Silk Road 2.0

A Study of Cryptomarkets in a Deleuze-Guattarian Perspective

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IV
Abstract

Title: Silk Road 2.0 – A Study of Cryptomarkets in a Deleuze-Guattarian Perspective

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Over the last few years, Internet has been established as a place for drug markets to expand into a new reality and develop according to new business opportunities. Silk Road is one of many cryptomarkets that have succeeded online, offering a wide selection of drugs on global level. Online drug markets are increasingly catching the attention of researchers, but both Internet research methods and topics of online illegality are still quite new and unexplored. This thesis deals with the structural aspect of Silk Road and how it is organized, with theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a theoretical perspective to catch the complexity. Data has been collected through observations of Silk Road 2.0, the second edition of the Silk Road market concept. More than a thousand screen shots have been captured and hundreds of pages with forum conversations printed to give a complete understanding of the market structure.

The online environment has made huge changes in the structure of drug markets, where new opportunities have been offered and restrictions created. As a facilitator of communication without hardly any spatial or timely limits, the Internet has become a place to establish connections around the world. Cryptomarkets are deriving advantages from this new context and have established themselves as a meeting point for entrepreneurs, consumers, and other people wanting drug related information. Markets such as Silk Road are offering an anonymous marketplace and forum where people can stay without being connected to their physical self. This might lead to a more socially equal market, but one cannot ignore existence of online restrictions and risks. The lack of face-to-face contact challenges Silk Road when it comes to trust and security – how can anything be secure when the participants are unidentifiable?

Silk Road solves this insecurity by introducing a feedback system and encouraging social interaction to increase the trust level. Leaving feedback has left the consumers with a major power to affect the market; bad comments and rumors are hurtful for the vendors, who in return offer the buyers great customer service to avoid negative feedback. Silk Road’s
forum is also important because of how the vivid interaction leads to a closer community
bond that heightens the level of trust. The closeness among the participants is also increased
by similar motivations and goals, which steers the market in a specific direction following the
participants’ lead. But it is still the administrator that enforces rules and delegates roles. Silk
Road might seem as a free market, but after a closer look one discovers restrictions and
formal boundaries. The restrictions, though, are not involuntarily enforced, but rather desired
by the participants in order to keep the market more stable. Morally decisions such as banning
the sale of weapons are taken collectively and forum hierarchies are revealing the level of
experience – all to induce trust into the market.

Additionally, formal rules are an attempt of creating order, which does increase the
trust, but it also seems to leave the participants with a false security. Role divisions are not as
formal as they might seem, especially since all the participants can interact in multiple
activities crisscrossing their appointed tasks. This is where Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome
theory becomes particularly useful. According to their theory, social structures are based on a
multitude of connecting nodes and other unnatural attempts to create order. Silk Road’s rules
and role divisions are accepted as organizing elements in the market, but it is also important
to look beyond them to see the chaos that really exists. Nothing is as simple as ordering
structures such as binary opposites and hierarchical structures; they need to be placed in a
larger rhizomatic structure to see the many connections. Also, this opens up for acceptance of
elements from the general society as important influences on Silk Road’s structure.
Cryptomarkets would not exist without the development of networked technologies and
constraints set by law enforcement agencies. Media also has an impact on creating the
cryptomarket reality adding to the participants’ experience and influence on the market
structure. Silk Road is also tightly connected to the physical world through drug supplies and
postal services.

The structure of Silk Road is a complex rhizome, where elements of hierarchical
settings and role divisions are important for its totality. But so is also the interplay between
different connections both inside and outside the online market. Silk Road is a place for
entrepreneurs to enter a structured environment and act as a collective group, while still
keeping their individuality. Therefore, the complex structure of Silk Road resembles a
controlled entrepreneurial market, where chaos and multiplicity lingers under the seemingly
formal structure.
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Writing this master’s thesis has been a long but joyful process. The topic has kept me interested and engaged and it has only left me wanting to explore this unfamiliar world even more. But I would not have made it without the help from many of you.

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1 Introduction

«The newspaper Adressa can today reveal that many Norwegian drug networks are selling drugs in bucket loads to Norwegian customers on a hidden part of the Internet. The networks distribute for millions of Norwegian kroners on the «dark net», where advanced technology, encryption services, and the Postal service make it possible for thousands of Norwegian transactions of cocaine, amphetamine, ecstasy, LSD, hashish, and marihuana to take place each year. The profit is paid in an anonymous, digital currency, and the cash flow cannot be tracked through the traditional banking system. The business has built up over many years; the volume increases, while the men behind it do not get threatened by the police or criminal justice system.»

Silk Road 2.0 was the largest online drug market on the deep web in 2013-2014 and lived up to the expectations as a second version of the Silk Road concept. In February 2011 the original Silk Road opened and grew at an amazing speed selling for approximately 15 million USD in 2012 to an estimated 89 million USD in October 2013 (Aldridge and Décary-Hétu, 2014:1). After a year of massive growth, Silk Road 1.0 was ended by the FBI due to an identity leak of the website administrator (Guardian, 2013; FBI, 2014a). It only took a couple of weeks until Silk Road rose again, now as Silk Road 2.0 (Guardian, 2013). The new version remained similar to the old one and there was hardly any difference. The number of participants grew even faster than before and the increase was massively helped by a growing media attention. FBI’s interruption had made online drug markets into a widely known phenomenon, catching not only law enforcement and media’s interest, but also the general public.

The Internet has created a platform of new possibilities for criminal actions and there have been massive changes in illegal activities. Challenges are not only created for law enforcement institutions trying to combat crime, but also for researchers aiming to understand the world of illegality. Choosing online drug markets as a topic for my thesis was therefore a natural decision when it was brought to me as an idea from a Norwegian police officer. Not knowing anything about this particular field, I started looking into this new world of Internet connected illegal activities. The available information on online drug markets was limited - something that only increased my interest for it.

My aim with this thesis is to contribute to this new field of research. Instead of focusing on the individuals in Silk Road, as most previous research, this thesis will emphasize how the structural aspects of Silk Road are formed through its social life and influencing elements from the general society. It also opens up a new perspective on drug markets by using the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a theoretical framework.

Their concept of the rhizome structure, characterized by multiplicity, change, and connecting paths, is valuable when comprehending an Internet phenomenon. But, most importantly, their invitation to combine order and chaos catch the dynamics of Silk Road in a special way. With this Deleuze-Guattarian perspective, this thesis will provide a complex comprehension of an online drug market’s organization and how different elements are influencing its’ structure.

1.1 Silk Road

Silk Road can be explored through Tor\(^2\); a software enabling anonymous communication through an encrypted area of networking nodes. It is separate from the regular Internet used by most people, but easily accessed through downloading Tor and finding the website address. The first visual is the market place where all the transactions are happening. The amount of available products is huge and one can easily get lost in the jungle of vendor profiles and product sites. Other areas for interaction and information are the discussion forum and messaging system where the social life is flourishing. This will all be explained in the following section, in addition to a description of the different social actors and roles present on Silk Road.

The Market Place

The market place appears immediately when entering Silk Road and is where the trading largely takes place. A range of products is offered, but Drugs is definitely the largest category. Categories like Books, Medical and Alcohol also include drugs or drug related information, like recipes and instructions. The remaining groupings mostly include stolen or forged goods like Electronics, Art, Jewelry, and Money, but also Erotica and different services. The list of products is long but not without limits. This is explained through a list of prohibited items associated with “violence and causing harm”, such as firearms and ammunition, explosives, knives, counterfeit currency, child pornography, stolen bank/credit card details, scans of passports or other stolen identity papers and human organs\(^3\).

\(^2\) The Onion Router (Tor) is an anonymity network made to protect the privacy of Internet users from surveillance (Tor, 2013). The network has a layered structure with encryption to secure anonymity by making the original computer’s IP-address close to impossible to find (Tor, 2013). It was first made for the American Navy to protect governmental communication, but is today widely used by civilians (McCoy et al., 2008).

\(^3\) Retrieved from the discussion forum 8/9/2014.
The available products are presented with pictures and short information about quantity, prices, shipping, and the vendor, as seen in this screen shot ⁴:

![Screen shot of Silk Road's market front page](image)

Figure 1: Screen shot of Silk Road’s market front page

In total, over 90% of the listed products are either types of drugs or goods connected to drug use or preparation. Drugs are offered through more than 14,000 different listings divided into ten general categories with 112 subcategories ⁵. Prescription has the largest amount of products available covering 25% of the drug listings and concerns products like Viagra and different relaxants. The groups of Cannabis, Ecstasy and Stimulants each cover about 13% and Psychedelics approximately 12%. Cocaine, speed and methamphetamine are included as stimulants, while psychedelics refer to synthetic substances like LSD and the newer NBOMe and the 2C-Family. Steroids are also included as drugs, representing the sixth biggest group. The remaining four categories collectively cover only 7% of the market, being Other, Opioids, Dissociative, and Precursors. Tobacco is the largest subcategory under other. (See Appendix A for a complete list of products and drug subcategories.)

For further information about the product, the buyers have the option to click into the product sites or the vendor’s profile. The profiles and product sites are where the vendors communicate directly with their customers. This is a one-way communication where the

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⁴ Retrieved from the market place 29/10/2014.
⁵ The numbers derive from the amount of available products listed under different categories. It also includes earlier advertisements for products that are no longer available or deleted. In other words, the numbers presented here are representing the totality of ever advertised products on Silk Road 2.0.
vendor presents himself/herself through giving information. Every vendor has only one profile, while the product sites are unlimited. Both profiles and product sites are updated quite often typically, with recent information on shipments or batches in particular. Their lengths vary, but what is always included is information about when the vendor was last seen and where he ships from/to, in addition to a vendor’s feedback and average rating. Feedback is required when purchasing an object, and it is presented through stars from 1-5 plus a written commentary. (See Appendix B for a complete vendor profile and Appendix C for a complete product site)

**Making a Purchase**

First step is to decide which vendor, what type of product and what amount, something that might be the hardest part of purchasing considering the vast opportunities and available information. To place an order with a vendor, one must often encrypt personal information or decrypt the vendor’s information, which is where more advanced computer skills might be useful. There are also ways around the encryption, but it does apply an extra level of security. Another limitation might be to get a hold of enough of the virtual currency Bitcoins. When the order is placed it is up to the vendor to ship it, taking all from 24 hours to multiple weeks depending on product, amount and origin country. The last stage is when the buyer receives the package and finalizes the transaction on Silk Road by releasing the payment to the vendor. The finalization stage also includes giving the vendor a score from 1-5 and short feedback. If something goes wrong during shipping, such as the package not arriving or the product not being accurate, many of the vendors offer a reshipment or refund.

**The Social World**

The social life on Silk Road is very important for the running of the market and takes place on different platforms. Interaction happens on the market place through vendor profiles and product sites, on the discussion forum, and through the messaging system. The messaging system offers means of communicating directly with other participants without the information being shared public and it is the perfect place to clarify details in private. Most of the messages seem to be related to purchases, such as personal deals of larger quantities or

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6 Bitcoin is a virtual global currency that was created as an alternative method of exchange for online payments (Yelowitz and Wilson, 2015). It adds for another layer of anonymity because of avoidance of a third party, such as banks, and the cost of identifying a user’s electronic signature is very high (Yelowitz and Wilson, 2015).
further resale. Many vendors also prefer receiving complaints this way, so they can avoid negative feedback publicly and give the buyers personalized customer support. But the majority of information and knowledge is shared in public for everyone to see.

The discussion forum is where the most information is shared and two-way interaction takes place. In the beginning of February 2014, only three months after the re-opening of Silk Road 2.0, there were already 371,416 posts in the forum with 25,851 members. In September 2014 these numbers had increased to 59,969 active members, and there had been 783,827 messages posted in 41,195 topics. The forum is where the participants share knowledge, personal experiences, and asks questions about everything from A to Z. The only restriction is discussing committing physical harm to someone or advertising for other dark markets. The conversations are organized into chronological threads of topics, then subject and posts, only interrupted by important administrative messages on top. These are attempts at hierarchical structures inserted by Silk Road administrators to make order out of chaos resulting from the large scale activity level. Participants are also assigned into member groups, starting as a newbie with restricted posting rights. Advancements happens trough posting a certain amount of comments in the forum, or by claiming other titles as Administrator, Moderator or Vendor. (See Appendix D for screen shots of the front page of the forum)

Additionally to the member groups in the forum, there are also different role divisions in the market place. Participants are assigned to different roles when entering the website, having the choice between constructing a vendor account and entering as a buyer. To register as a vendor requires a couple of demands, such as paying a refundable bond and getting to know the rules by reading the “Vendor knowledgebase”. This is a way for Silk Road to ensure the quality and seriousness of the vendors. Other cryptomarkets might have additional obstacles for vendor registration, such as only by invitation or by limiting the number of vendors (Martin, 2014). Earlier, Silk Road also ran a stricter vendor regime by requiring an approval. Today the only restriction seems to be for the vendors to join the round table in the discussion forum, which is where useful information is shared and opinions are valued. To become a buyer is, on the other hand, much simpler. Entering as a buyer is free and contains the largest group of participants. But it is also the role with the least specific assignments, as it is not even required to purchase anything. Some researchers (e.g. Martin, 2014) include all the buyers as consumers, which might wrongly indicate a self-usage of drugs among all the

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7 Retrieved from the discussion forum 5/2/2014.  
8 Retrieved from the discussion forum 8/9/2014.
participants of this group. The registered buyers can also be researchers, doctors, policemen, discussion-only participants, or others present on Silk Road without participating in exchanging goods on the market.

A couple of titled roles that have quite specific assignments are the administrator and moderators, which are the ones running and maintaining Silk Road. Both the administrator role and moderator role is made public through titles under their usernames and self-presentation. An administrator is the highest assigned participant controlling and running all facets of Silk Road, including setting permissions, banning users, creating user groups, appointing moderators, etc. The administrator also handles the money running through Silk Road when the escrow system\(^9\) is used during a purchase and claims a percentage of every sale. Dread Pirate Roberts was the administrator starting the first Silk Road page, famously getting arrested by FBI in 2013 (FBI, 2014a). On the closure of Silk Road 2.0, FBI claimed to catch the only administrator on the market, named Defcon (FBI, 2014b). The moderators, on the other hand, are participants helping the administrators through maintaining the discussion forum on a day-to-day basis, earning their title through loyalty and showing interest. Their authority is to edit or delete posts and lock, unlock, move, delete or split topics in the forum. There seem to be quite few moderators, and they are all assigned to different parts of the forum to keep order.

### 1.2 Previous Research

The previous research on online drug markets is quite limited, and the little research there is focuses on Silk Road or general connections between drugs and Internet. Through research, Silk Road is presented as a multi-staged drug market with a potential to transform the global drug industry (Martin, 2013). It is not a store in itself but an infrastructure where buyers and sellers can make transactions online with the website as a third party (Christin, 2013). Some researchers compare it to licit online markets such as eBay, emphasizing the new possibility of direct connection between manufactures and consumers (Martin, 2013; Christin, 2013; Barratt, 2012). Newer research avoids this comparison, claiming that Silk Road is rather an inter stage of drug chains due to the large quantities offered and prices typical of bigger sourcing stocks (Aldridge and Décary-Hétu, 2014). The fast development of online

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\(^9\) Silk Road offers an escrow system where the market operator withholds the transaction money until the buyer receives the products, in order to resolve disputes between the vendors and buyers (Christin, 2013). The money is released when the buyer finalizes the purchase by accepting the reception.
drug markets has made a few researchers warn against the challenge this poses to existing drug laws and policies (Barratt, 2012; Martin, 2014; Christin, 2013). The police are also struggling to combat these new threats, and some even perceive technology developments, such as hacker attacks, as larger threats to Silk Road than law enforcement agencies (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a). Positive effects of online markets are also commonly discussed, such as the absence of physical violence (Martin, 2013), sharing of information leading to harm reduction (Barratt, Lenton and Allen, 2013), and the general minimizing of harms and of potential risks (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a). These positive effects are often listed as reasons why people choose to enter Silk Road, combined with broader commercial trends, such as range quality, convenience, and rating systems.

Other given reasons are Silk Road’s ability to be user-friendly, especially considering their satisfaction rating and commentary, but also considering the relative safety of doing business online (Barratt, Ferris and Winstock, 2013; Van Hout and Bingham, 2013c). Vendors, on the other hand, are often attempted by the appeals of low risk and high traffic, and meet new challenges with the demanding customers claiming top-notch services to make the business succeed (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a). Online markets are run by a high competition, and sharing knowledge with the customers is important to succeed. This need for member support for the vendors and the importance of harm reduction throughout the forum are two reasons why Silk Road is very different than conventional drug markets (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013b; Van Hout and Bingham, 2013c). This separation from traditional markets is also reflected throughout the participants on Silk Road. Monica Barratt, Jason Ferris and Adam Winstock (2013) has concluded that the average clientele on Silk Road is primarily well-off white males, while Marie Claire Van Hout and Tim Bingham (2013c) add professional employment or tertiary education as other common traits. Even though the type of drugs and number of online buyers varies across countries (Barratt, Ferris and Winstock, 2013), many of them show a displacement away from conventional drug markets and often report solitary drug use for psychonautic and introspective purposes (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013c; Bosnes, 2015). Most of the research on vendors and buyers has quite small numbers of participants and cannot be generalized, but they still add interesting information to understanding Silk Road.

Some research also shows quantitative data collected through different software programs downloading information directly from the website. Nicolas Christin (2013) examined the original Silk Road and showed the overwhelming use of the market for selling
controlled substances and drugs, with 24,000 separate items being sold. An evaluation of the website estimated a monthly sale to be about USD 1.2 million, which is about USD 92,000 per month in commission for the Silk Road operators (Christin, 2013). The website showed to be steady while it lasted, with daily sales and number of vendors continuing to increase (Christin, 2013; Van Buskirk et al., 2013). The same type of research has been done on Silk Road 2.0, but it is showing quite different results with a conclusion of it not primarily being a drug market (Dolliver, 2015). Out of the small number of 1834 unique items for sale, only 19% of them were drugs (Dolliver, 2015). But the fact that 73% off all vendor accounts in the research advertised for drug items indicates that drugs are still quite important for Silk Road’s market. This research has been done on two different versions of Silk Road and show large discrepancies. In addition, my findings from the latest version seem to coincide better to the numbers from the original Silk Road (Christin, 2013) than how Diana S. Dolliver (2015) finds it to be currently.

New Psychoactive Substances

A focus of interest for connections between drugs and the Internet has been new synthetic drugs called New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) (EMCDDA, 2014). The reason why these new drugs received so much attention is because they continually challenge legal systems around the world by falling outside the list of scheduled substances. The Internet became a fast way to distribute the new, legal drugs, and also helped expand the customer list. A few researchers specify drug types, such as synthetic cannabinoids (see Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013; Barratt, Cakic and Lenton, 2013), while others focused on bettering the medical understanding of these new substances (see Deluca et al., 2012; Banerji, 2009; Schifano et al., 2006). NPS-drugs have also received the attention of large organizations such as United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). They report that the Internet is the key source for supply of new psychoactive substances in 88% of the countries in the United Nations (UNODC, 2013:xii), but that Internet also continues to become an important marketplace for selling both new and old drugs (EMCDDA, 2014). This research not only focuses on encrypted markets situated on Tor, but also regular websites selling temporary legal drugs.
Cryptomarkets as a New Category in Cybercrime Research

Another type of research that should be mentioned is cybercrime research that generally considers illegal actions on the Internet. Cybercrime is commonly described as «crime committed through the use of networks of information and communication technologies such as the Internet» (Aas, 2007:208). One should believe that the description also works well with online drug markets, but the common division into computer assisted and computer oriented/focused crimes (Jewkes and Yar, 2010) makes it fall short. James Martin (2013) discusses the cybercrime typologies, concluding it is too focused on singular acts and therefore not able to include online drug distribution. Online drug markets is multi-stage in nature, since it involves both online and offline offences, ending up fitting both categories of cybercrime (Martin, 2013). On one hand, drug distribution is a traditional crime facilitated by using a computer but, on the other hand, the distribution would not have taken place online at this extent if it were not for the encryption technologies (Martin, 2013). Martin therefore uses the term cryptomarkets as an ideal type for understanding this new emerging area of cybercrime. Cryptomarket is a term from hacker forums explaining «an online forum where goods and services are exchanged between parties who use digital encryption to conceal their identities» (Martin, 2013:6). This term fits well and is be used throughout this thesis as an additional word for Silk Road or other online drug markets on Tor.

1.3 Research Questions

The main focus in this thesis will be on Silk Road’s organization and structure as a drug market situated online. A detailed explanation of the social life and the market itself will be provided through an ethnographic approach of observing this cryptomarket, in order to further analyze the research question:

What is the structure and organization of an online market for illegal drugs like Silk Road?

This is a rather large question, and I have decided to break it down into three sub-questions. First; how is the Internet forming Silk Road as a virtual drug market and separating it from conventional drug markets? The nature and context of drug markets have great implications on market formations (Wall, 2014). In addition, being online creates both possibilities and restrictions for Silk Road, where important elements, such as trust and risk, are different from conventional drug markets. I therefore expect the Internet to have a great impact on how Silk Road is organized and structured.
The second sub-question concerns the social life on Silk Road: *how does the social life of Silk Road create a power forceful enough to affect the market structure?* Many important characteristics affecting market structures are socially tied, such as organization morality (Lippens, 2001), group cohesion (Broadhurst et al., 2014) and organizing principles (Spapens, 2010). Understanding the social life of Silk Road will give me an image of its organization, and it is fundamental in understanding the market structure.

