I mean high) level of trust with the vender.*

However, confidence in all members of the cryptocommunity was not realized by the actions and discourse of adminstrators:

> *I appreciate the work and all but this smells of "let us restore faith, slap some lube on it, and fuck em again.." You guys are asking for a whole lot of trust, and Im surprised the harsher criticisms havent came yet. I just see a lot of dick riding*

> *by a lot of people that are just praying their plug to either get money, or get*
> *fucked up doesnt disappear. STOP dick riding people, ffs, have some fucking*
> *integrity...*

Another member questions the integrity of the discourse and rhetoric imparted to restore

faith by stating:

> *Oh the criticism has been and long gone. Any posts asking that members read the*
> *defcon BS and comprehend it have been long since removed.*
> *Trust is something earnt. Not taken!*
>
> *here you have been told that your BTC has been misappropriated and you just*
> *move through like a flock of SHEEP and kiss ass in respect.*
>
> *You have been taken by people who have done nothing to earn trust?*
> *How can you respect people who show you none back?*
> *Words are cheap as chips, lets see them backed by action, then thank them when*
> *they have earned their thanks.*

These quotes illustrate how members perceive the system after a major hacking event.

Additional members cite their trust in the system:

> *im only a junior here but been around quite a while and its the only market i have*
> *trusted so im staying on board!*
>
> *thanks defcon for keeping us posted. as a long time sr user we only can hope for*
> *the best and see what the future holds.*

In general, trust is diachronous and reified over time (Frederiksen, 2014). Acts of

goodwill, such as repaying stolen Bitcoin, and discourse act simultaneously to establish

trust in the system. However, relational trust between members is still unclear and needs

further analysis.

8.0 Chapter Eight: Discussion

SR is an example of a non-hegemonic space of heterotopia within cyberspace, in

existence because of programmatic, semiotic, and cultural code that operated for the

purpose of rebellion. Contingent with anarchocapitalism, libertarianism, and counter-

economics, SR exists to fulfill the Mertonian definition of rebellion. However, in the

spirit of Becker, labeling SR as anything other than rebellion is subsequently oppressive.

Rebellion remains the self-identified *telos* of SR, therefore negating the oppressiveness of

this label of rebellion.

Citing SR as criminal innovation ignores the self-expressed nature of SR as

rebellious. Rhetorically, SR community juxtaposed its collective *hexis* against that of the

oppressive State – specifically resisting the politicized criminal justice agenda of

American Senator Tom Carper for Delaware, who acutely denounced the existence of

SR. The external pressures of political and criminal indictment facilitated more complex

and less nascent examples organization one may describe as organic.

SR operates within a state of organic solidarity (see Durkheim, 1938), where

programmatic coders, vendors, administrators, and other actors are united by not the

pursuit of wealth, but to achieve counter-cultural standards of success through rebellion.

This is an example of organic solidarity and higher organization where SR relies on

specialization demanded by the code of SR. The cultural code acts as an informal

mechanism of social control where the members adhere to the overall *telos* rather than for

individual pursuit. The members are collectively mobilized by a philosophical impetus

not unique to their supposed cryptocommunity, but are subsequently motivated by ideas

entrenched in Western political thought.

It was Rousseau and Hobbes that contemplated the bounds and authorities of State

regulation, formal social control, and societal ordering, much in the same way the

overarching crypto enlightenment did in the early 1990s, which gave rise to SR.

Freedom, or rather the right to liberty, loosely underpins all cryptomovements especially

SR that is the *sine qua non* of libertarian heterotopia. SR is therefore a cryptomovement, a type of moving heterotopia, entirely comprised of and by CMC. Foucault (1984) contends that heterotopia is space of otherness, where deviation from hegemon of State or other institutions is a fundamental condition to such spaces.