To make a complete understanding of Silk Road, my third research question turns the attention outside of the cryptomarket: *how does the general society affect the market structure on Silk Road?* This leads towards constraints and possibilities created by institutions outside the organization itself (Wall, 2014; Lippens, 2001). Drug markets are heavily connected to institutions such as law enforcement and media, which should affect Silk Road’s structure somehow. All of these research questions will be analyzed with a Deleuze-Guattarian perspective throughout the thesis as a new theoretical approach to online drug markets.

**1.4 Thesis Composition**

Chapter 2 offers an explanation of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories and concepts used throughout this thesis to understand Silk Road. Moving on to Chapter 3 will give you an insight to the collection of data and ethical considerations concerning Internet research. The analysis of the data starts in Chapter 4 by giving a description of the Internet as context for drug markets and how change has occurred naturally in this new environment. Chapter 5 concerns the social life on Silk Road, with an emphasis on how internal mechanisms are creating great forces inside the market that end up affecting its structure. In Chapter 6, the attention will be on elements from the general society affecting Silk Road’s structure through creating opportunities and constraints. Finally, in Chapter 7, I will conclude by summarizing the different aspects of the analysis and how Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts have been used to understand the data throughout the thesis. I will also, shortly, discuss how both cryptomarkets and the theories of Deleuze and Guattari should lead to further research.
2 A Deleuze-Guattarian Approach

The main theory used throughout the thesis will be from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, two French philosophers forming theories on how society functions. Most of their theories stem from around the 1970’s and 80’s, but it is not until the last few years that they have started to be more widely used by researchers of varying fields. In criminological teaching books, Deleuze and Guattari are included as part of postmodern criminology, though they never recognized themselves as such. Postmodern criminology developed in the 1990ies with an aim to not just deconstruct depressed forms, but also to reconstruct new organizations (Milovanovic, 1996:567). Alternative conceptual tools are developed to do analysis based on untraditional, non-linear effects. This is exactly what Deleuze and Guattari do in their rhizome-theory in their famous book A Thousand Plateaus (1987).

The rhizome theory is a contrasting social organization to the well-used hierarchical structures that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) mean is overtaking the society. Instead of creating categories and pyramid arrangements in societies, Deleuze and Guattari suggest we need to understand movements in space in a new way. In a postmodern way, they encourage people to accept chaos in societies and rather understand it by creating non-linear developments (Milovanovic, 1996:577-578). The rhizome theory will be used throughout this thesis to offer a different perspective on virtual drug markets and how they are organized. I will also include additional research inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s theories, which helps illustrate how their theoretical concepts are used in practice. The rhizome theory and other concepts will be thoroughly explained in this chapter.

2.1 The Rhizome Theory

In Western societies we find that hierarchical structures and binary opposites are fundamental in our way of understanding the society. We might even sometimes look for hierarchies or opposites where there are none. A hierarchy is when a society presents a variety of differentiated roles where not everyone has equal access (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Deleuze and Guattari challenge these ways of thinking by introducing the rhizome theory. «Rhizome» is a botanical concept that points out the amount of roots growing horizontally, for example grass. These roots are unpredictable and grow in all directions and over large areas (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This biological concept is used to emphasize their theory of
social space. The rhizome-theory is a way of understanding social space through accepting chaos and connections crisscrossing between different parts. The goal is not to organize chaos by placing it into a system, but rather to accept the multitude of differences. Even though they controvert hierarchical structures, they do not deny their existence. Instead, they include both hierarchies and binary opposites as so called virtual structures living inside the more natural structure of rhizomes. These de-centralizing movements of a rhizome expand the view of social structures and help combine a person-centered analysis with a more cultural-oriented approach (Loots, Coppens and Sermijn, 2013). This is what makes Deleuze and Guattari’s theories so interesting for understanding Silk Road: a complex social room where agents and structure both affect and get affected by each other.

**Six Describing Principles**

To explain the rhizome-structure, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) divides it into six principles. These are connections, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. The first two principles, connections and heterogeneity, emphasize how any connection point of a rhizomatic structure must be connected to something else (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). A rhizome can, and should be, seen in the light of many different approaches, such as biological, political and economic. By having such an approach to Silk Road, many different connections should be made in order to understand its structure and to see how it is formed by influencing effects.

The third principle of multiplicity explains how a rhizomatic structure cannot be reduced to one specific thing or into a multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:7). In other words, a multiplicity is viewed as a social formation, where divisions of individuals and groups are rejected in order to understand differences without categorizing or finding a totality (Brighenti, 2010). A rhizome consists of many different multiples that each need to be seen as substantives affecting the multiplicity or the separate totality when it changes form (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:7). Silk Road’s structure should therefore be split into parts, such as the discussion forum and drug market, to create an understanding of the totality of multiples of which it consists.

The fourth point is called the principle of asignifying rupture and concerns how rhizomatic structures will continue its’ existence if destroyed or stopped. The structure is so flexible that it wakes up again in a different place based on the old one (Deleuze and Guattari,
A rhizome structure is therefore close to impossible to destroy, something that can easily relates to drug markets. The flexible reality on the Internet also adds to the importance of this principle to Silk Road.

The two last principles are called cartography and decalcomania. Cartography points to the structure of a rhizome itself, comparing it with an open city map with multiple entrances, where roads connect all the different parts together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:11). The point of comparing the rhizome-structure with a map is to show that there are many different paths going in all directions with various connecting points. Even if one can describe the points, they should always be led back into a map (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The map in my thesis will be Silk Road, where lines or paths spread out in different directions but are always led back to the main connection point. The last principle, decalcomania, is a way of transferring a pattern from one material to another. Deleuze and Guattari use it to show how structures can try to immitate others, but that the final organization will always be a bit different than the original (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Every structure adds a personal effect depending on elements such as situation and content. So even though the construction of Silk Road might be influenced by conventional drug markets, it will never be an exact copy. The same goes for descriptive images of Silk Road given by the media or law enforcement.

**Arborescent Structures**

As an opposite of the rhizomatic structure of unpredictable roots is a hierarchical structure presented as an arborescent thought (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:5-12). The arborescent structure is ideologically linked to tree-structures, as with a strong and stable trunk that grow in a certain direction. Transferred to the society, it might be compared to hierarchies and binary opposites, something Deleuze and Guattari criticize as taken for granted in today’s society. Hierarchical boundaries or black and white opposites are not natural constructions in the social world and are never as clear as they might seem (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). These ways of creating order are virtual constructions created through people’s ideas and desires, according to Deleuze and Guattair, and can be seen as a way of self-organizing chaos (Murray, 2006). Virtuality in this sense will never become a reality, but they might get actualized through people’s resistance and challenging of existing social organizations (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Hierarchical structures are, in other words, not
natural parts of the reality but rather restrictions constructed by human ideas and desires to organize chaos.

By putting the rhizomatic thought up against the arborescent, Deleuze and Guattari challenge people to see the different ideas that are out there. In society, there are both rhizomatic and arborescent structures, but virtually constructed structures, such as hierarchies and binary opposites, need to be placed inside a rhizomatic map to be fully understood. As an example, Deleuze and Guattari would say that you can categorize social groups in hierarchies of inequality, but that it is not enough to understand them. You need to place the groups flat next to each other and, for example, look at how they are perceived in different social settings or get influenced by other factors such as biological, physiological, etc. Having this in mind when analyzing data might open up the understanding of a cryptomarket’s structure - could Silk Road be an example of a rhizomatic landscape consisting of some hierarchical constructions? A look at how Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts explain organizational structures will prove valuable to analyze this later in the analysis.

### 2.2 Combining Structure and Individuals

In the theory of rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari give an interesting approach to understanding organizations by abstaining from a division of levels into macro structures and micro individuals. Different research on organization sees the value of this theory in explaining multiple aspects of a structure. Many of the Deleuze-Guattarian concepts used in this type of research are very useful to understanding Silk Road, so I will hereby explain the theoretical ideas of multiplicity, desire and change, and organizational morality.

**Multiplicity**

In the philosophical thought of multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari explain how their idea of interplay between different structures acts out in a rhizome. A rhizome is for them an overarching structure, but it also consists of many other multiplicities. Therefore, a multiplicity can be used to describe the multitudes of a phenomenon, but also to connect it with other phenomenon on the same overarching level. Cryptomarkets are structured by an overarching rhizome, but there are also smaller organizations on the inside forming their own multiplicities. The different multiplicities are also be named *plateaus* by Deleuze and
Guattari (1987) to explain different structural levels without ranging them in any hierarchical order.

To explain the multiplicity concept even better, Deleuze and Guattari divides it into *multiplicity of order* and *multiplicity of organizations* (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). The multiplicity of order represents the exterior and differences that are spatial and numerical such as quantitative differentiation (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Saying that it represents the exteriority means that it is the structure often viewed by people on the outside, where specific characteristics and divisions from other organizations are emphasized to give a more concrete concept. Therefore, order is the more formal and static part of an organization, often represented as hierarchies aiming to make the structure more stable (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). The multiplicity of organizations, on the other hand, is about interiority, fusion, qualitative discrimination, and differences that are virtual, continuous and irreducible to numbers (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). This part of the organization is making the structure unstable by representing the heterogeneous elements from inside the structure and encouraging change. This is where more specific characteristics are showing, and might represent a contrasting image to how it is perceived by the exteriority.

By combining the multiplicities of order and organization, the concept is opening up an understanding of structures where the human aspect is also considered. A rhizomatic understanding of organization is therefore able to catch the tension between a more official organization structure and the movement that happens more internally and less visually (Lawley, 2013). Some organizational parts are forces stabilizing and maintaining its structure, but a more dynamic quality is always present and seeks to create disruptions and change (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). This emphasizes Deleuze and Guattari’s main point with the rhizome theory: one should accept the chaos reigning in the society. Chaos is natural because of the multiple differences that exist and any attempt to create order should only be looked at as constructed imaginary structures. One should rather move across different organizations, looking for connections, without arranging anything as better or worse than the other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Bringing the thought of multiplicity into my analysis will give me an interesting angle on how Silk Road’s dynamic elements and organization are more chaotic than at first glance. But at the same time, I cannot ignore that there are structuring elements throughout the market, that in many ways keep some degree of order throughout the organization. Another important aspect of a rhizomatic organization that needs to be discussed is the concept of desire and change.
**Desire and Change**

Desire is an important concept for Deleuze and Guattari in the rhizome theory. Theoretically they wanted to liberate the realization of human desire from forces that come from capitalistic social relations and other normalization-techniques used for dominance (Arrigo, Schehr and Milovanovic, 2005). This might resemble Marxist theory, but instead of viewing desire as a lack of human wholeness, Deleuze and Guattari see it as a technology or productive power (Arrigo, Schehr and Milovanovic, 2005). For them, desire is what produces reality (Oksanen, 2013). It is not intentional or subjectively driven, but rather something that inheres in people, bodies, and socio-cultural realities (Oksanen, 2013). Desire is what activates connections and makes phenomenon like Silk Road happen; without people’s interest and ability to create connections, then social structures would not become a reality. It is therefore important to understand the internal desire, as a mean of understanding an organization’s structure.

The human desire is a forceful power that forms structure and creates change. Hierarchies are often imposed on society in order to classify, order, and organize; but, because of human desires, such structures are always challenged (Lawley, 2013). Desire is what runs the multiplicity of organizations, or the inside of a structure, and works as a creative force against the controlling order (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Even though desire will force the more static formations to change, the formal organization and the engagement of life continue working together in a dual sense (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Any organization is change, and it is important to notice this process of creative evolution happening. In that way, Deleuze and Guattari dissolve the falsely made boundaries and opens up for connections to occur with other phenomenon on many levels (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). The human desire is a massive force in a structure and gains more strength when working as a foundation for the organizational morality.

**Organizational Morality**

As the concept of desire and change illustrate, the theories of Deleuze and Guattari open up a new understanding of structure that includes the individuals. Ronnie Lippens (2001) explains this even further by using Deleuze and Guattari’s theories to rethinking organizational crime and how it has changed over the last few years. From being static and formal organizations rejecting any influence from the outside, today’s organizations tend to
be de-centered and interplaying with outside elements (Lippens, 2001). Organizations that earlier made their participants more homogenous through strict rules and an organization-specific language, are now using the influence brought in by their members as potential sources to tactical networking. It is increasingly important for organizations to connect with other organized structures, valuing the sharing of knowledge and experience. This is a result of a change happening in what Lippens (2001) calls, the organizational morality.

Ronnie Lippens (2001) uses morality as a less traditionally bound conception instead of “culture”, and has an interconnected relationship with the organizational structure. Not only does morality change the organization, but the organization and its external elements outside are also forming the morality (Lippens, 2001). The inside culture of an organization, in other words, is always a product of outside elements, or as Ronnie Lippens (2001:319) says it; «the Outside is always already potentially, though undecidably, Within». Lippens (2001) calls organizations «clusters of labyrinthine networks», because of how today’s organizations are turning into highly complex networks that are interwoven with surrounding networks. This also reflects my approach to understanding Silk Road by looking at internal and external elements influencing the market.

2.3 Deleuze and Guattari in Research

The rhizome theory is not commonly used by today’s researchers, but the little there is takes place in different fields of science. Maybe this variety has something to do with Deleuze and Guattari’s encouragement to further research. Research that has proven useful for my thesis stems from fields such as criminology and cyber research, but also from educational and economic research. Before I explain them more thoroughly, an explanation of Deleuze and Guattari’s invitation to researchers to use their theories will be given.

An Invitation to Researchers

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that they wish for scientists from different disciplines to use the rhizome-theory to understand their own phenomenon. They enhance how their concept is not to be taken literally, but that it should inspire new approaches to see connections that earlier got lost in a more hierarchical way of thinking (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). They believe theories should be used as tool boxes, with the tools being philosophical concepts available for others to use in the way they want (Colombat, 1991; Malins, 2004;
Oksanen, 2013). To be inspired by the rhizome, one should move around like nomads traveling over large areas, never staying somewhere for a long period of time (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). One should not follow a premade map or a predestined path leading through known landscape, but rather let oneself be free in order to discover the real nature of phenomenon (Lorraine, 2005; Mazzei and McCoy, 2010). Different elements should be analyzed, then led further by shorter ideas and not follow a plan or fixed points. In other words, as immense perspective as possible is needed to understand how everything connects together.

This leads to why Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were quite skeptical towards the construction of terms and believe that it will lead to false categorizations and possibly hierarchies because of all the restraining inequalities. Terms are highly dependable on culture and the understanding of it varies (Oksanen, 2013). This way of forcing differences into a totality breaks with the multiplicity principle of Deleuze and Guattari. A category might be a way of organizing chaotic realities, but it will also end up leaving some parts out or including too much. No phenomenon is as uncomplicated as it might sound from the term that is used (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Take “drugs” as an example; its meaning is clearly affected by historical and cultural events, but also from biological facts and geographical placements. Every society is filled with terms such as this that classifies elements into specific categories and ends up creating unnatural boundaries. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wanted to circumvent the use of such binding terms but could not avoid it throughout their theory. Terms and categories may be unwanted due to their negative influence, but they are impossible to circumvent because they are essential in making anything comprehensible. In an attempt to avoid defining words and categories, Deleuze and Guattari avoid calling their ideas for terms but rather for concepts. In that way, the idea is less determinative since it leads to a way of thinking and is not a boundary-creating term. I do see the value of avoiding the use of any determining terms, but it would create a whole lot of challenges for my thesis. Instead, I have chosen to keep a focus on the use of terms and be aware of what the concepts capture and what escapes, especially when it comes to Silk Road’s use of terms as organizing principles. An awareness of what terms and concepts captures or miss is valuable to keep in mind throughout the analysis and it might give a different impression of the market structure than what initially appears.
Different Fields of Knowledge

Deleuze and Guattari’s theories are useful to many fields other than philosophy and are used in multiple research areas such as architecture, urban studies, geography, gender studies, and many others (Smith and Protevi, 2013). Educational research is one example where a multitude of researchers are looking into rhizome-structures. A couple of examples are how multiple factors affect the “Authorized teachers”-title in Australia and its practical use (Honan, 2007) or how a rhizomatic-inspired teaching practice might encourage new developments in learning (Mazzei and McCoy, 2010). Both these studies conclude that one should dare to move on past the safe havens of given concepts or fixed knowledge plans, to develop a free latitude in other directions that might be more natural (see also Amorim and Ryan, 2005).

The few criminological researches using the rhizome theory seems to be divided between researchers having a structural and organizational view, and the ones using an actor approach. Where both directions give an impression of wanting to move from one view and to the other. Ann-Karina Henriksen and Jody Miller (2012) utilize an actor approach when using analytical tools from Deleuze and Guattari to understand girl violence. They use the rhizome theory to look at multiple connections affecting violence, focusing on different marginalization happening in the lives of the observed girls. The girls are marginalized in multiple ways, which all affect their lives differently. The analytical tools of violence the researchers first started out with got wiped out by the empirical material in a real rhizomatic way, encouraging more openness and less categorical divisions. How the girls acted could not be connected simply to one single reason, but was a result of many different factors that contributed to the marginalization, such as being a female, foreigner, and young. This adds to the importance of paying attention to terms and concepts in order to not blindly accept their constructed meaning. A more structural view of the rhizome theory is presented by Simon Hallsworth (2013) when looking at criminal gangs. In his research, the gangs’ informal and floating structure fits poorly within the hierarchical description dominating gang research. Instead of falling for the temptation of reducing the world into simple, linear patterns and closed stories, he looks at how gangs really function. Gangs cannot be reduced to descriptive categories of formal organizations and consist of a structure so flexible that they float from one state to another depending on influencing elements. These are just a couple examples of criminologists using Deleuze and Guattari that have inspired me to use these theories in my thesis, while some other useful research has been done on the cyber world.
Rhizome and Internet

The Internet is in many ways presented as a new reality with unlimited connections and possibilities. This new model of information sharing has encouraged a few cyber theorists to use Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory to understand this new world (Robinson and Maguire, 2010). Internet elements such as interconnectedness, limitless heterogeneity and the possibility to enter and exit from any point makes it resemble a pure rhizomatic structure (Hess, 2008). All these aspects have made the Internet into an experienced arena of freedom, where laws and controls are felt as non-present (Buchanan, 2007). The feeling of freedom is further increased by the Internet’s massive size, making the totality impossible to imagine. The huge amount of available information also adds to the feeling of no limitation. Cyberspace is therefore an ideal place for organizations to operate globally and live the rhizomatic ideal as placeless creatures moving around like nomads (Lawley, 2013:40). This difference of reality can have big influence on any action or organization that happens therein. In that sense, the Internet can in many ways be seen as challenging hierarchical models and classification in the same way Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical theories do (Robinson and Maguire, 2010). So the connection between a rhizomatic structure and the Internet is not hard to find, but it is not without limitations.

The structural arguments are a perfect fit to a rhizome, but the Internet experience from a user perspective may not follow the same image (Hess, 2008). Countries are free to limit the freedom on the Internet by setting national restrictions, while search engines like Google are not as rhizomatic and randomly chosen as one might think; it is rather a tract of knowledge where some things end up higher on the list because of money or popularity (Hess, 2008). So instead of viewing the Internet as a romanticized area of freedom and randomness, one should use the rhizome theory to open up and accept a combination of both rhizomatic features and hierarchical structures (Buchanan, 2007). One can move around relatively free on the Internet, but many automatic mechanisms are hierarchical. This way of viewing Internet phenomenon will be important for this thesis, where different types of structures are discovered and accepted together. Another important aspect is how the use of the Internet has made the society increasingly nomadic, where things we earlier took for granted are now viewed as more flexible. Among others, our relationship towards our bodies, reproduction, health, knowledge and society have changed after the growth of the Internet (Marks, 2006). The rhizome theory has therefore been useful to not only understand this new information
environment, but also as a framework for understanding organizations of knowledge in general (Robinson and Maguire, 2010).

2.4 Silk Road and Deleuze and Guattari

Even though Deleuze and Guattari have their limitations when it comes to accepting formal structures, categories, and power aspects, they have helped to open up other sides of Silk Road as a structured social world. Different concepts of theirs will be mentioned in all of the chapters, where every last part will contain a detailed analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical view connected to elements from Silk Road. Having such a specific theoretical view in the thesis helps create a central connection throughout the whole work and is also valuable in many other ways. I could have included other theoretical insights to a larger extent, but because of the fruitfulness and complexity of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts I have chosen to mainly focus on their theory. All of their concepts are closely connected but still emphasize different parts of a complex structure. This view helps me achieve an insight on Silk Road’s structure where multiple elements are included and boundaries are invisible. The rhizome theory also gives an interesting perspective on a market situated on the Internet, which in itself opts for the use of a new theoretical view.
3 Ethnographic Research in a Virtual Environment

«Ethnography seeks to understand the lived experiences, social processes, cultural practices and structural parameters of a group or community» (Ritter, 2006:454)

I have chosen to gather data through a qualitative approach, more specifically ethnographic research. This type of approach is quite common to understand drug markets and enables a rich picture of the market, market place, and social and cultural norms (Ritter, 2006). My goal is to understand how cryptomarkets are organized and structured, which fits well with this in-depth research method. Ethnographic research implies that the researcher/ethnographer immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to conversations and being a part of the community (Bryman, 2012). I will be attending Silk Road, observing the participants’ behavior through self-presentation and reading their conversations. All this with the aim to develop an understanding of the culture and people's behavior in that particular context (Bryman, 2012).

The Internet context of my research focus places it under a particular ethnographic direction called netnography. This emphasizes the value of qualitative techniques to understand the moment of here and now in a rapidly-changing online terrain (Kozinets, 2010). Ethnographic research helps to accept different contexts, changes, nuances and multiplicities of drug markets (Ritter, 2006), something that is very valuable in online research.