The essence of community (or heterotopia for that matter), whether virtual or corporeal, requires the presence of human relationships (or at least social interaction), but more importantly, the maintenance of symbolic exchange, ritual, and myth (Hershberger, Murray, & Rioux 2007). This diverges from the early proposition introduced by Gusfield (1975) that communities are to exist in physical locality on a shared landscape. The cryptocommunity of SR is therefore a dichotomous manifold comprised of the dualist conscriptions of market and social space, manifested in text and code. Foucault (1984) also contends that *parrhesia* is different from rhetoric/discourse as a sophistical form of speech – the essence of free speech – specifically in the context of where an interlocutor of lesser authority is delivering criticism. DPR emphatically embodied *parrhesia* in the relationship of SR vs. State. Symbolic textual exchange made possible by cryptographic anonymity has facilitated *parrhesia* without formal recourse until 2013. The code is both cryptographic (programmatic) and cultural in nature, which is trapped within the procession of capitalistic sign-play. Ultimately, the code of SR ensnared in the paradox of anarchocapitalism still subsequently (re)produces countercultural modalities of resistance that is expressed as *parrhesia* – a discursive expression of resistance against the carceral code and what Baudrillard (1976) refers to as the code.

Baudrillard (1976) articulates that symbolic exchange is constituted and exchanged countercultural modalities, whether poetic or pictorial, as productions of

resistance against the capitalist code. Bitcoin as a (re)production currency is reified in the cryptocommunity to be of significant ideological import to the "global revolt" of SR. The implosion of meaning and sign value of Bitcoin renders the assemblage of resistance captured in the virtual physiognomy of the SR cryptocommunity's habitus as heterotopic and rebellious. In a post-1968 world, online networks as Deleuze (1992) suggests bound the societies of control and information flows and in turn reconfigure the concept of carceral code as introduced by Foucault (1995). The decentralization of the institution of the prison via networks is indicative of the nexus of discipline and punishment and therefore a driving reason why cryptography is so important. The sign-play of encryption where jumbled code and number constitute two-dimensional spaces of heterotopia demonstrated successful resistance against law-enforcement online and in the corporeal world, therefore enhancing collective trust in the system.

Collective trust in the system of SR was facilitated by operational success and security. Anonymous transactions defined by the dyadic and continual nature of relational trust increased cohesion in the organic community. However, the qualities of relational trust exhibited through textual discourse remains prolix and difficult to examine with objective analytical rigour mainly because of fragmentation and other methodological limitations such as unobtrusive observation. The critical-constructive aim of inquiry relies on value-laden judgment that impinges on positivist academic neutral research. Hence, I ethnographically explored and co-constructed an inductively cogent conceptualization of the SR cryptocommunity while synonymously remaining attached to the theoretical *bricolage* of critical and recreated notions of Durkheimian positivism through ethnography.

8.1.1 Limitations and Implications

As the ethnographer, I employed strictly unobtrusive methods of observation; making field notes, cryptic jottings, and framing the content throughout the entire process, which began in June of 2013 and ended in January, 2015. The main limitation of my study was the unobtrusive method I employed in order to collect the data. Relying heavily on technique of unobtrusive observation in ethnography calls into question internal validity. Some scholars postulate that relying heavily on unobtrusive observation in online research mimics the traits of a content analysis (Steinmetz, 2012). Triangulation, which is the practice of employing multiple research methods to validate the findings, is a technique that could improve the ethnography. However, in defense of my research practices, the non-obtrusive ethnography can be justified because I conducted data collection as the sole researcher, without the aid of any content collecting and analysis software.

Other methodological limitations include weakness in the application of ethnographic techniques suggested by the existing literature. I justify the *bricologe* of existing ethnographic practices and techniques with my own interpretative approach by arguing the paradigmatic outlook to be a critical one, but founded in antipositivist research language and habits. However, I weave constructivist and symbolic interactionist research values into my study in order to capture the *telos* of cryptcommunity of SR. This approach could be equated to a directive content analysis (Berg & Lune, 2012) as the outcome of capturing the *telos* is possible through both ethnography and directive content analysis.

Furthermore, theoretical limitations of the current study include an integration of each theory in the framework. Based on paradigmatic outlook of each theory, commensurability could be argued to be weak. For example, integrating the postmodernism of Baudrillard with contemporary criminological theory of Merton and Becker may raise questions regarding how rigorously each theory's tenets can be applied to the current inquiry when they are integrated. I argue that this study is an antipositivist research project that incorporates a critical approach, multiple theories, and chosen methodology in order to fulfill the essence of the *bricolage*.

8.1.2 Epistemological Contributions

This study contributes to cybercrime literature by drawing on the critical perspectives, fulfilling the role of academic partisan, and bringing attention to the overarching issue of drug prohibition in connection to the SR cryptocommunity. No previous research has provided qualitative findings from the critical-constructivist standpoint of inquiry into the social dynamics of the SR cryptcommunity. Consequentially, giving voice to the members of SR in conjunction with a scholarly analysis is the main contribution of this study

Future research could include a philosophical examination of ontic becoming into a character of rebellion. Habitus can be further explored, as items of analysis are collectively defined in the categorization of pictorial and textual artifact. In affinity to physical artifact, the text constructs an overall portrayal of the cryptocommunity as a radically divergent group solidified around the ontological edifice or resistance. I avoid reductionism in this study in this regard to abide by the principles of *bricolage*, but

paradoxically atone to reductionism by categorizing social fact by analyzing SR within the *mythos* of its own rhetoric/discourse. The reason for this is to give voice to the cryptocommunity will synonymous respecting the counterculture it represents.

9.0 Chapter Nine: Conclusion

In turn, SR is much more than just a virtual "offender convergence setting" (Soudijn & Zegers, 2012) for the international criminal subculture. SR is an assemblage of philosophical motives, democratic values, and grassroots entrepreneurialism that has invigorated the market with a seemingly unstoppable momentum. However, SR is much more than a profit oriented market. The Silk Road is a community that will not accept defeat in the War on Drugs and submit to the stigma of criminality instilled by legal definition. SR will stop at no social control strategy implemented by law enforcement, because SR is more than a hub for cybercrime. Encryption provides the anonymity required for a marginalized, subaltern, and illegalized countercultural community to survive. Now, as the Silk Road expands as Silk Road: Reloaded, the community is back on the long and treacherous road of rebuilding its defenses, strengthening its internal security, and preserving its position on the Dark Web. With the arrest of Ross Ulbricht, the accused DPR, SR has remerged as SRR, but without the momentum of SR 1.0 and certainly without the code of resistance/rebellion that defined the habitus of the cryptocommunity.

Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

ACRONYMS:

BTC: Acronym or market short-title for Bitcoin.

CMC: Acronym for computer-mediated-communications.

DPR: Acronym for Dread Pirate Roberts, captain (founding administrator) of both Silk

Road community forums and marketplace.

OIM: Acronym for online illicit marketplace (e.g., SRR)

P2P: Acronym for "peer-to-peer", a computer programming term to define a shared

platform intended for computer-mediated-communications.

SR: This is an acronym for the term Silk Road, the ethnographic site of research and an

agora-style online illicit marketplace.

SR2: Acronym for Silk Road 2.0, the second evolution of Silk Road after the first legally

forced closure.

SR3: Acronym for the "scam market" that emerged after the second legally enforced

closure of SR2.

SRR: Silk Road: Reloaded, the latest version of Silk Road.

RL: Acronym for "real-life"

TERMS:

Cryptocurrency: A term used to define a set of currencies regulated by cryptographic

notational systems.

Cryptocommunity: An encrypted discussion forum or collective asynchronous setting for

computer-mediated-communications.

Cryptomovement: An encrypted discussion forum or collective asynchronous setting for

      computer-mediated-communications that is underpinned by the theme of

      achieving rebellious objectives.

Cryptomarket: An encrypted marketplace or collective asynchronous setting for

      computer-mediated-communications that is purposed for exchange/trade.

Mining: A term for the act of creating Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies.

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