3.1 Choosing a Field and Gathering Data

«All ethnographers have to decide where to go and what to do when they get there.» (Hine, 2008:261)

As in most ethnographic research, the gathering of data happened through an ongoing shift between collecting information and developing a research question that could specify my thesis. It began with an interest for describing cryptomarkets down to the parts of the social life and characteristics of different actors. I started with three cryptomarkets, but considering the instability and massive amount of information, I limited myself to focus only on Silk Road 2.0. After a few observations with a general description in mind, my interest turned towards the organization and structural features of the cryptomarket. The question «How does this affect Silk Road’s structure?» combined with a choice of theory helped specify my searches.
Entering Silk Road

To choose a specific field for my thesis, I started reading about online drugs and discovered that Silk Road was the site often mentioned in newspapers, online communities and scientific research of the field. Additionally, it also seemed to be the most stable market and the largest in amount of product and participants. It is often important for an ethnographer to select a site for research, which usually takes place in a bounded physical site (Leander and McKim, 2003). Finding specific physical sites online is limited and space should instead be seen as fields of relations (Leander and McKim, 2003). In my case, it came down to choosing only one website as the specific field.

Silk Road is often mentioned in drug discussions and there was no problem figuring out how to enter. The site can be accessed through Tor which I downloaded and then enter the Silk Road browser like a regular network reader. To find Silk Road I had to search for its web address, or URL, on the regular Internet. Tor did not have a search engine at the time, so I needed the correct address to find a specific site. The URL was easy to find. All I had to do was write “Silk Road URL” in a Google search engine and it gave me many hits. Most of them were discussion sites about drugs. I could then copy and paste, and then enter the Silk Road site through Tor.

The first page of Silk Road was simple. All you get is a place to log in using a username and password, with a simple Silk Road logo in the upper right corner. The first time I entered, I chose «create a new user» and created a name and password. I also needed to come up with a pin-code as extra security. I could choose between creating a vendor-account or a buyer-account. I chose the latter and kept the same username and password throughout all of the observation. No other questions or information were needed. Most of the content on Silk Road was fully available when I logged in, except for the private-messaging system where participants can communicate on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, the discussion forum had different access-levels where you could login by creating a different user than for the market. Just as a curiosity, I did create a discussion account, only to discover it simply gave me the additional right of posting comments. I then started gathering data.

Collecting Data

The data consists of screen shots, printed online conversations, and field notes that were collected during my observations. Being a qualitative and in depth-study, I found it
natural to dig rather deep into some information than to collect all that was available. Still, my research questions are quite broad and demands many objects to give a better explanation (Bryman, 2012). Traditional ethnography involves long-term immersion in the social context (Ritter, 2006), which in my case was collection of data across a timespan of approximately one year (6/11/2013-26/10/2014). During the first eight months I only entered Silk Road a few times, but always captured screen shots to analyze later. In the last few months of data collection my research question had been further developed and I entered Silk Road with a more specific purpose. The main part of my data was collected during August and September of 2014, and I was only entering Silk Road for curiosity when it closed in November 2014. The closure of Silk Road therefore became a natural ending of my data collection.

A lot of my current data is screen shots made of vendors’ profiles, product sites, market sites, and discussion threads. It consists of approximately 1300 screen shots in total. This is an effective way of capturing presentations of the website, but also show how participants present themselves through text (Boellstorff et al., 2012). Screen shots clearly reflect the virtual reality of the website and are easy to return to for more information and are often called visual ethnography or virtual notes (Boellstorff et al., 2012). Taking pictures like this is especially important since the Internet is such a fast changing place as I experienced myself when Silk Road closed down. Even though the page disappeared, the screen shots and printed conversations that I had made allowed me to always, in a way, reenter Silk Road and analyze it.

While I gathered screen shots from some interesting statements on the discussion forum, some of the more valuable information were the copies I made from discussion threads. Copying whole conversations allowed me to follow a thread and understand the responses better. Especially one thread concerning a Norwegian discussion covering more than 140 pages when copied. All the information was interesting for my thesis but it consumed too much time during my observation. Therefore, I decided to copy and print the document, thus analyzing it at a later time. This copy of the discussion thread was used to find direct quotes and expressions of Silk Road participants. All the Norwegian quotes throughout the thesis are translated into English by me, which will be stated as footnotes.

This raw data was also supplemented with my own field notes. Describing through field notes is a way to capture one’s own impressions as a culture and community member, the subjective meanings of interactions, and events as they unfold over time (Kozinets, 2010).
Since I was situated behind a screen, it gave me the opportunity to write quite extensive field notes. I wrote down my thoughts and immediate observations and brought them further to a more analytical thinking level of tables and lists to make order out of the chaos. After a while I determined it was taking too much time and I started to capture screen shots for later analysis. But the combination of data collecting and analyzing did help me discover reasons behind cultural actions, instead of offering more typical recording or description of them (Kozinets, 2010). Therefore, my data consists of a combination of what is seen on the screen and what is experienced by me as a researcher; which is emphasized as important in netnography.

### 3.2 Netnography

*Netnography* is an expression developed by Robert V. Kozinets (2010) as a form for ethnographic research adjusted to include Internet’s influence in the society. It is also called “virtual ethnography” by some researchers (Lee, Fielding and Blank, 2008:12). The concept of netnography will be shortly presented in the following part, with an emphasis on how the availability and state of the data differs from regular ethnography. I will then present some vulnerabilities and limitations concerning this way of approach. A main limitation is that this thesis is not generalizable to an overall understanding of cryptomarkets, but it will give a detailed understanding of Silk Road’s structure. This will not be discussed this any further, but I will present a few other considerations essential for this thesis.

### Online Fieldwork and Textual Data

Netnography mainly concerns participation-observational research based in online fieldwork and uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to understand cultural phenomenon (Kozinets, 2010). It also adds to the data with other elements such as descriptive statistics, archival data collection and projective techniques (Kozinets, 2010). Doing ethnographic research online is very much the same as in physical life, but it offers a difference when it comes to the availability and state of data. Gathering data online contains both particular challenges as well as new opportunities (Kozinets, 2010). Internet gives criminologists a great opportunity to easily access small, specialist groups which traditionally are populations that are difficult to enter (Hewson and Laurent, 2008; Miller and Sønderlund, 2010; Bouchard and Amirault, 2013). In my case, Silk Road offers a public drug market that
contains conversations and sharing of drug related experiences which are normally hard to reach. An additional opportunity of netnography is the access to a large amount of data. This can also be a challenge because of the sometimes unlimited amount (Blank, 2008). The amount of data available on Silk Road was enormous, and FBI’s closure of the website gave me a natural ending of data collection, which was almost a relief. The online world is always available, and every time I had another question or needed a screen shot that was more effective than the one I already had, I could just reenter and gather more.

Another important difference is how online data is mainly text. This makes it important to clarify the distinction between textual observation and document analysis when doing online research (Hewson, 2007). My data consists mostly of textual observation, which contains data in the structure of a regular conversation and social behavior. I study logs of interaction from Silk Road’s discussion forum, but also communication from vendor profiles and product sites. Document analysis, on the other hand, usually concerns archives containing documents specifically constructed to be spread and circulated on the Internet, such as home pages, formal documents, and blogs (Hewson, 2007; Hewson and Laurent, 2008). The public announcements from the Silk Road administrator can be seen as documented text, but since it is open for comments and further discussions I will use it as a part of my textual observation.

Even though netnography lack movements of bodies and vibrations in air, the approach still concerns meanings of acts and utterances through the community’s manifest and other textual means (Kozinets, 2010).

### 3.3 Vulnerability and Limitations

There is a lot of uncertainty concerning the Internet which is important to consider in online research. In general it is important to be skeptical to the online content (Bryman, 2012). One cannot know for sure who is behind the written text: It might be the same actors behind different screen names, or more actors behind one name (Blank, 2008). The participants can also come up with unreal information or lie about hard facts like gender, age or origin country. In my case the participants might create false feedbacks on products, giving them a higher rating than it should have been, or buyers might lie about getting their products or not. There are also many other ways to scam and it is hard to judge the quality or accuracy of the written texts online. It is also difficult because of the lack of distinction between controlled news and rumors in most websites (Lee, Fielding and Blank, 2008:4-5).
Another important aspect when doing online research is the interrelationship between online and offline worlds (Lee, Fielding and Blank, 2008:19). These interconnections are shaped by many factors, among them access/lack of access. Even though my thesis considers an online phenomenon and therefore exclusively Internet members, it is still important to abstain from the dichotomous division of online and offline worlds (Leander and McKim, 2003). Online or offline – they are both realities where the participants of Silk Road do participate and extract their experiences from. By rejecting one of them, the understanding of a cryptomarket’s structure and functions would not be complete. So even if my focus is on an online phenomenon, I do have to remember the website’s and the participants’ foundation in the physical world.

**Communicative Validity and Trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability are two traditional concepts of how to gain a better understanding of data quality and how to improve the data (Rasmussen, 2008:85). When considering them in Internet research the theorists are disagreeing. Some even choose not to include them in their research and rather encourages the ability to improvise and work around unexpected problems (Lee, Fielding and Blank, 2008:6). I have chosen to shortly discuss how I will improve the validity and reliability of my thesis, especially since my research field closed down something that might give me a problem with the credibility of data (Knobel, 2003). I will therefore shortly discuss my thesis by using Michele Knobel’s (2003) *communicative validity* and *trustworthiness* in evaluating qualitative research.

Communicative validity, or validity of interpretations and claims, can be shown by cross-examining multiple sources of data or evidence (Knobel, 2003). A problem with having an ethnographic approach is its focus on one single phenomenon, making it lose the power to be generalizable (Ritter, 2006). My thesis is not generalizable but I will compare and contrast my data towards earlier research of the same field, which is both interesting but also supportive of the data validity. Trustworthiness rather concerns to what degree a reader can trust and believe in the quality of the study itself (Knobel, 2003). Again, I will lean on earlier research for readers to find it credible, but also through gathering a large amount of data that will be presented throughout the text by screen shots and quotes. It is also important to consider possible ethical challenges.
3.4 Ethical Considerations

Doing ethnographic research online raises a few ethical considerations that are important to discuss and clarify. The first section concerns my decision of doing a purely observational research without any social contact or public information about my existence on the website. Connected to this is the second point of what public space is online and when the ability to lurk is an “ok” approach. Lastly, I will discuss my standpoint towards protecting the participants throughout my thesis, even though they are already anonymous on Silk Road.

Pure Observation/Lurking

An important decision when doing netnography is where to situate oneself as a researcher along the continuum between participation and observation (Kozinets, 2010). Internet opens up for lurking; an opportunity to do observational research without directly participating in any social activity, other than being anonymously present on the website. Some researchers have chosen to lurk through doing purely observational or passive netnography, even though this is often not seen as true ethnography since the participation is missing (Kozinets, 2010:75). My approach in this thesis is just that; purely observational and without any social interaction in the field. Most actions on Silk Road concerns illegal activities, of which I would not partake. I could have participated in the discussion forum and stated my presence, but it would be impossible to ensure everyone one the site would be informed. Even though I did not actively participate, I do believe I gathered a well understanding of the Silk Road community. The amount of textual data available is huge and answers many of the same questions I would have asked through interviewing. It was also comforting that my findings coincide with another ongoing master thesis focusing on interviewing Norwegian buyers on Silk Road about their motivation (Bosnes, 2015). Lurking might not give the same in-depth understanding as ethnography requires (Hine, 2008), but just by entering this online drug world and observing the visual aspects, and experiencing the possibilities and restrictions, gave me some experience. Additional reasons for not participating include the reigning fear among the participants of law enforcement going undercover and other general security concerns, as well as avoiding any negative feedback or encounters. Most importantly, I do not believe my gathering of data will be hurtful for any of the participants or the website in general.
Public versus Private Space

The online ability to do unobtrusive observation of verbal behavior raises the ethical issue of invasion of privacy (Bordia, 1996); what is public and what is private when online? To consider if the websites are open or private areas is problematic when doing research on the Internet (Kozinets, 2010:156). Internet is experienced in different ways, and it might be hard to judge if it is an open space or not. One reason for discussing this is to make sure that people’s privacy on the Internet is shown respect (Lee, Fielding and Blank, 2008:19). An important way to judge if the website is public or not is the degree of required login and registration, or sometimes an invitation from members (Bryman, 2012; Hewson, 2007). In my case, Silk Road only required a simple login open for everyone, and therefore no restrictions for entering. The numbers of participants on Silk Road is also high and difficult to grasp, so I expect all the participants are well aware that their comments or profiles can be viewed by anyone. On the other hand, the private messaging system is more private but also outside of my access. I therefore consider Silk Road as a public space, where the text posted is actually meant for the public to see, which was also seen mentioned in the forum. But the question of participant protection still remains a topic, even in an anonymous environment.

Participant Protection

Another consideration of online research is the anonymity of participants on the website. This is especially important for actors using the Internet to discuss or buy drugs (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013). In my case the participants are already anonymous, since they use nick names and are highly concerned about security breaches leaking their identities. Even so, it might still be an ethical challenge when I refer to certain members (Kozinets, 2010; Hewson, 2007) or show screen shots. Online participants often invest a lot into their online personas and should therefore be protected in the same way as offline identities (Hewson, 2007; Tackett-Gibson, 2008). I will therefore anonymize the participants when using quotes or specific information by giving them new nicknames, except for the ones being publicly known through arrests. This also avoids a connection of my thesis to any specific nickname from Silk Road when doing an Internet search, since it will be open for public. The screen shots, on the other hand, will not be censured, except for my own username.
3.5 Analytical Approach

When doing ethnographic research I discovered that a lot of the analysis takes place during the collection of data. The majority of coding and thematizing of data happened throughout the observation, but also during the few hours or days after. That was when the memory of my observations was the strongest, swirling around future analysis. Notes were taken and further developed into complete chapters. The first analysis widely approached Silk Road with an aim to understand the market’s complexity. The social life on Silk Road fast became an important part of my data, since the majority consisted of interactions on different levels. I first attempted to understand the different actors in the cryptomarket, but later moved on to use this knowledge in order to have a look at the bigger picture; the market structure. The focus of the analysis became the interplay between inside, social forces and outside elements, while understanding Internet as a phenomenon was unescapable. Throughout working with this thesis, I often returned to my own data and earlier research in order to complete my analysis.

In ethnographical research it is quite common to build one’s analysis on prior theoretical work (Boellstorff et al., 2012). By using theory, one can achieve different lenses to understand patterns of social activity (Boellstorff et al., 2012). This is greatly the case in my thesis. My theoretical choice of Deleuze and Guattari was one of the first decisions made when I chose cryptomarkets as the theme. Their theoretical approach was kept as a thought in the back of my mind throughout the whole thesis. The main reason for choosing Deleuze and Guattari was how they seemed to be responsive to the data and research interests, which is important (see Boellstorff et al., 2012). I also kept the theory in mind when forming research questions throughout my research. My focus on Deleuze and Guattari also influenced the data collection, especially for limiting the collection from a data overload (Blank, 2008). This theory was therefore in dialogue with the data throughout my work, and continuously suited my analysis by creating unexpected analytical approaches to the data.
4 Cryptomarkets and Internet

In order to see how Silk Road’s structure is formed, it is necessary to understand how the online environment affects the market organization. Every market structure is influenced by its environment and surrounding elements (Wall, 2014; Bright and Delaney, 2013). This makes it important to understand how the online situation has created a new reality for drug participants, separating cryptomarkets from more conventional markets. Internet has led to a time and space compression that opens up for new organizational realizations for drug businesses, where social image and customer service have become important. Another aspect of the Internet is anonymity and how it has both negative and positive consequences for the social life online and transactions on the market. This has created a different reality for trust, where Silk Road comes up with interesting solutions to solve it, such as feedback systems, virtual communities, and other substitutions for external regulations. Silk Road is clearly a product of this complex space opening up for new movements and boundaries which I will further discuss in this chapter. Internet’s complexity as an environment for business will first be presented, before I discuss cryptomarkets as a product of its environment with an emphasis on anonymity and trust.

4.1 Internet as a Market Context

Internet is perceived by many as an unlimited space where one can move around freely without any restrictions. A reason for this is the absence of natural boundaries like space and time, making life online very different than the physical reality (Buchanan, 2007). This has made great changes for the ones choosing to enter the online world to derive advantages from this new reality context. Internet is characterized by flows, where people, information, objects, money, and etc. are moving around with hardly any physical boundaries (Aas, 2007). Contacts can be made all over the world and organizational possibilities make it possible to receive any wanted item to your doorstep, just as what Silk Road is providing. This interconnectivity has changed the world in many ways and has created a complex space for individuals to explore.
A Complex Space

Time and space function as organizers of everyday life through setting boundaries for when and where. They are important societal factors in every physical society, but the last few decades of globalization has led to great changes. Technological developments and other incentives have created a highly increased speed of communication and ease of moving capital (Aas, 2007). This is also seen in cryptomarkets, where a compression of time and space has made the world of connections smaller and time spent shorter. A new reality has been created, where physical boundaries hardly interfere (Waskul and Douglass, 1997). The enormous space of the online world also offers an unlimited amount of information and it is easy to get lost reading your way from the starting point, ending up on a very different website. The exploring in an unimaginable world of information and possible contacts has also changed the individual. Internet has opened up an imagination of a liberate world without any real world consequences, something that has led people to explore new behaviors and expressions they see as separated from their physical person (Wynn and Katz, 1997). An example of this is the openness of drug use in the Silk Road forums, where people share detailed and personal experiences with drugs. Even if it might be experienced as a separated self when online, it is still interrelated to the physical world. And some say that the exploring of the self in a new environment is seen to just be adding pieces to the complex and multiple self (Wynn and Katz, 1997).

The creation of such a complex space has not only resulted in positive effects such as sharing of information and establishing social connections, but it has also created additional fear in people’s everyday lives. Internet as a physical space contains a lot of uncertainty concerning general questions of whom, what, and where because of its anonymity. Another insecurity is connected to posting personal information in a place where the boundary between private and public is not very clear (Wynn and Katz, 1997). People can therefore misuse personal information published online and spread it within seconds. This has led to many new dangers that have arisen with the Internet, such as identity fraud and hacking of personal information (Aas, 2007). On the other side, it has also given traditional crimes an opportunity to expand by entering the virtual world (Wall, 2014; Broadhurst et al., 2014). Internet therefore contains both possibilities and new risks, but the image of it being a boundary-less space is not necessarily its true reality.
Virtual Boundaries

The structure of Internet might look a lot like a romanticized rhizome pulled right out from Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, with its interconnectedness, limitless heterogeneity, and the possibility to enter and exit from any point (Hess, 2008:39). But the real experience from a user perspective may not follow the same path (Hess, 2008:39). The first obstacle is having a computer with Internet access and preferably not a public one for entering cryptomarkets. This leads to an exclusion of many people (Aas, 2007; Neale and Stevenson, 2014; Gordon, Forman and Siatkowski, 2006). Even though the number of people around the world with Internet access is highly increasing, the movement online does not mean there is total equality. When entering the virtual world, there are many set boundaries that might be unknown for most users. Some of these are nationally set limits like the blocking of Western web sites in China. Countries might even censor online forums, like the drug-policy perspective in Australia to make all online drug-related discussions illegal (Barratt, Lenton and Allen, 2013). People aware of their anonymity and/or privacy therefore use Tor or other similar services to avoid “political” censorship and to be allowed a freedom of speech (Chaabane, Manils and Kaafar, 2010:167). In other words, the life online is highly dependent on physical locality and set boundaries.

Another limit to Internet’s random interconnectedness and potential democratizing function is tied to technological constructions or software programming, such as search engines (Hess, 2008). When doing an online search, an illusion of free movement is created for the users. But what is really happening is that the search results are arranged in specific orders based on commercials and gatekeeping functions (Hess, 2008; Buchanan, 2007). Internet’s rhizome-like structure is therefore infused with created hierarchies and unnatural priorities, something that makes the online world into a structure of both freeing elements and more restrictive orders (Buchanan, 2007). This is visible on Silk Road where vendors can manipulate the search results and make their products come higher up on the list. This can be achieved through making false feedback or by bumping their answers up in the discussion forum. So even when choosing an alphabetical listing of available merchandise, it is not as random and non-hierarchical as imagined. It seems like Internet is reorganizing social boundaries in their own sphere by creating virtual boundaries when it is lacking physical ones (Wynn and Katz, 1997). The boundaries created are definitely forming Silk Road’s structure, and will be further discussed in both chapter 5 and 6.
Inseparable Realities

A general division of life online as *virtuality* and the physical life as *reality* is quite common. But is it really a black and white division without any interrelations at all? Throughout the highly use of online mediums over the last decades, researchers and theorists have started to explore the interconnectedness between reality and virtuality (Aas, 2007). Cyberspace is an important component affecting today’s society in many ways (Marks, 2006), and what happens online will influence one’s daily life in the real world. This connectedness is visual on Silk Road, where actions are clearly being influenced by outside elements, and how its own market actions are forming life in the general society. Silk Road is highly interrelated with its participants’ physical life in the general society and the two different realities cannot be separated apart to see their real structures and organizations. Nothing is as black and white as it might seem and the boundaries are rarely as clear as conceptions explain them, something that Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theory emphasizes. They explain binary divisions like these, as unnatural constructions created by the society in an attempt to organize information. Opposites like reality and virtuality do not really exist, but still manages to form organizations and meanings in the society because they are presented as natural divisions. Such divisions should therefore not be ignored but placed in a rhizomatic map as representations that, in many ways, are connected to the reality and the subject (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:12). One should therefore focus on how the virtual world and the physical reality are interconnected through different elements. But one should also look at how the maps are differently formed depending on context.

4.2 Cryptomarket: A Product of the Environment

Cryptomarkets are taking place in an online environment which is something that has led to a different development than conventional drug markets. Internet has created many new opportunities and risks which have changed important factors for criminal organizations adapting to these conditions (Martin, 2014). Even though the virtual and the physical world are definitely well connected, they do have different characteristics. One difference is cryptomarkets’ dependence on a functional social life and have turned its attention towards the consumers. Additionally, the placement in an anonymous and textual market has created some new business opportunities for general organization and brand building. The time-space
compression has made it easier to gain connections on a global level and to continue over time. This has all affected cryptomarkets allowing them to form into a different structure and organization than traditional street markets.

**Organizational Opportunities**

One of the biggest changes in online drug markets is their use of technology as an intermediary to facilitate the drug business. This has had great impacts on the formation of drug chains. Cryptomarkets’ dependence on technology has made it possible to cut down the chain by many segments and still function effectively (Martin, 2014:55). One sign for shorter drug chains is the generally low prices, which indicates less people working, or larger quantities (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998:3). This also makes for a cleaner drug, since there are fewer stages for it to be tampered with (Martin, 2014:53-54). Throughout Silk Road there are many vendors who comment on their own drug chains by report buying directly from drug producers, having their «personal cook» or receiving «shipments directly from Columbia» (Martin, 2014:55). Here are a couple of examples where vendors comment on their drug sources, where the first one uses it as advertisement in his vendor profile, saying that «Our products are first hand products straight from the importer or produced by us! We stand for quality».

Another vendor is asking around in the forum if anyone is interested in homegrown weed for further sales: «Are there any Norwegians interested in buying homegrown weed in bigger quanta? If there is any interest, I will consider starting an onion store.». These two comments show that many vendors have quite a short chain between themselves and the drugs, or they at least say so. Still, some drugs like heroin and cocaine keep demanding a longer drug chain because of their country of origin and production method (Martin, 2014). Therefore, cryptomarkets can be seen to create a more direct connection between the vendors and buyers on a global scale.

Not only has the technology developed new organizational possibilities (Wall, 2014; Brenner, 2002), but it has also created new types of demands and network necessities. A cryptomarket is available 24/7, which is great for the buyers, but some vendors seem to have trouble keeping up with all the demands. When a vendor has not been online for a day or two, buyers start getting worried:

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10 Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.
11 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
12 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
«Haven't heard from /vendorname/ in over 48 hours now. Has anyone heard from him? In the last message he asked if it should be shipped on Wednesday or wait until after Easter. I answered him, but after that, I haven’t heard anything. (...) maybe I should take into consideration that it is Easter holidays (...)»

This person had waited for only two days and is worried if the vendor had gone missing.

Many vendors therefore find it necessary to post when their on vacation or what their working hours are, such as this vendor\(^\text{13}\): «I am online a couple of times a day and you will find me very responsive. I DON’T WORK WEEKENDS however so please show patience if messaging at the weekend». There are both negative and positive effects of running an online drug business and the characteristics that might lead to an increased sale might also be creating high demands and expectations. Therefore, it is important to maintain market trust through well-established social images.

### The Value of Social Images

An important impact for success on Silk Road’s rather anonymous environment is to create a socially constructive public image as a drug distributor (Martin, 2014:40). On cryptomarkets like Silk Road, vendors have the possibility to have their own vendor page that is personally customized. This profile is important in order to establish a direct relationship with customers and also to create their own sub-brand (Martin, 2014:35). The brand-building is really taken seriously by many vendors in hope of gaining success. Some even express a use of expert help on layout and how to create success online\(^\text{14}\):

«Before I started here, I bought a consultant appointment at one of the biggest vendors and got some advice on how an operation can operate over a longer period of time and at the same time succeed. I would advise everyone that is new in this type of distribution to do that, just to get an insight on how things work.»

Vendors can create a brand, using a certain name, adding pictures, logos and other recourses to build an identity and brand awareness, which is a different aspect of drug dealing compared to the conventional drug market. Most of them spend a lot of time creating vendor pages, which are filled with marketing style rhetoric of commercial jargon and organizational goals (Martin, 2014). Like this vendor who is really turning on his commercial charm saying that his goods are the «connoisseur’s first choice» and that you can really «Buy with confidence!»\(^\text{15}\):

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\(^{13}\) Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.

\(^{14}\) Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.

\(^{15}\) Retrieved from a product site 15/9/2014.
Listing is for 1 gram of /vendorname/ 95-99% MDMA. The connoisseur's first choice, the best quality, the strongest potency, the ultimate seduction. Expect to receive powder with color ranging from light tan to white. If you desire crystals order greater than 2 grams. Flawless delivery rate – Buy with confidence!

Gimmicks, lotteries, and reward programs for returning customers are also frequent, like this vendor who is offering a weekly deal where you get more items for a lesser collective price:\(^\text{16}\):

Others claim their products are made with organic ingredients only or that they can be stamped as fair trade products in order to gain customers (Martin, 2014). This is from a vendor profile selling “TOP SHELF Organic Medical Marijuana”:\(^\text{17}\): «All buds are organic and minimal fertz are used, they will produce a smooth smoke and various effects depending on strain listed. I will try to give a description of the genetics that herb comes from, but for a detailed description I recommend looking up the parent strains.». This clearly shows that some participants on Silk Road are quite conscious buyers caring about where the products come from and how they are treated. Showing dedication to provide a quality service and being professional is therefore important for Silk Road’s vendors (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a). Competitive pricing, speedy dispatch, slightly overweight products, and good stealth techniques are other elements that have positive effects on business (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a:183). In order to succeed online, it is important to create and maintain this socially constructed image of oneself as a vendor, while in conventional drug markets there are other typical characteristics counting as positive for success such as violence and threats.

Virtual Violence

The online framework has made many of the stereotypical qualities applied to drug vendors disappear, at least in its original way (Martin, 2014:45-46). Particularly violence, which is an element highly connected to the physical world. Violence seems to happen in all the stages of conventional drug distribution, and often with the purpose of protecting.

\(^\text{16}\) Retrieved from a product site 5/2/2014.
\(^\text{17}\) Retrieved from a vendor profile 14/2/2014.
excluding, dispute, discipline, encouraging compliance, and to intimidate (Martin, 2014:55). These are important parts of criminal activities, and it makes it hard to imagine how such criminals could transfer their business onto the Internet (Calderoni, 2012:322). Participants on Silk Road seem to be highly conscious of the absence of violence and some say that this is the reason why Silk Road is so important. Here is an example of a vendor's comment on a recent police action against street vendors:

"This action is a good example on why SR is so genius, also socially. There were big street-vendor groupings that got caught. They are making so much fuss, using violence and exploiting minors and are a big embarrassment and damage to the whole local community of Oslo. With SR and the postal service we avoid all the negativity "street-dealing" is causing of damages and risks, and everyone can safely buy their joints (or whatever they want) without being part of a more criminal environment! Don't forget this, it is super-important and something that makes SR so revolutionizing and exciting to work with!"

This vendor is excited to be a part of Silk Road; a world without any violence, damages or risks. It is for him a safe environment where everyone can access the drugs they want without being a part of a social world where other illegal actions are included. The online world is a different situation than the physical world. Here, the worst possible reaction is not to be killed or seriously injured, but to be excluded from the web site (Lusthaus, 2012:90; Monsma et al., 2010:154). Reducing systemic drug-related violence seems to be one of the benefits of cryptomarkets (Martin, 2013; Aldridge and Décary-Hétu, 2014; Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a), which might lead to an impact on the low prices since the risk compensations are smaller (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998:7).

Even though there is an absence of physical violence, there are other forceful acts of virtual violence doing the same tasks (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a:188). Virtual violence might take the form of cyber-attacks, such as hackers enabling themselves to ruin the cryptomarket by stealing money or manipulating their site. A lot of the integrity online is digital, so damaging of sites and functions might be very influencing on both the administrators and participants (Wehinger, 2011:212). Another type of virtual violence is the spreading of false rumors and feedbacks. This also takes place in conventional drug markets, but seems to be much more important in cryptomarkets where everything depends on the virtually constructed image. Getting bad feedback or negative comments seems to have a huge negative impact on the business in cryptomarkets and is avoided at all cost. Many vendors publish statements saying they want negative feedback in a personal message first so they can try to solve it with the buyer. Such as this vendor who is telling his customers to send

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18 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 26/10/2014. Translated by author.
him a message so he can resolve the problem instead of getting a negative feedback without any chance to dispute:\(^{19}\):

«We treat our customers in the best of our ability. If there is any issue regarding customer care/ delivery or product please notify me before leaving any negative feedback. I am always open to resolve any issue you have. There comes a lot of hard work with running a solid working company. Please respect that and give us a chance to dispute.»

Public shaming is so harmful for the business that it also seems to function as a social control to make cryptomarkets more secure (Wehinger, 2011:212). Participants want to avoid these types of virtual violence, but a lot is limited because of the anonymity that exists.

### 4.3 An Anonymous Reality

An online characteristic that really adds to Internet’s complexity is anonymity. A traditional definition explains anonymity as dealing with the inability of others to identify an individual or for others to identify one’s self (Christopherson, 2007:3040). This way of behaving through a hidden identity is often a highly appreciated element of online interaction or movement. Online, you can hide behind the screen and not reveal your physical identity by seeing anyone face-to-face. This opens up for many new opportunities; the fear of social consequences connected to their true identity is left behind, opening up for social norms to become less conservative (Christopherson, 2007). This has led to a lack of stereotype-judgements based on visual impressions, making Internet a ground for social equalization where social norms and judgements are left behind (Christopherson, 2007). Drug related research has shown that anonymity is an important factor in multiple ways such as, finding drug related information, contributing to information, and interacting with people online about this somewhat taboo-covered topic (Barratt, Lenton and Allen, 2013). Social norms concerning drugs are quite strict and a positive attitude is generally not accepted. In Silk Road’s forum, on the other hand, drugs is the most common topic, and one can find all ranges of attitudes and values (Martin, 2014:7). Everything concerning drugs is accepted and there should be no judgements, as expressed by a Norwegian vendor:\(^{20}\): «(...) everyone should be allowed to take whatever they want without being "judged" by us. That's the whole point of this market!». The anonymity makes it easier to connect with like-minded people and people feel encouraged to explore their personality even more (Christopherson, 2007). The dynamic of never meeting face-to-face carries with it a secure feeling, which gives the actors a boost of self-courage.

\(^{19}\) Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.

\(^{20}\) Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
Even though anonymity is mostly perceived as a positive element of the Internet, it also has negative implications (Wehinger, 2011; Aas, 2007). One thing is a higher risk for threats and fraud, but it may also lead to bad behaviors without any inhibitions (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012). The social equalizing effect of the Internet might also sound better than it really is. Because not only do the physical characteristics create unequal possibilities in the physical world, it also works as a way to predict behaviors and create order in large social spaces. Some researchers actually claim that the human need for ranging and making differences will force un-equalizing structures onto the Internet, such as hierarchies and stereotypes (Christopherson, 2007). Some of these might be grounded in physical life, while others are more based on the Internet context. Language is one identity marker that still is visibly present online and has an important role (Warschauer, 2000). Writing skills and formulations might give away some socially revealing hints about status and position, but it might also be tangled with and give false impressions. For example if you are writing perfectly formal English, others might see you as an ethnic American and not with Mexican origin (Christopherson, 2007:3046). On Silk Road, language is used as a way to create trust. This is clearly seen in the Norwegian forum where the Norwegian language is used as a way to reveal some parts of you without giving away the whole identity. So physically present or not, some risk and un-equality will always be present, and anonymity is highly affecting the feeling of trust in any environment.

4.4 Online Trust

Anonymity is, as mentioned, very important for the participants on cryptomarkets, but it needs to be balanced with a feeling of social identity to create trust. Hiding behind the screen makes it impossible to know for sure who you are doing business with, something that heightens the risk of something going wrong during transactions. A general trust is therefore an important part of every online market and especially on markets selling illegal merchandise. Missing the general trust based on physical appearance has made cybercriminal actions very unstable (Lusthaus, 2012). How can some sort of basic trust be achieved in the anonymous landscape of the Internet? On Silk Road, different elements such as a feedback system and virtual communities are introduced in order to enforce trust into the market through a system of self-regulation.
A System of Self-Regulation

An important side of cryptomarkets is the absence of external regulations (Martin, 2014:27). There is no government or private organization guaranteeing conditions or terms of sale. They stand by themselves making sure of their own safety. This increases an uncertainty concerning the quality and reliability of products and services available on Silk Road (Martin, 2014:28). The lack of state regulation and means to enforce agreements have led them to alternative mechanisms to create trust among market participants and ensure profits (Martin, 2014). Therefore, different mechanisms of self-regulation are introduced to help the notion of security and trust (Wehinger, 2011). One example is how market operators are policing the market place to generate rules and monitor compliance (Wehinger, 2011:211), which on Silk Road are the administrators and moderators. Different mechanisms are also implemented, such as awarding licenses to sell, moderating forums, implying rules, awarding certificates and access to authorization, and locking user accounts. All this is completed to create market stability and a basic level of trust.

Frank Wehinger (2011) divides the bases of trust in illegal online markets into three different types, which I think are all present on Silk Road. First is a process-based trust tied to the past or expected exchange such as reputation. This type of trust demands a long chain of exchange where both sides have proven trustworthiness. On Silk Road most customers show a preference of returning to a vendor with whom they had a positive experience, while vendors award returning customers with better advantages if the shipping gets lost. Secondly is the characteristic based trust which is tied to a person and depends on characteristics such as family background or ethnicity (Wehinger, 2011:210). Most characteristics are invisible when online, except for the language. The language used might help create trust in different ways, such as in the Norwegian forum where using the Norwegian language has created a feeling of closeness. Thirdly is an institutionally-based trust which is tied to societal institutions and depends on individual or firm-specific attributes (e.g., certification as an accountant) and on intermediary mechanisms (e.g., use of escrow accounts) (Wehinger, 2011:210). This is the main source for trust in illegal online markets, according to Wehinger. On one side is the person- or firm-specific trust depending on a membership in a subculture, which leads to certain expectations (Wehinger, 2011:211). On the other side there are intermediary mechanisms functioning as a guarantee for the transactions going through as promised (Wehinger, 2011:211). These are both present on Silk Road and can be seen as, for example, the feedback system and the establishment of community bonds through social interaction.
The Feedback System

Administrators have introduced a feedback-system on Silk Road where the buyers have the responsibility and power of making public comments on vendors. Such a reputation system is made to meet challenges such as helping buyers distinguish trustworthy vendors, creating trustworthiness on the market, and discouraging participants who have bad intentions (Resnick and Zeckhauser, 2002). The feedback system is therefore an important factor in making cryptomarkets work. Participants on Silk Road put a lot of trust in the system and even the vendors are encouraging others to use the feedback-system: “Can everyone who orders please leave feedback! We need it to make this community work, currently only about 10% of customers are actually leaving any feedback.” This vendor really values the feedback-system and says it is important to make the community in Silk Road work. Feedback and seller rankings have proved to be of great significance in the market and lays the ground work for the vendors’ online reputation (Martin, 2014:43). If a vendor is running a successful business some positive feedback will only enhance the sales, but the moment something negative is said it might influence other buyers to abstain. This system has led to a large amount of power to the consumers who can easily influence a vendor’s success by leaving a comment.

Research done on similar reputation systems on eBay has also proven that a creation of trust through feedback systems has an impact on the achieved sales (Houser and Wooders, 2006). A reason for this could be that none of the traditional trust basics, such as location, inspections, and lengthy reputations, are present. Internet markets therefore have to establish trust among strangers by creating strengths such as a better distribution of information and the large volume of possible feedback (Resnick and Zeckhauser, 2002; Resnick et al., 2006). Differently from eBay, Silk Road demands each and every customer to leave feedback and a score, something that might make their system a better base for trust than when comments are optional. But the most important thing with such a trust system is that the participants believe in it – if not it would not function (Resnick and Zeckhauser, 2002). The reputation system is actually seen as so important that new vendors who do not have any feedback invest a lot of time and effort into establishing a reputation to enter the market (Xiao, Ju and Fan, 2013). And according to Craig Newman (2011), trust and reputation have such important roles in today’s Internet society, that they will probably become more important than money and nominal power in the future.

A Virtual Community

Another self-regulation mechanism is the creation of personal relationships and networks, which might help to circumvent the problem of relational risk (Wehinger, 2011:212). This highly separates cryptomarkets from conventional markets, where it is said that the more contacts you have, the weaker the network is concerning safety issues (see Kenney, 2007). It has been proven that in online markets it is highly important to create a virtual community to ensure basic trust, mostly because it satisfies the consumers need for information safety and social interaction (Shadkam and O'Hara, 2011). Creating social bonds is significant for trust in cryptomarkets and makes the chance of getting scammed a bit smaller. Through social connections a moral community will develop, where the participants can expect trustworthy behavior because some normative standards have been founded (Podolny and Page, 1998:61). This creates a kind of self-enforcement within a group and can also be expanded with an area specifically set aside for reporting scammers and to alert the group (Lusthaus, 2012:89). An active community makes too many witnesses to get away with anything and forces the participants to act more correctly.

Another difference from conventional markets is the need for vendors to reveal some of their identity in order to create market trust. Instead of trying to distance oneself from one’s personal identity in a cryptomarket, it is necessary to build some kind of identity for the other participants to trust you (Lusthaus, 2012:93). Finding a suitable balance between secure anonymity and personal identity is difficult, but important, because one needs to leave parts of oneself unmasked to attract potential criminal collaborators (Lusthaus, 2012:80). Therefore, creating an online identity is crucial for gaining trust as a vendor on cryptomarkets, but not at the expense of safety. This construction of identity might lead into a brand, establishing a starting point for reputation (Lusthaus, 2012:80). Making one’s name a bit more familiar and with a shorter distance, might attract clientele by making one seem more known (Martin, 2014:27). Participating in general talk in the forum might also establish a firmer identity of the vendors because participants get to know them better (Resnick et al., 2006). Especially if customers manage to get the perception of a vendor’s ethics, it might lead to a heightened trust and further purchase and revisits (Limbu, Wolf and Lunsford, 2012). The internal social life of a cryptomarket is therefore highly important and should be seen to have large impacts on Silk Road’s organization and structure, together with the feedback system and other elements of substituting external regulations.
4.5 Internet as a Rhizomatic Space

Internet has clearly created a rhizomatic environment for cryptomarkets to develop, but not without some limitations based on virtual boundaries and binary divisions. Online sites, such as Silk Road, have created global communities characterized by flexible and complex rhizomatic structures, spreading out in all directions. This gives away a feeling of freedom, where people display themselves anonymously without considering any real world reactions to it. People travel around on the Internet like nomads looking for drug related information; searching in an online search engine makes you move on from information to information, in a source that seems inexhaustible. Then to experience that your movements are not as free as you thought, because of national limitations on Internet usage and software programming setting restrictions on the rhizomatic movements.

Internet is an important side of cryptomarkets’ characteristics having had great effects on important market elements such as organization and trust. Silk Road seems to be a cluster of many connections crisscrossing the market and forum, just like a complex rhizomatic map. The online market has entered as a new middle part of drug chains, something that has shortened it down and given benefits of low prices and cleaner drugs. Silk Road is also characterized by offering anonymity to its participants, something that is seen to give both advantages and disadvantages. By not meeting face-to-face, a basic foundation of trust is missing and leaves the market unstable. Cryptomarkets such as Silk Road have therefore introduced different measures to substitute these physical basics of trust as well as other external regulations that normally exist in markets. The feedback system is one example of a highly successful measure that adds to the feeling of security and creates some level of trust among vendors and buyers. The creating of virtual communities in the forum is another example of finding trust in something relational that increases the feeling of closeness. So even though Internet is offering a more rhizomatic space than the physical world filled with time-space boundaries, it is also filled with ordering structures such as software hierarchies and other introduced mechanisms for building trust in an anonymous environment.
5 The Social Structure and Market Characteristics

Silk Road is not only a marketplace where you can buy drugs or other goods, but it is also a hub where like-minded people meet. Looking at the social part of Silk Road and how people interact with each other made me realize how there seems to be a different division of power than what is usually expected in conventional drug markets. Being a place where people have many of the same motivations for entering such a website made Silk Road into a meeting place where a community-feeling had developed. Not only do you buy drugs on the cryptomarket; you are part of a bigger community fighting for the same rights. Through these motivations one can see a kind of democracy developing. The consumers and buyers on Silk Road gain social power through gathering in a group and is a strong force shaping the market structure following their own preferences. Even though the administrator and moderators try to enforce certain rules, specific roles, and tasks upon the Silk Road society the uncertainty created by the Internet context allows the consumers and buyers to retain their power. Certain tasks like leaving feedback are introduced to ensure market trust and security, but ends up providing more power to the buyers.

In this chapter, I will look more closely into different market characteristics that enforce a certain social structure on Silk Road. First I will discuss how the participants’ motivations adjust the organizational morality which is fundamental for a market structure such as Silk Road. These motivations and goals are also important for the social life on Silk Road and helps create a community-feeling as discussed in the following section. Even though life on Silk Road is relatively free, I will look more closely into the way it is organized through rules and task divisions. In the last part of this section I will look in depth into how the consumers and buyers have gained a significant power through giving feedback and therefore affecting the vendors’ reputation.

5.1 Individual Motivation and Desire

Participants on Silk Road range from a multiplicity of characteristics and personalities, but even so, some motivations are more common for entering the cryptomarket. In this part I will analyze what the different motivations are and why they exist. Some reasons for entering that will be further discussed are politics, knowledge, social connections, and security.
features. To look at why these motivations occur I will connect them to the physical and virtual world outside of Silk Road. I will then analyze it through theories of Deleuze and Guattari and the construction of organizational morality.

**Common Motivations**

When Silk Road was founded by “Dread Pirate Robert” (DPR) it was with the ideological conviction of total liberty from governmental surveillance and control. These thoughts were the foundation and motivation behind why many then entered Silk Road in the first place. The goal was to create a free market where one could sell and buy goods without any limits. The nature of the Internet already seemed like a suitable place to wage protests and activism to fight for their rights (Hess, 2008:40). This was the moral ground on which the original Silk Road was based, and the few rules and procedures that existed were founded on these values and beliefs. The same motivations were also visible to some extent on Silk Road 2.0 where people expressed things such as: "Cannot stand all this with others deciding what I use. No one! Has any fucking thing to do with it. My body, my business. One of many fucked up parts of today's society. Fucking hell." and "I don't think Norway in general has any reasons for not allowing us to decide ourselves what we want to use!". These two comments clearly express a hostile attitude towards the state and a wish for drugs to be legal for everyone’s use. But in general on Silk Road 2.0 it seems to be more caution and with a less interest for the ideological thinking of DPR (Martin, 2014:81). Cryptomarkets today are rather complex and multifaceted online communities where participants have different political identities and motivations for entering (Martin, 2014).

Other reasons for entering are tied to the structure of the marketplace itself and often about the minimization of risk that Silk Road offers. Most law agencies around the world are practicing strong reactions towards any type of drug connections and encryption technology has created an opportunity to stand stronger against those threats. Silk Road’s high security level is a great temptation for recruiting participants by ensuring them a place outside of the radar. Many people are grateful for the existence of the less risky cryptomarkets, such as this buyer expresses: "Btw, I am seriously thankful for your guys’ existence so I can avoid the hell one has to go through because of this fucking #&!* war against drugs.". Other participants choose to buy drugs on Silk Road because the use of feedback gives them a feeling of trust (Bosnes, 2015), while

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22 Both retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
others generally see Internet markets as a steady and relatively safe drug source (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013). All these structurally motivated reasons for entering are connected to the market place and transactional area, where also other reasons for buying exist.

Even though the political activism-motivation seems to be fading away, the participants still have a common interest in drugs and everything concerning drugs. A motivation for entering cryptomarkets is the generally large selection of drugs combined with good prices and quality products (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013). Price is important, especially among the Norwegian participants who are complaining about the high drug prices in Norway, such as this buyer: «(...) but the main reason why I started here is the insane prices Norwegians have to pay!». Others express that the quality of drugs is much more important: «We Norwegians know how hard it is to get a hold of quality products and I believe 100% of everyone with half a brain would agree that real amphetamine for double price is a better deal than the regular crap consisting of creatine, pmma and acetone.». This buyer is actually willing to pay more for drugs online than on the street if the quality is better. Another vendor is telling his possible customers to go elsewhere if low prices are more important than quality and good customer service:

«I got something for your Mind, your Body and your Soul. If cheaper price is more important than a connection whose reputation guarantees not being scammed, receiving the finest product, prominent service, and unsurpassed shipping then order elsewhere. Otherwise I am happy to accept your order and offer a great experience»

This vendor is looking for conscious consumers who know what they are doing; pay more – get more- is what he is saying. Vendors are also greatly motivated of making their business succeed by introducing new types of financial and organizational means.

More importantly for both vendors and buyers is the possibility to exchange information and experiences with others interested in drugs. Another motivation for engaging in the virtual collectivity is to take advantage of this information to learn more about drugs and drug use (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013:8). People are hungry for sharing and receiving information, as can be seen with the high number of participants in the discussion forum. The available information and the possibility to ask questions and share experiences are important reasons for entering a social world such as Silk Road. This motivation might further lead to a common desire to create a social community, which is typically linked to transactional markets (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001:298). A buyer who is quite active on

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24 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
26 Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.
the Silk Road forums expresses how the online social world is what drives him to continue exploring drugs27:

«I am loving these experiences but I hate drug environments. I prefer exploring it on my own through closed networks like this one. I have never had any particular contact with drug environments in real life and the few I have met have not really given me a taste for more. Without the Internet I would probably not have experienced these magical moments.»

This shows how motivating the social life on Silk Road is for some participants. A growing sense of togetherness, like this buyer is experiencing, is formed through a common search for knowledge, information, and social connections. Another reason might be a disinterest in participating in other types of criminal activities, which is seen as normal in conventional drug markets (Heber, 2009). So even though Silk Road can be said to be a mix of drug users, entrepreneurs and political activists, it does seem like some motivations are common and create togetherness.

Off-Site Experience

Additional elements why people are motivated for doing economic transactions in a market are proved to be off-site experience and collectively held knowledge (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). Even if this research was done on legal markets, it also relates to Silk Road. An example of cultural luggage from outside is expectations connected to stereotypes and rumors whirling around in society. Even though the Silk Road participants do not seem to fit drug stereotypes of «predatory psychopaths and stone-cold killers» (Martin, 2013:12), these traditional images are still shaping people’s behavior. Similar connections to the off-line world have also been found when researching other types of cybercrime (Broadhurst et al., 2014). I even felt it when I entered Silk Road for the first time, where with my prior knowledge I expected a lot of bad grammar and slang words. After a while I was more and more surprised at how professional and knowledgeable the majority of participants were. Even though the drug users themselves might have different expectations than I had, it does seem to be grounded in some sort of general knowledge. A general assumption among the buyers is that they themselves are responsible and capable of making smart decisions when it comes to drugs, but everyone else should be careful (Bosnes, 2015). Everyone else can end up getting addicted, but they look at themselves as smarter and not fitting the stereotype. So an

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image of a drug addict-stereotype is present online, but people do not categorize themselves as in that image.

By observing on Silk Road one gets a good image of the different participants and how they behave and they seem quite different than the stereotypical drug user and drug vendor. For example, gimmicks like Halloween and Christmas discounts do not fit well with the stereotypical representations of drug dealers as. The vendors on Silk Road are perceived as individuals who are working for profit and thinking like regular businessmen, while buyers are intelligent consumers showing a clear drug preference (Van Hout and Bingham, 2013a). These newer types of participants in a public drug market make it even more interesting to examine where the motivations come from. Whether or not it is the market that shapes the criminal actors is hard to say (Calderoni, 2012), but their motivations for entering Silk Road might give an interesting analysis. Online activities outside of the specific website have also proved a strong factor in explaining a member’s activity and economic exchange (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). Research has shown that next to friends and receiving e-mails, surfing the web is one of the most important sources for discovering online drug markets (Gordon, Forman and Siatkowski, 2006). This despite the risk of the commentaries only being myths and fantasies (Hallsworth, 2014:40). Therefore, off-site experience and information found on the regular Internet are great motivations for entering Silk Road.

**Forming an Organizational Morality**

Deleuze and Guattari include an individual approach in their theories in order to understand structure, something that coincides well with looking into participant motivation. Different reasons for why people enter Silk Road will have an effect on the market structure. Not only do they signal what elements to strengthen in order to bring in more participants, but by having more of a common motivational foundation also creates a communal way of doing things. People and organizational structures alter each other in both directions and by changing the motivational reasons for engaging in a structure you also affect the larger picture. As explained in Chapter 2 about theory, Ronnie Lippens (2001) uses Deleuze and Guattari to understand the new formation of organizations growing out from the changes of morality. The early formations rejected any influence from the outside, being static and formally organized. While today’s organizations tend to be de-centered and open towards outside elements (Lippens, 2001). By looking at people’s motivations on Silk Road, you can
see how it is more leaning towards the last description. Outside elements are clearly visible inside the market, as seen in the change of motivations from liberal convictions to needing more security features and how it changed the market. The different motivations coming from the outside and inside are collected together and form an organizational morality of how things should be or should become. Values such as sharing of knowledge and not scamming others become expected by most participants. This interplay between the outside and the inside is important to understand a social structure in a Deleuze-Guattarian sense.

The way these motivations are affecting the participants can be linked to different mechanisms of pushing and pulling actors towards joining a cryptomarket. Mechanisms doing the pushing might be political institutions and law enforcement creating threats, making it desirable to enter in the encrypted Internet that is made possible through the pulling mechanism of technology development. Other elements are tempting and pulling actors into cryptomarkets, like the search for knowledge, new social connections, and the general wish to complete transactions, as mentioned earlier. When all the participants in a market have similar motivations for entering, it should affect the market in order to achieve these wanted common goals. If Silk Road does not maintain the discussion forum or encourages participants to engage in sharing experiences and information, then people will no longer find a reason to stay. As any normal business, Silk Road has to ask what the participants want in able to continue their success.

Silk Road’s orientation towards the participants and their opinions might be a conscious decision, or it might be something they are forced to. However, it does give the buyers and vendors the power to form the market structure to their own advantage. These foundational motivations can easily be turned into desire, which interestingly is mentioned in Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome-theory. Deleuze and Guattari look at desire among different people and institutions as a way of making connections (Sørensen, 2005). Connections are made when different things affect each other and they do not easily happen if there is no underlying desire. Desiring something adds additional will to go somewhere and expand either their social life or other desired elements. Using the rhizome-theory to understand Silk Road does in this case make it clear that the participants’ motivations are the reason why people connect to this cryptomarket in the first place. Silk Road would not function with the lack of any of the different motivations behind the desire to buy drugs or make social connections on cryptomarkets. At the same time, these desires or motivations are affecting Silk Road’s structure by drawing new connections to the physical or virtual world outside of
the specific market space. Without the participants’ motivations for earning knowledge and searching for information, the connections going outwards would be limited.

5.2 Community Bonding

A great motivation for entering Silk Road is the interaction and sharing of information that happens in the discussion forum. But not only is the social part important for entering in the first place it also plays an important role in forming the market structure directly. Through social interaction and market transactions relationships are created and close bonds are formed. Therefore, I will analyze the social relationships on Silk Road and how they lead to a community-feeling which is a large force towards the shaping of market structure. The Norwegian community will be presented as an example of smaller social worlds being created in the forum and forming small clusters in the complex structure.

Developing Social Relationships

Silk Road is filled with social relationships in many forms and strengths. Not only is the discussion forum a well-appreciated way for the participants to mingle, but there is also interaction happening through the vendor pages and feedback system. Social relations are such an important part of Silk Road that it would not exist if it weren’t for the interaction that is happening. Interaction is the basic foundation for any social structure and it is vital to look at the relationships between the individuals to understand Silk Road (Benson and Decker, 2010:131). Getting a picture of all the social parts of Silk Road is impossible, especially since it combines public sections, restricted sections (requiring higher status) and person-to-person private messages that are not externally visible. Even so, the discussion forum seems to be the main area for social networking. Research on other markets have also found that most users exchange private messages only to complete transactions (Motoyama et al., 2011:73). Transactions are also a part of the social life, since it is a relational structure where participants are committed to each other in more coordinated ways (Holt, 2013:156). Even so, it is in the discussion forums that the relationships are mostly visible and interactive.
Exchanging knowledge is a basic foundation for creating social relationships and is crucial on the Silk Road discussion forum. Some share knowledge through fact-like comments using fancy words and a formal language: «The danger is that methamphetamine is easier to misuse. It is more powerful and it opens up for new and more dangerous methods of consumption like smoking. The increased serotonin activity compared with amphetamine also gives a feeling of less side effects and a more comfortable high. Everything depends, naturally enough, on the drug being synthesized properly and that it does not contain any damaging substances remaining from the reaction with pseudoephedrine. The situation today seems like the methamphetamine actually keeps a high purity standard thanks to big productions from laboratories in Asia and Mexico and stricter controls of sales of pseudoephedrine in stores in the US.»

Others describe personal drug experiences down to the last detail, also called trip reports. Here is an example of a review on the psychedelic drug called DOM:

«We got out of the apartment and are soon aware that we are quite different. We decide to walk towards a park to sit down for a while. I feel calm and confused at the same time. It was fine walking around among people, but I was really aware of things being different. People looked very interesting, birds tweeted nicely and the trees bended over from both the wind and visuals.»

All kinds of knowledge are valued on the Silk Road forum and both these quotes received positive feedback in the form of others being interested or thankful for their stories. Through sharing of knowledge in a market place one expands the knowledge base of its participants, but it also expands the set of potential trading partners (Motoyama et al., 2011:71). It is seen on Silk Road that the rumors and talks about different vendors and products have a great influence on a person deciding whom to buy from.

The forum is also where vendors and buyers get in touch directly and share a conversation before doing business. By talking to each other, or observing other people talk, social identities are created, which is instrumental in facilitating the exchange of drugs and money (Kenney, 2007). A way to show some personality is for vendors to express some moral standpoints, such as this Norwegian vendor; «No one in here should judge you for your choices, or what you want to consume, but meth... I do not want to help people destroy their lives that way.». He is showing no support for using meth, and rather suggests to the person asking to try smoking cocaine. The response he gets, from the same person, is understanding and shows how a negative response to the request actually turned into a positive value: «I really appreciate you caring for others on SR to that extent /vendornoame/! I am well aware of what you are trying to say. (...)».

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28 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
29 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
30 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
31 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
Social relationships and notions of a personality make it easier for people to buy drugs, because the feeling of trust is more present when there is some sort of connection. In real life, this might be through buying from the same vendor each time or from friends. On the Internet, this is a bit different because of the anonymity hiding the real identity of the person vending. But the participants still find trust through the sharing of information on the forum and the feedback that each buyer has to leave for the vendor. Just as seen in the forum where a consumer is encouraging a vendor to participate more in discussions:

«I believe you are sincerely welcome to participate as much as you can handle; what else should we use this anonymous forum for, if not to talk with each other? I believe I speak on behalf of almost all buyers here, when I say that activity on the forum and fast/intelligent answers in messages is only positive for a vendor. If you participate actively in discussions about safety and stealth, it usually means that you know something about it. If I have the choice between two given vendors, and product & price is about the same, the BTC would go to the one I "like" the best.»

A vendor’s participation in the forum is important and builds trust through being active and showing some personality. Knowledge and information make the buyers feel more secure, but the vendors also need to be preoccupied with customer service in order to succeed. Through participating in the forums, asking the other participants what they would like them to offer or being open for discussions on negative comments seems to be a great value to the business. Silk Road also makes space for closely knit groups to develop, often based on different interest areas that are more specific than just drugs. In some parts of the forum you can even see how virtual parties are taking place and view people talking as close friends. Relationships on Silk Road are not only professionally based on transactions, but they are also socially founded and create close virtual friendships. These personal relationships and establishing of networks with reliable people seems to be of great value on the function of cryptomarkets (Wehinger, 2011:211).

Online forums are complex organizations and not only does the purpose of the relationship vary but also the duration and structure (Holt, 2013:169; Monsma et al., 2010). In the forum, the main connection is a topic or question working as a frame for the conversation that differs in length. Even though the degree of networking varies it does seem like the Internet is providing a sense of community that can be difficult to find offline (Walsh, 2011:61). Physical limits for social relationships disappear (Kenney, 2007:240) and the networks spread out fast through public postings available for anyone to see (Motoyama et al., 2011:73). The possibility of being involved in many interactions and getting to know lots of people widens the network level and creates a criminal macro-network rather than closely knit

32 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
groups according to Roderic Broadhurst et al. (2014:7). As in conventional drug markets, rich networks seem to be leading to more success on Silk Road (Décary-Hétu and Dupont, 2013), but there might still be necessary with a certain balance of size and structure in order to succeed (Bouchard and Ouellet, 2011). The participants therefore seem to find comfort in narrowing the macro-network down to communities on different levels.

**Communities on Different Levels**

The building of relationships that is happening on Silk Road has led to a frequent use of the word “community” throughout the forum and market. But what does it really imply? A general definition of a community is «a group in which individuals come together based on an obligation to one another or as a group in which individuals come together to be one in purpose» (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001:298). The use of “community” on Silk Road seems to be referring to different groups, such as people occupying a specific site, the entirety of users populating all cryptomarkets, or the broad collective of dark net users operating on Tor (Martin, 2014:19-20). The participants often see themselves as part of a community, like this vendor is expressing when Silk Road re-opened:

«To all my old customers, I have been away for a while after the domino effect of underground sites falling. We all lost so much and may we as a community build our self’s stronger now against scammers and governments oppressors»

Why these feelings of community exist might be due to similar motivations, experiences, and circumstances, or even point towards similarities in social class and levels of education among the participants (Martin, 2014:20). Just the fact that the drug interest is shared online is also seen to be a starting point for social interactions and building of virtual communities (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013; Kozinets, 2010). The use of the word community might also be directed towards Silk Road’s population with a purpose to bring information and trust through interactions. Such a close-feeling context helps the participants to evaluate the reliability of the content (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). An example of use of the community-feeling is from the administrator’s welcome-back message when Silk Road 2.0 opened:

«Dear community. It is with great joy that I announce the next chapter of our journey. Silk Road has risen from the ashes, and is now ready and waiting for you all to return home: http://silkroad6ownowf.onion. Welcome back to freedom. Over the last 4 weeks, we have implemented a complete security overhaul. This overhaul marks the dawn of a brand new era for hidden services, and it would not have been possible without the patient support

33 Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.
He is clearly playing on the use of a community-feeling to make the participants return, especially by welcoming with «Dear community», telling them to «return home» and thanking them for keeping the «community spirit alive». I read this the first time I entered Silk Road and it even made me feel quite welcome. By working on creating a bond to the group, the administrator makes sure that the participants feel at home and increases the chance of returning participants to his site.

Movements across markets are very normal and many vendors list the different markets they are vending at in their profile or encourages members to «Look for us on other markets as well as we start reaching out!»

The frequent movements across markets has even started the use of a language typically associated with offline global population movements, like «migration» and «refugee» (Martin, 2014:22). Migration to another cryptomarket can be voluntarily in search for a bigger selection or more customers. Refugees, on the other hand, are forced to move from a closed market and according to James Martin (2014:23) are welcomed in new markets just like real world refugees. But even when a market is closed, the participant community still persists; it just moves to another market for a while, until the old one reoccurs (Martin, 2014:23). Just like the administrator says in the quote above, that the new version of Silk Road would not have been possible «without the patient support of this community».

At the same time as this community-feeling is growing, Martin (2014) points out that users having different ways of expressing group identity and disagreements among participants might lead to the closeness notion at different stages. Even if they disagree on the discussion forums and belong to different smaller communities, they still remain participants on Silk Road and have drugs as a common connection. Even broader they belong to a community of people buying drugs online and discussing it in outside forums. This is particularly visible when entering other cryptomarkets than Silk Road, or discussion forums on the regular Internet (Martin, 2014). Many buyers and vendors simultaneously maintain accounts across multiple sites. They can then communicate and trade with a broader range of users and it is also an assurance in case one site gets closed down. But it is still common to be closer with one of the sites, which might reflect a certain community-feeling of where you

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belong and which market you support. This makes the participants so powerful that Martin (2014) even finds the group of users to be running the market site more than the site leadership or infrastructure. Without the social life Silk Road would probably not exist, or at least would not be re-emerging.

The Norwegian Community

A Norwegian thread in the discussion forum is a great example of how smaller societies develop on Silk Road and create extra tight bonds. Silk Road 2.0 had quite a large discussion forum in the end and there seemed to be creations of smaller societies developing in the forum threads. This creation of sub-communities might be a response to the growth of the market (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). In large macro networks with many connections, the feeling of belonging is easily lost. A few of the participants in the Norwegian forum expressed that «This was reasonable :). Finally a “Norwegian” part of the forum :D!» and «(...) maybe we should make a small sub-culture here =)?»36. Instead of whirling around in different sources of information, it is easier to participate in a discussion that more specifically fits your needs of knowledge and contacts. Many of these subgroups were tied to specific drugs or political views, but there were also some subgroups connected to different nations, such as Norway. Ethnic and kinship ties have been seen as facilitating relationships among smugglers in the real world (Benson and Decker, 2010). And the situation is similar on Silk Road.

Having a common background already makes it easier to connect and sharing a nationality seems to be a place where a basic foundation of trust is already present. In the Norwegian discussion thread the main language was Norwegian and therefore included mainly Norwegian participants talking about personal experiences with the customs, different vendors, or drugs. Being in the same situation when it comes to available drugs on the street market and same security threats adds an extra value to the sharing of information. The language also seemed to be an important part of creating a closer society, since the rest of the forum is mainly in English. Even though Internet in general started as a globalizing event where English was the main language, research has shown that during the last few years a growth of local languages have been renewed in the online world (Warschauer, 2000). Language is an important part of an online identity construction and might be an extra addition in the creating of trust in online environments where other identity markers are

36 Both retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
hidden (Warschauer, 2000). This is what seems to be the case on Silk Road. Reading the thread one can see that the few English posts are not being answered and even encouragements like «People please use english it hard to understand you» did not get any attention.

Reading the Norwegian thread makes it clear how such a small society heightens the feeling of closeness which seems to make the imagined hierarchy between vendors and buyers more equalized. Belonging to the same nationality, that in addition is small in size, adds an extra layer of trust and also a feeling of equality. Vendors and buyers are usually not equally set in a drug hierarchy, but in the Norwegian discussion they had an open discussion of what the market should contain and the vendors showed a high flexibility when it came to which product and prizes they offered. There also seemed to be a respected relationship between the different Norwegian vendors:

«I can see that the competition here on SR is becoming critical among the Norwegian vendors! Ha ha, we like that, and it benefits you customers! (…) We will start running a strategy here where we do not battle on price/product against the other vendors. If they offer something good for a nice price, let them sell it, we'll take something else.»

This vendor comments on the competition between the Norwegian vendors and how they choose to go for different drugs than the rest of the vendors are selling. They resist the growing competition, which probably is a way to strengthen their own business, but it also ends up being respectful towards the other vendors. So despite the different interests among vendors and towards buyers, they seemed to be more on each other’s team than expected.

Creating Hubs in a Rhizomatic Reality

By observing social life on Silk Road, one gets a better understanding of how the life on the market takes place. Relationships are built on many reasons, such as transactions, sharing knowledge, or securing customer service. But no matter what the background for the interaction is, it seems to create a togetherness among the participants. It isn’t even necessary to participate oneself; the public publishing on the Internet makes it available to just watch and still get the feeling of being a part of something. Silk Road consists of many individuals, which in a Deleuze-Guattarian sense move around like roads in a map. They all start off with a certain interest or curiosity towards drugs and the Internet, and then ends up on Silk Road or other cryptomarkets. On Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical map, Silk Road and other

37 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014.
38 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
cryptomarkets can be understood as a bulb or hub where different roads end up meeting (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The threads can represent different individuals, who through similar desires or interests make connections when meeting on a hub like Silk Road.

Another interesting part of this analysis is how there are different levels of communities. As discussed, participants use the community-word for explaining specific spaces or connections, but many points towards different things. This is captured fruitfully through Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory where they talk about different plateaus or levels. Silk Road can be seen as one specific plateau where social interaction and transactions are happening and the participants feel as a part of something bigger, such as a community. Others might disagree and feel a connection with other cryptomarkets, but they still connect to each other on a cryptomarket-plateau. Different levels can be found in larger scales as drugs in general or libertarian politics, or there are smaller levels such as the Norwegian network. But even though they can be ranged in some way, nothing says that one plateau is better or more important than others. They are all interconnected and some people might feel a part of more than one plateau. It is all a question about where the desire creates connections, as emphasized by Deleuze and Guattari.

Another interesting point in the eyes of Deleuze and Guattari is how the participants on Silk Road and their community-feeling give this cryptomarket a never-ending life. As a rhizome structure would, Silk Road kept living despite the closure of the physical website. The participants spread out to different websites, but returned to the new version right away when it emerged. A feeling of belonging and other past experiences on the site might be the reason for returning. If the transactions were the only important part of Silk Road then the participants could have easily just remained on other cryptomarkets and achieved their goals of doing business. Even though Silk Road carries with it a good reputation, a closure and the subsequent arrest of different participants39 should have led to a mistrust and skepticism of the sites security. The social life is definitely important to Silk Road and you can say that this cryptomarket would not have existed if it were not for the community bonding of the participants. Therefore, it is important for the administrator and moderators to make sure people maintain these feelings of closeness and social bonds by creating different boundaries for the participants so they feel they’re a part of something more specific. This is done on Silk Road by manifesting actions of order.

39 See criminal complaint of Dread Pirate Robert (Guardian, 2013), Defcon (FBI, 2014b), or other participants (FBI, 2013).
5.3 Creating Order

Reading the media coverage of Silk Road gives you the impression of it being a totally open market where the participants are free to do whatever they want. The image is of a market where anything goes and no rules apply. Well, that is not the real Silk Road. Even though it lacks external regulations from official institutions it does try to create some order in the multiplicity of interactions and transactions. Silk Road contains different principles for the participants to follow, such as banning items and certain subjects. Another way to create order is through a division of different activities into specific roles. But even though there are some restrictions on the website, it is clear that it still is reigning a certain chaos. This will all be discussed in the next section and then analyzed by using Deleuze and Guattari theories.

Organizing Principles

A market without any rules is hard to maintain and in the absence of formal ruling authority Silk Road has created their own range of regulatory functions (Martin, 2014:11). These rules and routines are mainly imposed by the administrator and followed by the moderators in order to organize both the market site and the discussion forum. But an imposing of such rules and routines also needs to be met by support among the participants in order to work. To have some sort of organizing principle is a central idea to most groups, even though it might be driven by individuals or smaller groups (Wall, 2014:231). A total absence of management would only lead to chaos and would not be beneficial to any parts of the market (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). But at the same time, too much site management may destroy the trust, relationship building, and knowledge base, making it necessary that the community is effectively managed for it to be collectively profitable (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). It is a fine balance between creating organizing principles with the support of most participants and making them too strict that people leave.

Silk Road 2.0 had quite a few rules and restrictions, but the first version of the market was much freer (Martin, 2014). Rules usually emerge over time and through experience something commonly seen in conventional drug markets (Kenney, 2007:250). But the developing and extending of rules on Silk Road does take shape in a different way than in the physical world. In conventional markets the rules are rarely written down because of the hostile environments, but rather transferred orally and informally (Kenney, 2007:250). These implicit understandings are communicated through conversations, stories, body language, and
social gatherings (Kenney, 2007:250). This differs from Silk Road where written language is
the only way to communicate. The transmitting of written communication could be seen as an
oral way of talking, especially because of the way the language is used. But at the same time,
what is written is also very open to the public. This is what makes the organization and
structure of Silk Road and other cryptomarkets more transparent than other criminal markets.

Physical and Imaginary Boundaries

Introducing rules in an irregular market like Silk Road is done in different ways. In a
study on conventional drug markets, Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nigel South (1997) identify
market rules as either physical or imaginary boundaries shaping the moral and economic
confines. Imaginary boundaries are based on symbols and traditions guiding the participants’
movements without being visible, while physical boundaries are actual restrictions inserted by
authorities (Ruggiero and South, 1997:64). Using this to understand Silk Road emphasizes the
different ways that restrictions are being imposed by the administrators. Some of the rules are
made clear for the participants, such as having to leave feedback when buying a product or
being restricted as a “newbie” in the discussion forum, where a promotion based on
experience is needed to be able to participate in all the topics. Other limits are more invisible,
such as the already laid out structure in vendor and forum profiles, which are presumed as
areas for personal development (Cover, 2012). These are all restrictions inserted on Silk Road
through the layout and programming of the website and are not easy to get around. This is a
way of organizing social life and even though it makes the market more complex, it seems to
be working as a security line for the participants (Holt, 2013).

The most important rules on Silk Road 2.0 concern the merchandise that is illegal to
vend:

«We do not support violence, and prohibit items associated with causing harm. Prohibited items: Firearms (and
ammunition), Explosives (inc fireworks/flash bang grenades), Knives not classed under memorabilia or of
collector value, Counterfeit currency, Child pornography, Stolen bank/credit card details, Scans of passports or
other stolen identity, Human organs»

This is found many places on Silk Road and is sometimes also present on the front page. Here
the website is distancing themselves from what they call «items associated with causing
harm» and then provides a list of those items. Most participants seem to agree with these
terms, while others still try to get their hands on some of these illegal items. An example is

40 Retrieved from an information sheet on the site for Silk Road’s vendor registration 5/2/2014.
seen in the Norwegian thread where one asks for a vendor to buy weapons from and gets a very negative response. This then starts the following discussion\textsuperscript{41}:

«Not that I care so much, but where did that reaction come from? He should be able to ask such a simple question without being roasted? :p»

«No, not when it comes to guns. We should ban such behavior because it has nothing to do here. Weapons are made for taking lives, something we do not support.»

These two members have different ways of approaching the question of illegal merchandise on Silk Road. The first one does not necessarily say that Silk Road should be selling weapons, but asking the forum to be open for all discussions. The second member is clearly distancing himself from weapons and expresses himself like he is speaking on the behalf of the whole Silk Road community by saying «We should ban this kind of behavior» because weapons are «something we do not support». The rules are for him clearly a way to signalize what Silk Road is by setting moral boundaries.

Other kinds of restrictions are more invisible and imaginary, but still work as organizers of the social life on Silk Road. Some examples are the spoken language and understanding of common Silk Road terms and symbols which work as boundaries to some participants. Communication in forums are also a way of creating common meanings and expectations that might practice as traditional limits (Kozinets, 2010). Through conversations you learn traditions and ways to do things from the more experienced participants and you are exposed to common opinions. One tradition that is generally accepted is the division of roles and tasks where the administrator is helped by some moderators to keep order on the site. They are the ones enforcing most rules and restrictions, but their roles do not seem to be much contested on the Silk Road forum. You could compare their roles to the police in the physical world; even though they get some negative feedback – they are respected by the majority.

Sometimes a common purpose or motivation is not enough to run a market and there is need for leadership to create an organized and clear structure, which is the case on Silk Road (Broadhurst et al., 2014:5). It might be that the administrator role is accepted because it is the one running the web site, but it is also perceived as a necessity for the market to function effectively. For example, the job of filtering and aggregating the information on the forum is immense and really makes the discussions clearer (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001).

\textsuperscript{41} Both retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 4/11/2014. Translated by author.
Security Functions

Even though the restrictions are physical or imaginary, it has been seen in research that some site management is necessary to create a perceived value from the participants and secure a following transaction (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001; Holt, 2013). Common rules create a sense of togetherness among the participants, where they watch out for each other and self-govern. The rules work as social norms based on values, beliefs, and perceptions, which can effectively regulate the market by ensuring a kind of predictability of actions (Wehinger, 2011:212). The participants want to follow most of these rules in order to be accepted as a part of the community. In regular markets these norms are usually a result of industrial principles and practices trying to sustain the industry’s public morals, but this is missing in illegal markets (Wehinger, 2011:212). In Silk Road’s case, the amount of uncertainty that comes with the anonymity and illegality of the market creates a need for the administrator to calm the other participants by forming their perceptions of the market page. An important part is to explain the website’s actions against security breaches and to always be improving the situation thus allowing the participants to understand that they also can make the market better. It is important to not only focus on outside threats and interferences that create rules and restrictions, but to also see the rules that are imposed from within a drug market as well (Ruggiero and South, 1997:64). Such as the divisions of roles that will be discussed in the following part.

Division of Roles

An important way for Silk Road to create a certain order among the many participants is to divide them into roles. Role divisions are commonly based on a person’s main activity or experience and participation on the website and is upheld through rules and restrictions (Holt, 2013:161). By first sight, the division of roles on Silk Road is quite simple, as mentioned in Chapter 1, and the market consists of administrators, moderators, vendors and buyers. The administrator and moderators are the ones running the website and maintaining the order. The vendors and buyers are the ones participating in the transactions and are assigned their roles when they first log onto the Silk Road site. The distribution of roles on the market site is a way of facilitating the actions on the market and to make it easier for the participants to know what interests the others have. Some participant’s take the task division more serious than
others such as this vendor that clearly states what he expects from the buyer and vice versa:\footnote{Retrieved from a vendor profile 5/2/2014.}

\begin{quote}
I have the right to cancel any order for any practical reason!
I will keep a SCAMMER list!!
I will will treat any confidential information carefully and delete after use with NO RECORD!!
I will ship in the safest manner as possible!
I will treat you fair!
YOU accept my terms and conditions after placing an order!
YOU will Finalize as soon as you receive the product!!
YOU will NOT discuss my stealth in the open!!
YOU will Only encrypt sensitive messages!!
YOU will Use any product at your own risk!!
YOU are responsible for writing down your address correct and in the right format
\end{quote}

This vendor is pointing towards more ethical role tasks as well, such as discussing stealth in public and how to treat confidential information. This shows how the division of roles leads to a specialization of activities (Benson and Decker, 2010) at least of what is expected from the other participants. Even though this often is linked to having leaders on top ruling a hierarchized market chain, on Silk Road it seems to be formed from what the participants expect from each other. The anonymity and security concerns make the members nervous which will be increased if their expectations to the other participants are broken. The functions of the executive roles of the administrator and moderators are to organize the market and create safety and not to lead the group. This is clearly visible in the technical differences the role division gives, such as creating a vendor profile and other practicalities around transactions. In this way, the labor division is also based on convenience (Benson and Decker, 2010:133).

The discussion forum, on the other hand, has its own hierarchical ranking of the participants, which is based on experience and participation. Here you can see how the ranking affects the participants, both by putting up physical restrictions of where one can comment, but it also affect their behavior and respect among each other. In this part of Silk Road the power of the moderators and administrator is more visible. They have the last word in the discussion forum and often use their power to delete posts or distribute messages that are prioritized in the forum. Also, they have the power to distribute titles and rights on the forum and therefore situate themselves on top of the hierarchy. Here are examples of four different participants and their different rankings:\footnote{All retrieved from the Silk Road’s discussion forum 5/2/2014.}
The first participant is a senior member who has become a moderator, and has a great karma score because of the many posts and the reaction to these posts by other members. The second example is a member who has been given the title of “full member” because of his participation on Silk Road as a drug expert physician who gives medical advice. The third one has the title “vendor”, but is only a junior member with fewer posts and less karma, the last example is only a “Newbie” who is not even allowed a profile picture. These examples show the many titles one can earn and how the number of posts combined with knowledge is the most important values to climb the hierarchy. This quite strong division into different classes based on experience affects how the social networking plays out and makes the participants identify as part of certain groups and adjusting their behavior thereafter (Kenney, 2007). One can also see how the ranking limits relationships to develop across the different titles in the discussion forum, as between moderators and regular participants (Holt, 2013:158). The participants show respect towards the moderators in the forum and do not argue because of the fear of getting closed out.

Organizing the social life into different activities and roles makes the participants more effective, because titles lead to certain expectation for behavior and aiming goal (Holt, 2013; Benson and Decker, 2010). Even though the ranking-system in the discussion forum leads to differences, it also works as a possibility for promotion. This adds an element of competition that motivates the members to participate (Benson and Decker, 2010:133). By showing knowledge and posting comments they can climb up the rankings and get promoted to moderators after some hard work. A hierarchy is therefore often inserted in a social structure as an opportunity oriented mechanism (Calderoni, 2012:324). So in the discussion forum there is a possibility to climb a ranking ladder while the market has roles introduced in
order to coordinate the activity; and they both work as elements forming Silk Road’s structure. But are the divisions really as clear as they sound?

A Hidden Chaos

Even though Silk Road divides the market into roles that seem relatively easy to understand, it is quite a blurry line when looking closer. The rules and roles seem strict because of the practical limits set to each profile. But what can stop you from making more than one profile? As Ann-Karina Henriksen and Jody Miller (2012) discover through the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory, I find that the simple categorizations did not make much sense when looking at the data I collected. I tried to define the clear roles in which the participants are divided and how they affected each other but placing actors into these groups was impossible as evidence by the arrows crisscrossing in all directions. Because the vendors can also be buyers and reverse, while the administrator and moderators also can be both buyers and vendors. There is no way to be 100% sure of who is behind the screen name or which activities they are participating in. At the same time one cannot know if there is one or more people behind the same screenname appearing as one person, nor can you know if the same person is using multiple usernames and accounts. The anonymity and possible plurality of roles makes the divisions uncertain, but it still remains as a way to order the network.

Even though it often is a large inner justice in online drug communities (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013:38), being situated on the Internet adds a lot of uncertainty by restricting the possibility for totally controlling the market. Many of the elements that are required for climbing the forum rankings or appearing as a truthful vendor can be tampered with, as is often seen on Silk Road. Valuable elements for social roles in virtual forums are signs of authenticity like quality points and amount of contribution, in addition to more personal qualifications such as experience with drugs or cryptomarkets or amount of knowledge (Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013). Personal qualifications can be hard to tamper with, but not impossible considering no one is able to check the source for what is written.

The mind of most vendors is therefore set towards their own profit and advancement, but they still seem to respect the organization. The participants are not forced to maintain this organization of roles but seem to be doing it because of the way it makes the market more organized and clear. If someone does not complete what is expected of his/her role it will get
noticed. This is clearly seen in the Norwegian forum where one vendor is telling another to just make sure to deliver the goods and everything will be fine\textsuperscript{44}:

«You have now showed a quite rude side of yourself with the last few posts, take it easy.. your customers are very understanding and patient here but you are going crazy as if you have eaten all your peppers yourself. No one is against you or against each other here, we are all on the same team. The only thing required is that you do your job delivering the goods.»

They are all on the same team, the first vendor says, but everyone has to make sure to complete their role expectations in order for the market to function and disagreements to be avoided. It is voluntary to become part of Silk Road and its organization and if one does not accept its structure one can easily move to another cryptomarket. So, the communication on Silk Road implies both an uncertainty concerning the roles and rules, but the organizing principles also provides a support because of everyone’s interest for security. Most participants ultimately work towards the same goal, which is making the market function in the best possible way.

\section*{Boundaries in a Rhizomatic Environment}

As I have shown in this section, Silk Road with its administrator has introduced rules and role divisions in order to organize the chaos of individuals and tasks. In the case of the discussion forum it even forms a hierarchical structure with a possibility to advance upwards into the ranking system. These divisions end up creating groups of individuals that get certain characteristics and expectations connected with them. Attempting to organize chaos is quite normal in the general society, and is often shaped as hierarchies according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987). But a firm division of roles and activities into categories is done in a forceful way and there is nothing natural about it. Silk Road is a great example of how language is used to enforce structuring elements, which is what Deleuze and Guattari calls major language: a language created to secure the formal structures through roles, titles, and possibilities (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). The way such as language is introduced in societies like Silk Road does create a certain order in the online community, but it is not natural and might give a false sense of safety.

Instead of attempting to organize the multitude of differences into a system one should focus on accepting the chaos (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:5; Milovanovic, 1996:577-578). Nothing should be ranged as better or above something else, and one should rather enter in

\textsuperscript{44} Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
the middle to see how everything connects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:5). The first glance on Silk Road does give the impression of an organized role division in the market site and a natural hierarchy based on experience in the discussion forum. But the more you think about it the less organizing it seems. Because, as I mentioned earlier; how can you really know the truth of who is behind the screen name and what their intentions are. It seems to be more fruitful to be open for a chaos of roles when analyzing Silk Road and not the existing roles and other categorizations. You have to keep an open mind for vendors buying drugs or the administrator himself having a personal business. Social worlds are not naturally dived into roles or categories but an attempt of doing so does affect the structure by creating expectations among the other participants.

Even though hierarchies and orders qualify as virtual and imaginary structures in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, they do affect the real world when activated into the natural and more rhizomatic world. Silk Road has proven to be very flexible spreading out its many connections in all different directions both by influencing other realities or being affected itself by the outside. This clearly makes for Silk Road being a rhizomatic structure on a plateau that is equally placed with other relating hubs such as competing cryptomarkets or more conventional markets. But even though a rhizome is its natural structure you cannot close your eyes on the hierarchical orders and role divisions inside of it. All attempts to create order are interconnected to the flexible rhizome and they should be viewed together and not as separate parts. To understand Silk Road’s structure you need to analyze the structure for what it is and accept the reality for how it works, if not you will never see the reality for what it is; chaos.

5.4 Decentralization of Power

The Internet has affected the society in many different ways, one of them being the growth of decentralized power. Throughout this chapter I have shown different ways the consumers of Silk Road are achieving a great amount of power across the whole cryptomarket, such as creating powerful communities and having collective motivations. I will explore this further here, by discussing the power of the consumers and especially how the feedback system turns the social power system upside down. I will then give a shorter summary of this whole chapter by looking at how the social world is affecting the structure.
Power of the Consumers

The way the social community has built up to be a great force has made Silk Road to be highly inclusive and representative of their participants, and especially the consumers (Martin, 2014:45). The website is dependent on the support of their participants, something that is clearly shown in a message from the administrator45:

«You might also notice that the re-launched marketplace lacks a number of features from the original marketplace – we will be working hard over the next few weeks to implement improvements, and we continue to study each and every post made in the Feature Request forum. Your opinions matter to us, and we will not neglect the thoughts of the community.»

The participants’ opinions matter to the administrator and he «will not neglect the thoughts of the community» when reestablishing the cryptomarket. This shows how the administrator is almost giving away all his power. Even if he is the one making the last decisions, a message like that does sound good to attract support. He validates the opinions of the community, which in number will be mostly buyers and consumers. But not only do the buyers have the majority of sayings in public forums, they also have an important part in determining the tone and the content of each site. If they are not satisfied with something they will tell you, especially through customer feedback and populating of vendor sub-pages (Martin, 2014:45).

A distinct relationship between buyers and vendors seems to be shaping the structure of illegal online markets (Holt and Lampke, 2010). Looking at the discussion forum you can see how vendors are behaving differently and also get different type of respect from the others. The vendors seem to carefully watch their commentaries and behavior in order to maintain their business. Buyers, on the other hand, are expressing themselves freely and are receiving support from vendors to tell the truth without any negative reactions. Such as this vendor46: «Last contribution to this thread, to let the buyers express themselves without any vendors interfering.». The way the buyers and vendors interact is in one way showing more equality than what is expected in conventional markets, as shown in part 5.3.2. But a division is clearly visible, and with the number of buyers being much higher than vendors the amount of support is unequally distributed. This is also the case in conventional markets; the difference is just that in an online environment most of the buyers are present in the same place. They therefore represent a joint force. At the same time, the pressure lies on the vendor being great at doing business. The buyers have many vendors to choose among, and the demands for a seller are

45 Retrieved from the first page of Silk Road 6/11/2013.
46 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
very high. One Norwegian vendor states this change of power from the vendors to customer-led by saying

«Dark net markets in Norway have been up and running for a while now and it is no longer a clean “vendors market”. The customers are to a large degree contributing at setting the prices, which, like most other places, are run by supply and demand!»

More than in conventional markets, the vendors need to create a good relationship with other participants just to keep their image clean from bad reviews and complaints. The customer service is such an important part of keeping the business running successfully, and shows how social interactions between buyers and vendors are structured. Thomas J. Holt and Eric Lampke (2010) locate four different key factors in online interactions of a stolen goods forum that can be easily transferred to Silk Road; communications, price, quality, and services. Offering a good price and quality products are basic needs of being a successful vendor. Some even go all the way and ask their customers to help decide the pricing:

«These vendors have set their prices without asking the customers. I can of course do the same, but I want to run an effective and profitable business. Therefore, I want potential customers to take a part in the price-setting depending on much they are willing to pay. I am aware that there are more factors than the price, but price is probably important to gain trust. I do not want customers to feel scammed after a trade. My aim is the trade being a positive experience for both parts. I will also be 100% honest when it comes to quality.»

This is a new vendor who wants to start a business, and he receives a lot of advice through participating in the Norwegian forum. So not only is the forum a way for vendors to communicate with buyers but also for them to share knowledge among each other:

«If you want to build a customer base relatively quickly I would have set the prices to a competitive level. Preferably lower that the established vendors on Silk Road. I, personally, have difficulty trusting new vendors, but with the right price I’ll take my chances. In many ways, /vendornam/ did correctly with their business from the start by offering good discounts when buying larger quanta. Good quality and good customer service.»

This second vendor shows the first vendor how not only price is important but also offering good communication and extra services seem to be very important. Easy and rapid communication is expected by the buyers, and many prove to be quite impatient. Some vendors also give bulk discounts or special prices to returning customers. Others promise full refund of money or reshipment if the buyer is not satisfied, but some might have a few restrictions on those benefits due to earlier experiences of being scammed or tough border customs:

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50 Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.
Refund policy: IMPORTANT: Refunds and reship will be treated 7 days after the estimated shipping time frame of your country (you can find them further below the page).
- 100% reship or a 50% refund in case of a no show. After a reship no refund will be assigned.
- New buyers with no transaction history get a 25% refund in case of a no show.
- Australia, NZ, Denmark, Russian, Italy, CZ and Scandinavian policy: 25% refund or a 50% reship for those destinations (we conduct these rules as there is a higher risk involved for items to reach there destination).

All these customer service-offerings are results of high competition and the buyers claiming their rights. Customer service really seems to be one of the great forces influencing online market dynamics (Holt and Lampke, 2010), and really leaves it to the consumers to keep the balance of the market. But it all comes down to the feedback system.

Reputation-Systems

Feedback is an important part of the Silk Road market and really impacts on a vendor’s reputation. It is read as a guide to first-time buyers and is commonly used to signal if something is wrong. So the effects might be bad for business but it can also have good impacts. The feedback system represents reputation scales that makes the market run more fluidly and efficiently and it also encourages good behavior and reduces the risk associated with business transactions (Décary-Hétu and Dupont, 2013). One example of good behavior is how vendors seem to be more truthful about their drug batches. Like this vendor, who is keeping a stock update in his profile in order to inform his buyers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STOCK UPDATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ketamine stocks are OK – Just isting 1g again to ration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola MDMA stocks are GOOD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mephedrone stocks are GOOD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correct information is very important because of the feedback system; it is better to sell a batch for less money if the quality is not as good, than to lie and get punished through bad feedback. This shows how the feedback system leaves the market wheel in the hands of the buyers. Because of its important role affecting the actor positions, the feedback seems to be largely steering the market (Holt, 2013; Martin, 2013). The ones leaving comments are the buyers, which mean that the feedback system gives a lot of power to them. But there are other factors influencing a vendor’s reputation.

Reputation is not something randomly distributed among participants in an online criminal market and there are many factors affecting the reputation at the same time (Décary-

51 Retrieved from a vendor profile 15/9/2014.
The first important factor is the number of awards received which is connected to the personal characteristic of the nickname. This often depends on group memberships and the consistency of a nickname and profile shows stability and attracts returning customers. Here, the administrators play a major role in distributing reputation, allowing certain vendors to get different titles and rewards (Décary-Hétu and Dupont, 2013). Secondly is the number of days the vendor has been active, which is usually given in their profile. This points towards more experienced members which often are sought for their advice and expertise (Décary-Hétu and Dupont, 2013:188). Another number that might count positively is the amount of feedback, which shows the size of the business (Martin, 2014:44). Lastly, is the size of network. A large amount of returning customers shows a certain satisfaction and success usually observed in positive feedback. Being active on the discussion forum is also a plus for the business showing availability towards the actual and potential buyers.

Negative feedback or accusations might not stick, but they may create a reasonable doubt in other participant’s mind (Décary-Hétu and Dupont, 2013:191). It is therefore important that the vendors correct the problems when they get negative feedback (Holt and Lampke, 2010:44). A Norwegian vendor is clearly trying to repair his reputation in the forum, by responding to rumors even though he prefers keeping a low profile: «I want to keep a low profile, but when the gossip starts spinning around, I just get so pissed off!». Then a few sentences further down he actually ends up dismissing one of his buyers spreading bad rumors: «After this trade is done, I prefer you rather buy from someone else than us.». In this situation the vendor blames the buyer. If that is a smart choice or not is hard to know, but I have also seen other examples of vendors thinking about reputation before money. The feedback system is clearly giving the customers a lot of power, and it is important to the vendors to try and fix it as fast as possible. The feedback might also have more negative outcomes which were not intended when first made (Martin, 2014:43). One is an over reliance of consumers on trusted sellers with a great record of success, making it hard for new vendors to enter the market (Martin, 2014:43; Xiao, Ju and Fan, 2013). Another weakness is the potential “gaming”, for example through “dummy” transactions with false positive reviews. Other vendors might also produce false negative feedback on a competing vendor page (Martin, 2014:44). Feedback does not necessarily provide accurate information, but is a way of creating a system of self-regulation that creates the social system of Silk Road, giving most of the power to the consumers.

52 Both retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
5.5 Effects of the Social World

In this chapter I have been giving you an analysis of the social world inside of Silk Road and how it shows that the participants, and especially the buyers, have a massive force in forming the structure. People enter Silk Road often with common motivations from the outside, such as sharing knowledge, gaining information, and joining a cryptomarket and all its goods. These motivations are forming an organizational morality, which leads to creating a feeling of togetherness and social bonding. Similar motivations make people meet and create connections with each other. The connections are developed into close community bonds, where social relationships are created through interaction in both the discussion forum and on the market itself. The participants have different opinions on which community they belong to and there seems to be different levels of connections. The massive force of the participants is clearly affecting the formation of Silk Road and the administrator seems to be listening. Even when different organizing principles such as rules and role divisions are introduced it seems to be founded on the participants need for order to feel secure and part of a collective. But these principles do not exist naturally on Silk Road and tries to hide the chaos that is its true reality.

It has been valuable to add an extra level of analysis to this chapter by using Deleuze and Guattari’s theories. Deleuze and Guattari’s thoughts have led me to see how individuals can affect the larger market structure through having collective motivations and creating an organizational morality based on strong connections of desire. To understand the internal morality you have to turn outwards and open up for understanding external connections and influences. This is also important when you attempt to understand the social life and how community bonds are being formed. People make relationships on different levels both through agreements and disagreements. Connections are usually made through people’s desires, and disagreements are one way to see the different plateaus of community that grows. Some connections create a bulb in a forum discussion, such as the Norwegian one, while others do not connect until a higher level like attending cryptomarkets. Even so, the community-feeling on the Silk Road level is seen to survive the closure of the first version of the website, making the cryptomarket able to re-emerge a few days later. That is a sign for Silk Road being a rhizome structure. But it is also filled with unnatural structures like forum hierarchies and market role divisions that are created in attempts to make some order out of the chaos. These organizing structures should be added into the overall rhizomatic structure to
see how the overall organization really takes place. Using Deleuze and Guattari to analyze the internal part of Silk Road has opened me up to see the chaos that is taking place behind the societal structures and especially how the buyers and consumers in this specific drug market have a lot of power in their hands.
6 Influences from the General Society

Every social structure is influenced by elements from the general society and Silk Road is no exception. Different constraints and opportunities are affecting how the market is run. Cryptomarkets would not exist without the technological opportunity to start an online market, but these developments have also created a new division of social inequality among drug users. Another market constraint is the law enforcement that through actions and rules makes the market protects itself and its participants to take certain steps. Silk Road is also highly connected to conventional drug markets and they show an interchanging relationship where the connections go both ways. Media is another influencing element that not only creates an image of Silk Road among the general population, but also seems to have impact on the market participants. These and other elements are some of the influences from the general society forming Silk Road that will be discussed in this chapter and connected with Deleuze and Guattari’s theories.

6.1 Networked Technologies: Constraining Opportunities

The development of communication technology like the Internet has laid the groundwork for cryptomarkets’ existence. Through this development, opportunities have been created for criminal markets to run almost without any threats. Technology is, therefore, an important element to consider when understanding the wholeness and context of Silk Road. This also coincides with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory where they clearly support an interest towards the technological parts of organizations (Lawley, 2013). In this way, technology can be understood as a human contribution making it possible to create assemblages and rhizomatic movements and not only as something physically compact (Lawley, 2013). But it is also important to remember that not everyone has access to these technologies, and the creation of cryptomarkets seems to be leading to a division of social classes among drug users and vendors.
**Developing Opportunities**

Networked technologies such as the Internet have changed the world in many ways. The main reason for creating the Internet was to facilitate relationships, something that it has achieved both socially and for business (McCusker, 2006). The earlier remote drug fanatic can now turn to the Internet to join online spots like Silk Road for relational opportunities with other drug actors (Lavorgna, 2014; Broadhurst et al., 2014). These new connections give many advantages that are hard to achieve on the street, such as detailed information, lower prices and a better range of high quality drugs. The Internet has also developed new organizational opportunities through the ease of communication. Many financial and organizational means that earlier put a stop to developments are no longer setting restrictions. One great change is the possibility to communicate on a small scale but still reaching out globally (Wall, 2014). Another opening is that cyber-hotspots like Silk Road are providing vendors a managerial opportunity to run their business and create direct connection between suppliers and consumers (Lavorgna, 2014; McCusker, 2006; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). Internet also gives you access to multiple sources for information and recent updates of what is happening around the world. Not having access leaves you out in many parts of the society and the world of drugs is proving to be no exception.

**New Social Barriers**

The Internet has developed many possibilities for people around the world to create social relationships, manage their business, and access knowledge in new and easier ways. But many people are left out of this new online domain. Many locations have no Internet access, or if they do it is only in public places such as library or café. Researchers suggest that a new division of social inequality is growing, where people without online access are becoming segregated from the general society based on information and access to the global world of consumers (Aas, 2007). This social division is not only pointing to third world countries where the online development has not reached, but also less wealthy sub-groups in Western societies. In countries, such as Norway, it is almost expected that everyone is online, interacting through different social media channels or at least having access to information. But what happens to the ones without Internet access?

A division among the drug population based on Internet access is starting to become visible in the society. Many drug users do not have access to a personal computer, and if they
do, the delays with Internet purchase might be perceived as unacceptably long (Gordon, Forman and Siatkowski, 2006). This especially points towards people addicted to drugs for a long time often to heavy drugs such as heroine or amphetamines. Not only are they left out in the general society, but without Internet access they also risk getting marginalized in the drug community. Cryptomarkets offer an access to a market with multiple drugs for a lesser price, as well as, a huge amount of information, and it is also proclaimed to offer a low-risk drug environment. Lacking access might lead to a hierarchy among drug consumers, but it also might create a difference among vendors as well. Drug chains from some locations will have to remain long because of drug type and origin, despite the possibilities in the global world of communication technology (Martin, 2014). Vendors participating in the online market are more accessible and might steal a lot of customers, which further can force street vendors to lower their prices. Internet is therefore not only creating possibilities, but also puts restrictions on the consumers not being able to access these new cryptomarkets, which is something that challenges the rhizomatic-image of Internet connections.

**A Limited Rhizome**

Internet’s facilitation of social relationships can easily be seen through Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory, where connections are spreading out in all directions and multiple influences form the structure. These are great opportunities for most people, but the ones not having access are being left out. In other words, the rhizomatic expansion happening through Internet connections is not for everyone. The restrictions are not made by virtual hierarchies or categorizations as Deleuze and Guattari write about, but the actual physical disconnection of not having the same possibilities as other people. It is therefore important to move away from the rhizomatic structure as a theoretical mindset to see other connections that are influenced by the structure but not directly connected. Disconnected drug participants do have other contacts of getting drugs and information, but these do not cross hubs of connectivity such as Silk Road. When being dependent on the street life of drugs and physical connections, there are larger risks of being discovered and getting sanctioned. People buying drugs online can remain at home and explore the drugs themselves, relatively safely. This has made it easier to make better choices concerning drug use and a type of “drug elite” of informed users and custom-oriented vendors seems to have been created. Risk still exists on cryptomarkets as well, and law enforcement is doing what they can to stop the drug flow.
6.2 Law Enforcement: Setting Constraints

Cryptomarkets have expanded at express speed since the trend started just a few years ago, leaving big challenges for law enforcement agencies. Especially the use of encryption technology and postal services has created concerns for law enforcement around the world regarding how they can manage these new developments (Martin, 2013; Kripos, 2014; Kripos, 2015; EMCDDA, 2014; UNODC, 2013). Different tactics have been tried to interfere in the digital drug business, but it is difficult to say if their actions have succeeded. Threats from law enforcement was a main reason for moving into encrypted online areas and the structure of Silk Road kept evolving thereafter, as I will further discuss in the following section.

Taking on a New Criminal Reality

New actions are set into life, such as specialized anti-cryptomarket cyber-policing operations, digital forensics, improving mail scanning procedures, and an undermining of the infrastructure that online traders depend upon (Martin, 2014). Different types of policing intelligence and risk profiling can be helpful to attack cryptomarkets and close them down, but the problem is that these tactics are highly costly and invasive (Martin, 2014). Other challenges are met in the law systems, such as legal loopholes for new substances or how to gather enough evidence for court (Walsh, 2011; Lavorgna, 2014; Martin, 2014). Law enforcement resources seem limited in the digital world, and not all countries are up-to-date (Grabosky, 2004). The challenges are many; decisions about where the money for crime prevention should be spent and how big the threat of online drug markets is towards society will affect the cryptomarket and how it is run in the future.

Police organizations have collaborated across national borders for a long time with an exchange of information and advice. This was an earlier advantage when fighting crime, but with the flourishing of cryptomarkets and Internet forums the connectedness has also reached the criminal world (Martin, 2014). On Silk Road, the participants are discussing trafficking-related topics, giving notices and warnings, and sharing a lot about custom controls at the borders. The information is spread from a variety of sources, such as anecdotal accounts, uninformed speculation, advice pages and confidential documents (Martin, 2014). This
example from a Norwegian vendor is providing information about his own experiences with the border customs when receiving packages:\(^53\):

«For everyone asking if it is risky buying from abroad: Norway has one of the most effective customs in the world and we are all the way up among Australia, Canada. It might get through, but it is a real chance of it getting stopped. I have tried many of the ones writing 93% success rate to Norway and ordered 2x where both packages have been stopped, so that's probably pure fantasy. Some things, of course, enters easier than others, a lot of things matters: sender, shipment country, receiver (It is easier to get packages through the customs when the receiver is a company.).»

This buyer is giving advice to other people wanting to buy drugs from across the border, saying that it is very risky. He talks both from his own experience, but also from general knowledge about customs. By sharing experiences like this the participants on Silk Road learn how to protect themselves and make it harder for law enforcement to catch them. An absence of direct physical contact is one of the huge challenges that makes most of the conventional anti-drug tactics impossible to use (Martin, 2014). Other challenges for law enforcement are geographical and practical restrictions, such as national borders and unsure limitations, making them a bit crippled against criminals online (McCusker, 2006; Grabosky, 2004).

As for now, the first known attack from law enforcement was when the FBI closed down Silk Road 1.0. It happened through infiltration by undercover agents and searching for digital evidence trails, approximately two years after it started (Christin, 2014; Guardian, 2013). The encrypted network had not been solved; it was the administrator who had given away some personal information on the regular Internet. The fastest result from the first closure of Silk Road was the enormous rise in the value of Bitcoins. Law enforcement interruptions like this are seen to impact conventional drug markets by affecting the prices, which again is said to affect consumption (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998). This was also the case with Silk Road. The prices did not seem to increase in general, but the customers suddenly had a lot more value of Bitcoins to spend. Instead of being an act of knockout, the closure lead to a “post-Silk Road”-phase characterized by increased competition, diversity and innovation, instead of one market dominating as earlier (Martin, 2014:80). The confidence of consumers’ integrity did not seem to have been shaken. Instead, FBI’s closure of Silk Road only led to a migration to alternate dark web marketplaces resulting in massive growth of other cryptomarkets (Van Buskirk et al., 2014). When Silk Road 2.0 returned as a new version, it again grew to be one of the biggest cryptomarkets, before being closed again in November 2014. Silk Road is very adapting towards changing conditions (Martin, 2014) and its flexible and fast-changing characteristics are perfect when resisting law enforcement.

\(^53\) Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
disruption (Calderoni, 2012). But the market also contains many skilled participants that are interested in technological developments and therefore employ the power to develop themselves further.

**A Survival of the most Technological**

The Internet is almost impossible to govern (Walsh, 2011). It’s wide space makes the attempts of control from law enforcement quite difficult and lets the technologically skilled criminals escape from being an easy bait (Wall, 2014). The cat and mouse play among the police and criminals have now moved from being street-wise to being about technological skills. Even though multiple law enforcement agencies have tried to close down cryptomarkets, it has only lead to an exploding development of new marketplaces. The way these closures have influenced cryptomarkets is just like Deleuze and Guattari’s description of a rhizomatic structure being an asignifying rupture that will continue to exist (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The destroying of such a rhizomatic structure will only result in it waking up in a different place or based on the old one (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). A rhizomatic structure is always connected to other instances and impossible to totally destroy. This is exactly what happened to Silk Road and other cryptomarkets. Silk Road 1.0 closed, resulting in the expansion of other cryptomarket and creation of many more. And, after a few days, Silk Road 2.0 rose again with a new administrator. This development has led many researchers to advise law enforcement to follow the market demand instead of attacking it (Malm and Bichler, 2011; Castronova, 2006; Molnar, Egelman and Christin, 2010) which will only force the participants to move to more secure and possibly hidden sites (Holt and Lampke, 2010; Holt, 2013; Stallwitz, 2012). If this is taken into consideration among law agencies is unsure, but their activities will continue to change the structure of cryptomarkets anyhow.

**6.3 Conventional Drug Markets: Interdependence**

Cryptomarkets take place in a different environment than conventional drug markets, but they remain highly dependent on each other. Both markets have mostly the same customers and commodities and a development in one of the markets should impact the other one. Two market characteristics that have interchanging impacts among the markets are differences in social structure and the availability of information, both creating expectations
among the participants and furthering higher demands. Splitting them in two different markets is not a clear black and white division, but they are different because of the varying opportunities and constraints when being situated in the real world or in cyberspace (Wall, 2014). The generally common trait among markets is their definition as a place where a buyer and a vendor can locate one another in order to conduct a transaction, but how it is done differs (May and Hough, 2004). Differences between cryptomarkets and conventional drug markets have been shown throughout this thesis, but in this section I will emphasize how they are interchanged through pushing and pulling each other in different directions.

**An Interchanging Relationship**

Cryptomarkets and conventional drug markets are tightly connected to each other since they are both suppliers of the same type of goods. The participants are similar, even though Silk Road seems to be attractive for new buyers. There is no doubt that their former experience has been brought to Silk Road and is forming structural elements, such as security measures and expectations of stereotypes, as mentioned in Chapter 5. Online markets depend on the outside world for products and transportation, so any change in conventional drug markets concerning price and supplies would be noticed. It is easier, though, to see the how cryptomarkets have affected conventional markets, especially concerning drug prices. Conventional drug markets are known for large price variations in market levels, among locations, over time, and from transaction to transaction (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998; May and Hough, 2004:559). They usually also increase the drug prices due to factors such as cost of import, labor, products, and risk compensation (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998). Many of these are costs that vendors on cryptomarkets can ignore, or they can at least choose to ignore them. The circulation of information online makes sure the prices are more stable than in conventional markets, because the consumers across markets are communicating (Caulkins and Reuter, 1998). The pressure should therefore be quite high on conventional markets with this increased competition and might lead to changes concerning price, purity, and availability (Van Buskirk et al., 2014; Bilgrei and Bretteville-Jensen, 2013). Silk Road also tempts individuals by offering benefits such as customer service, a relatively safe environment, and an informative social life. The online consumer has been empowered by the feedback system and the forum’s rumor mill that reaches out to everyone on the market. Together, this might make the consumers into conscious buyers that know what they want and what their rights are.
The drug market in an overall perspective has become more competitive, especially since cryptomarkets are available everywhere as an alternative to street- or home-markets. But not everyone has access. Street markets will always have some requests and what actually is seen by interviewing buyers of Silk Road is that most of them prefer using conventional markets for cannabis and other high-risk detection drugs (Bosnes, 2015). Silk Road is used for “unknown” drugs, synthetic pills, and medicine that are easier to get through customs (Bosnes, 2015). Conventional markets and cryptomarkets today are offering different realities and satisfying multiple needs. That might change in the near future but the interconnection will always exist due to dependence of physical drugs to sell. Other aspects that might change their interdependence is the development of organized crime and Internet.

Organized Crime Online

A current discussion concerning cybercrime is how conventional organized crime will pair up with the Internet (McCusker, 2006): Have the technological advances facilitated the commission of physical crime or has it led to the creation of a new wave of traditional, but virtual, organized crime? Some claim that cybercrime is only «old wine in new bottles», which is recognizable crime committed in a completely different way (Grabosky, 2004; McCusker, 2006). Drug markets fit that description, but another question is the existence of traditionally organized groups in the online environment. Today traditional criminal groups are rarely found online, something that is dependent on their need or capacity to use Internet in their business (McCusker, 2006). Motivations for entering the Internet world are many, such as more profitability and less risk, but traditional groups are still lacking online (McCusker, 2006). If such organized groups should enter Silk Road for business they will probably create change, but an even larger transformation could happen if the participants online start organizing (McCusker, 2006). This could then be established as organized crime in the form of a relatively large number of small independent individuals, who all compete against each other for market share (Desroches, 2007). Until now, cybercriminals have not organized in larger groups and they evade control by traditional organized crime groups in much the same way as they evade control by government (Wall, 2014). At the same time, this thesis has shown a large degree of individual participation on Silk Road that might be seen as a place where people have started to organize in a group. Changes might happen, but what is true is that conventional markets and cryptomarkets are interconnected and open for contacts.
to be established across organizations. Therefore, organized groups or not, connections will spread out to all types of criminal hubs and highlight their connections.

**Rhizomatic Connections**

The way cryptomarkets and conventional markets work by affecting each other is a great example of how rhizomatic connections are not only working in one direction. Connections, in a Deleuze and Guattari perspective, are working in multiple directions and crisscross each other. Hubs such as Silk Road, where social connections meet, are affected by both inside and outside elements, but the creation of a hub itself also affects those elements in return. This does not only concern cryptomarkets and conventional markets, but works towards networked technologies and law enforcement. Silk Road forms its structure from constraints and opportunities from outside institutions, but they also reflect back in an interchanging relationship. A Deleuze-Guattarian perspective on the organized crime online discussion opens up for other influencing ways organized crime and Internet might develop. The discussion of organized crime online is led into a binary classification between computer-oriented or computer-focused crime which might have negative impact when understanding cryptomarkets (Martin, 2013). A black or white picture does not explain a phenomenon; the society is created out of different tones of grey (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Maybe one should not assess if the online crime is organized or not, but rather focus on how it is shaped and formed, which is how Deleuze and Guattari say a society should always be understood.

**6.4 Media: Constructing an Image**

Cryptomarkets have often been presented in the media over the last few years, especially since the closure of Silk Road 1.0. The presentations vary, but mostly show a cryptomarket reality that is portrayed in a sensationalistic way by exaggerating the dark world of criminals and illegality. This creates an image of the phenomenon for other people around the world, but it also affects the participants on Silk Road and therefore the market structure. Media manages to create fear through telling stories of new and deadly drugs and about online contracts for murder, which also spread into the market itself. Not all rhizomatic connections are wanted by both sides and a portrayed image is never the same as the reality.
Media has always been contributing to a social construction of crime and Internet is no exception when presented as infested with dangerous individuals (Aas, 2007). Cryptomarkets are often presented in a sensationalistic way that creates an image of these virtual spaces as entirely lawless and where anything goes (Martin, 2014:6). Some general images of the offenders are sometimes created, even though their original nations and motivations are more diverse than what is presented (Broadhurst et al., 2014). James Martin (2014) finds Silk Road to be resistant against negative media commentary about the market, but through observing the forum I found many examples where media presentations had influenced the participants. Media’s interpretation of Silk Road is often commented on in the discussion forum, such as this participant who really shows a hostile attitude towards any type of publicity: «All publicity is evil. You cannot even expect an interesting or thought-through article.». The visibility of drug markets has shown to shape enforcement action against them (May and Hough, 2004:550), something that might be the case with Silk Road as well. The closure of Silk Road 1.0 led to a lot of attention and while the media covered Silk Road the number of users connecting to the Tor network really hit a peak; going from approximately 1 million to more than 5 million (Dolliver, 2015). The numbers decreased the following year, but still remained twice as high than when Silk Road 1.0 existed. This might be a coincidence, but still it seems likely that they became more known through the media coverage. The increased attention is a threat for Silk Road’s security and is why they are met with hostility when they are trying to get in touch with participants, such as this vendor is expressing:

«We keep on getting strange requests and questions putting us in danger if we were stupid enough to fall for it! NRK contacted us too for a couple of weeks ago and asked if we wanted to answer some questions for a story they were working on. They said they had been following the Norwegian SR environment since the start and said they had observed us gathering again on SR2. We didn't give them any response because we do not feel safe on their intentions nor like the publicity. To put it that way, people are watching everything we do in here!»

This vendor does not trust media and is not happy about the surveillance they keep on the site. There is a reason why they are on an encrypted network; their actions are illegal, and they avoid anything increasing the risk of getting caught. But at the same time they are totally aware of how public Silk Road is and that they are being watched.

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54 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
55 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author. NRK is the Norwegian governmental broadcasting company for both radio and TV.
Media attention does not only create fear among Silk Road’s participants for security concerns, but they are also affected in other ways. Some participants in the forum talk about things they have learned through media, such as this consumer who watched videos in different newspapers on how customs work:

«I have seen a few videos in online newspapers where you get a sneak peak on how the customs operate. It seems like all the bigger packages get scanned, while letters just briefly get looked through. I think they catch drug shipments in letters based on how suspicious the letter looks, shipping country, drug dog, and recognition of letters previously seized.»

A border custom’s practice is useful knowledge to the participants and there are many that seek the media for useful information and news. Other media coverages seem to be less helpful by aiming for sensation and creating fear. A discussion in the Norwegian forum thread concerned the media attention to the new so-called crocodile-drug that spread in Russia (see VG, 2012). Many participants reacted with fear, while others were more skeptical to media in general:

«It is strange to see how the media still manage to steer people’s attitudes. Even the ones staying out of the mainstream society. (...) It is interesting to see how media creates a reaction among people without going in-depth in their story. “Krokodil” is a direct result of the prohibition of drugs and would never exist if there were regulations allowing sales of similar substances with a higher security profile.»

Many tragic drug stories, such as this one, are often being linked to cryptomarkets even though the connection is minimal. It might seem like the connection is made because of Internet’s mysterious and uncomprehensive characteristic giving an extra sense of fear. Cryptomarkets lack of violence and other types of drama online which might push the media to search for other sensational things to say about them (Martin, 2013). But markets like Silk Road are not as lawless as they are presented and one can no longer buy murders and child pornography on the site. Since the cryptomarkets are changing in such a rate, the media stories are often outdated and stuck in the first version of Silk Road. Additionally, it is often built on publications made by law enforcements.

**Law Enforcement Publications**

Images are not only created by media presentations, but also through publications made by law enforcement agencies. They are usually quite hostile toward cryptomarkets, and present them as highly subversive and socially and economically harmful for the general society (Martin, 2014). They also show an interest of making cryptomarkets feel insecure by

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56 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
57 Retrieved from the Norwegian discussion thread 8/9/2014. Translated by author.
overrating their own powers of detection (Martin, 2014). Cryptomarket administrators are often portrayed as «ruthless villains focused solely upon the exploitation of a vulnerable and victimized public» while vendors are self-interested criminals that are highly dangerous, but also cowards hiding behind technology (Martin, 2014:76). Just in order to create a resistance in the society and scare people from participating. On the other side is the administrators of cryptomarkets that are “talking up” the security levels that protect their users, sometimes even giving it too good of a reputation (Martin, 2014). Their interest is of course to maintain or heighten the number of participants. There are clearly no impartial sources of information in these contrasting views about a moral ground and a portrayal of the state (Martin, 2014). And it is up to people to choose which image they want to believe.

**Constructed Presentations**

Silk Road is presented through many different eyes that have different intentions with what they are telling. The participants on Silk Road distance themselves from these general representations of the market, but they do seem to get affected anyhow. They cannot avoid being part of the physical world and media coverage is non-escapable. Presentations through media and other institutions rarely describe what is experienced as the true reality among the participants. This leads to the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of decalcomania where a story is never identical when copied. A story that is passed on from person to person always has a personal effect added that depends on experience and background, working both consciously and unconsciously (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Images of Silk Road, such as presented throughout media and law enforcement, can give a false impression of being a true description of the cryptomarket reality. And might further lead to a realization of a virtual reality where the copy becomes the new reality.

**6.5 Postal Systems and Real World Events**

Real world phenomenon such as different social institutions and technological developments are all important when forming Silk Road’s structure. Cryptomarkets are also directly connected to the real world through their use of the postal system as drug mules to deliver packages. Any change postal systems around the world will affect the distribution on Silk Road and more broadly the market structure. This direct dependence in the physical world also makes online markets sensitive to any real world event influencing drug supplies.
or transportation. But also financial crisis and developments of third world countries might affect Silk Road. Such events happen both on global and local levels and will be further discussed in this section.

**New Drug Mules**

Cryptomarkets are situated on the Internet, but there are still parts that make them dependent on changes in the physical world; especially when thinking about mail delivery, and how it might become a difficult reliance (Aldridge and Décary-Hétu, 2014). Receiving physical letters is getting more and more unusual and countries are introducing electronic mail as the main way to receive letters even from official institutions. Making the amount of physical mail smaller makes it easier to spot letters with illegal substances as content, or at least heighten the suspicion when someone receives quite a few letters from other countries. But while the letters are becoming fewer, the amount of merchandise ordered from Internet sites is growing. A few years ago, there were only stores or investors ordering large shipments of merchandise, but people today are ordering for their own use which means smaller amounts at a more frequent pace. Another element connected to delivery is the growing privatization of postal services where separate companies make great promises of tracking and safely arriving merchandise. So even though the amount of letters is declining, the postal service is just facing a more complicated structure than before.

Cryptomarket participants seem to keep themselves up-to-date on postal developments and subsequently adjust their delivering and stealth. This type of information is widely shared on Silk Road to help fellow participants:

«Like, if you deliver packages after 1530, they won't get shipped until the next day. If you deliver packages on Friday it will stay in the post office until Monday, the postal system has cut many full-time jobs the last few years as well. Like in my case, when I send a package going to Oslo it usually arrived the next day, maximum 2 days, now the packages have to go through a different city to be sorted and then shipped to Oslo. In most cases when it takes a couple of days extra it is usually the postal system or the vendor that is a bit slow.»

This participant is clearly updated on the Norwegian postal system and he also mentions changes from the last few years. Packages that arrived in a couple of days are now taking longer because of rearrangements in the postal system. General information about the postal system and shipment of packages are commonly discussed, but how vendors have packed the goods is a strictly forbidden theme because of security issues. The few stories of how the

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drugs were received explain highly creative ways to hide the drugs from the border control and it is no wonder that it is difficult to detect mail ordered drugs. Shipment methods also seem to vary a lot due to a need to show variation in order to reduce detection, but also because postal systems vary according to country; while it is safe for Americans to receive a tracked package, Australians are choosing not to because of the risk of having to sign when receiving such a package. Norway appears to be one of the most difficult countries to order drugs from, which is why the Norwegian vendors seem to be doing quite well with local business. The shipping of drugs makes Silk Road always directly connected through the physical world and it cannot avoid being affected by important events.

**Influencing Events**

Because of Silk Road’s tight connection to the physical world, it is clear that important events around the world will affect the market structure. Some countries and regions are haunted by wars or poverty and are falling outside Internet phenomenon such as cryptomarkets. But this will not last forever. For example, what will happen when technological changes advance in remote locations, such as Afghanistan or villages in Latin America, where a lot of the drugs are manufactured or grown (Martin, 2013). Such a transformation might lead to huge changes in cryptomarkets; new groups of vendors that are closer to the drug source might enter the markets. Other challenges would then follow, such as language and technological skills. Today, Silk Road is characterized by participants from English speaking countries, but also other countries where English is well known (Christin, 2013; Dolliver, 2015). But there is nothing in the way of creating cryptomarkets in other languages except that the customer base might be smaller.

Other events have also proven to effect drug markets through the opening of new criminal opportunities, such as political crisis, environmental disasters, and so on (Lavorgna and Sergi, 2014). Anita Lavorgna and Anna Sergi (2014) look at how the financial crisis assisted organized crime in Italy and how the situation created economic opportunities for the criminal gangs to make extra earnings. The market situation made it possible for organized crime groups to benefit from the financial crisis by taking small risks with large profits; people needed services but did not have the money to pay for it; so the groups offered their services for less money and ended up earning quite well despite the crisis. Important events like these will affect the whole society, both locally and on a global plane. Cryptomarkets will
not escape form the effects of such global events. Therefore, changes will be adjusted to the physical world and its events.

6.6 A Complicated Rhizomatic Map

As seen throughout this chapter, many parts of the cryptomarket are affected from the outside and it is important to understand these various processes in order to comprehend Silk Road (Martin, 2014). Networked technologies have led to an expansion of connections around the world, both in legal and illegal environments. But even though many people have the possibility to use this facilitator of relationships, of business organization and of sharing of information, some people are left out with no Internet access. Technology is therefore not only creating opportunities, but also restrictions. Law enforcement agencies are another example of outside institutions setting restrictions on drug markets and forcing the market into an encrypted environment. They have tried in different ways to destroy cryptomarkets, but the Internet context and the nature of cryptomarkets have made them quite resistant and flexible to threats. Silk Road is also connected to the real world through conventional drug markets that work in an interchanging relationship with cryptomarkets, where they are close connected due to products, prices, and social connections. Other influences from the general society come through the media, where false images of cryptomarkets are created and the participants are affected through sensationalistic stories creating fear and anger. The postal system and real world events are also elements that form Silk Road’s structure.

Together, these influences push and pull Silk Road in different directions, both through direct opportunities and restrictions, but also by encouraging the participants to start acting differently. A drug market cannot be reduced to a specific phenomenon without considering other phenomenon making it important to look at external influences (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The real world influences are all examples of different power systems that do not shape experiences alone but work in a multiple way affecting each other and cooperating at the same time (Henriksen and Miller, 2012). This is heavily supported by Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of a rhizome-structure where the principle of multiplicity stands strong (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Rhizomatic expansions happen fast through networked technologies, but it also creates the questions if they are restricted and not for everyone. Cryptomarkets include a lesser risk to be discovered by law enforcement and offers an opportunity to not take part in any physical drug environment. This might end up with
creating a social division among drug users where some are more privileged than others. Expanding the understanding of connections stretching outside of cryptomarkets also opens up the eyes to see how they are directly connected to the physical world. Packages are sent through postal systems and drugs have different physical origins. One should also not forget that the participants are always situated in the real world and also gather information through media and other sources that can form Silk Road’s structure. Connections should therefore be seen as a complicated rhizomatic map where all the roads are interchanging and never one-directional but comes from every direction.
7 Silk Road – A Controlled Entrepreneurial Drug Market

The structure of Silk Road is different from conventional drug markets. The online environment has created a new type of drug markets where characteristics such as knowledge and information sharing have become important. Basic market principles like trust and social relations have also developed differently in the online environment, having great effects on Silk Road's general market structure. The social life on Silk Road is very important for the market to function and affects the organization quite heavily. Especially the costumers are given a great deal of power and without their support neither the vendors nor the administrator would succeed within the market. Vendors also have to live up to giving customer service of high standards. Additionally, the social interaction creates a closer connection and community-feeling gathering the participants in joint groups reinforcing their power.

Elements from the general society have also proven to be an important part in forming the market. Even though Silk Road is online, it depends greatly on the physical world outside. Technological developments and threats from law enforcements are the main reasons cryptomarkets exist in the first place, while media impacts both the individual participants and the organizational structure. Due to supplies and shipping, Silk Road is also dependent on real world events happening in conventional drug markets or other arenas such as postal services. These are just some of the elements justifying Silk Road's highly flexible structure that is being pushed and pulled in different directions depending on coercions or opportunities from the general society.

As a concluding remark, I will summarize the analytical findings analyzed with theories of Deleuze and Guattari, then present Silk Road as an example of a new and complex market structure. Lastly, I will show how Deleuze and Guattari are valuable for future research and how cryptomarkets open up for many interesting research possibilities.

7.1 A Chaotic Hub of Connections

Deleuze and Guattari’s theories have given a new perspective on drug markets by catching Silk Road’s complex market structure and how it is formed by different dynamics.
Their theoretical encouragement to accept the chaos that reigns in the social world has caught the interaction between both rhizomatic and hierarchical structures on Silk Road. This interplay is also underlined in their understanding of multiplicity as divided into order and organization, which emphasizes the importance of expanding one’s view to reach outside of the structure itself.

**Accepting chaos**

A fundamental thought of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories is the idea of a rhizomatic structure being the main type of social organization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The rhizome is based on paths running in all directions, creating connections and smaller hubs of lines crossing each other. Humans react to this chaos by creating hierarchies and binary opposites as imaginary structures of order in a more naturally rhizomatic world. Silk Road looks just like a rhizome; it is heavily flexible, consists of multiplicities and heterogeneity, and makes connections in different directions, but still has a point of departure. Hierarchies and formal structures were also found in the market and were accepted as important imaginary structures organizing the market through simple understandings. Despite Silk Road’s characterization of uncertainty and changes, there exists an imagined stability where the need for common ground has led to the creation of organizing tools, such as categories and role division. These attempts to organize the market and forum increase the trust among the participants and the security level is perceived as higher; the imaginary role divisions and hierarchization calms the participants and makes Silk Road more likely to function. Opening up for both rhizomes and hierarchies made the analysis accept the chaos of roles on Silk Road.

When understanding chaos, it is important to include as many connections as possible to see fully how an organization works (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Silk Road’s situation in an online environment made it important to focus on different impacts from both the general society and internally from the market. This coincide with the encouragement of understanding today’s organizations as clusters of labyrinthine networks, where the outside is always affecting the inside, instead of the old and conservative type of closed organizations where tradition was stronger than change (Lippens, 2001). Silk Road’s market does not only develop itself, but there are connections to the general society creating opportunities and restraints that form the market structure. Participants and the market itself are tightly
connected to real world happenings and a lot will be missed by not removing focus from the cryptomarket’s borders. Just as in Ronnie Lippens’ (2001) contemporary organizations, the participants are accepted as resources for Silk Road bringing with them information and networking from the outside. Without the overall connecting participants, Silk Road would not be as successful as it was.

**Multiplicity of Order and Organization**

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of multiplicity emphasizes the value of including connections originating from both internal and external aspects. Multiplicity is divided into *multiplicity of order* and *multiplicity of organization*, where order represents the external and more formal structures of an organization and organization is the internal and changing elements (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Including both aspects in research will help to accept more connections and also see how they implement different types of structural elements. External institutions have a need to create a structural definition so that it is manageable and understandable, establishing a formal part of the structure (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Contrary to this process is life inside the organization, such as participant’s motivations and personal experiences driven by human desire (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Participants’ desires are affecting Silk Road greatly, where their motivations and the feeling of togetherness have made them affect the structure. Through drift and interaction, the power has become a great force, resulting in what Deleuze and Guattari would call deconstructive and non-organizational (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Desire consists of a power creating lines of flight that make it possible to escape from the formal structures and make new ones. Structures that earlier were only virtual, are now possible to actualize and make into something more structured and formal (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). Silk Road is an ever-changing market, where things like security and products are always developing and being pushed towards modifications. But what is also found on Silk Road is that the desires and ideas of the participants actually long for a more formal structure where rules and social orders are wanted. So, differing from Deleuze and Guattari’s always de-structuring of desires, it seems to be working in an opposite way on Silk Road.
A Multi-Connected Hub with Imaginary Boundaries

To understand the totality of social structures, one needs to open up and see how connections are made on many levels and connected through a hub (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Therefore, a hub makes a natural place to do research, since multiple movements meet and stop there for a while. Silk Road is a place just like that: different actors from the drug business meet and cross paths in order to complete transactions or exchange knowledge. Even though the connections are not restricted to just that one web site it represents a place where a collection of actions and desires meet. A hub like Silk Road is always flexible and ever-changing and still exists even though it gets closed down. Participants keep on moving, carrying with them the notion of Silk Road that blossoms again when a new site is created.

Creating imaginary boundaries that make the participants feel part of a community is one way to make sure such a hub will keep on existing. Rules, role divisions, and moral expectations are examples that create a firmer more definable market structure. An important theme throughout the thesis has therefore been Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical concept of accepting the boundaries as experienced limitations for the participants, and to see past them and accept the chaos that is actually ruling.

Silk Road’s role divisions, rules, security measures, and descriptions created by law enforcement and media are all contributing to an understanding of Silk Road that is not necessarily true. When looking closer into the market with a Deleuze-Guattarian perspective; the structure is not as clear as it seems at first. The participants all move in different directions and they are free to act independently of their role descriptions. Language is used to enforce most of the structuring elements, coinciding with Deleuze and Guattari’s major language that is created to secure the formal structures through roles, titles and possibilities (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). The use of titles and role names laid the groundwork for what the words really contain, but they can still be interpreted in multiple ways. By looking through the meaning of these words, one discovers, again, chaos and uncertainty. For what is a category named “cocaine” to decide what it really contains, or a role title of “vendor” for who is really behind the screenname?
7.2 A New and Complex Drug Market

Silk Road is a novel and complex drug market in an Internet environment and is quite new for researchers in criminology. The academic research today is limited and the field is in need for additional research. This thesis has brought a new and inspiring view through the theories of Deleuze and Guattari. Their concepts have proven to be valuable for understanding the complexity and multiplicity of the market structure in this new landscape for criminal actions. Traditional theories and research also provide an interesting view on cryptomarkets and should not be neglected. But by starting with fresh theoretical eyes, one escapes the danger of falling into the exact same understanding of cryptomarkets as conventional drug markets. Deleuze and Guattari’s theories have challenged me to take a different approach on Silk Road as a cryptomarket, opening up for a different understanding of a new type of drug market.

Initially, Silk Road seemed to be a free and open market filled with individuals moving harmoniously in all directions. But a closer look revealed the chaos that was reigning. The Internet brings anonymity, which for the participants on Silk Road, seems like a positive attribution. But who is really trustworthy? There was a huge amount of uncertainty on Silk Road, something that does not differ from conventional markets. When buying drugs on the street or through friends-of-a-friend, one does not have a better insurance than a face to connect the transaction to in person. The insecurity on Silk Road is just shaped in a different way since it is founded in another context, or different reality. It is challenging to compare Silk Road with theories based on conventional drug markets because a cryptomarket seems to be mixing different categorizations when divided into formally and loosely structured markets (see Benson and Decker, 2010) or into open and closed marked structures (see May and Hough, 2004). Silk Road fits into most of these descriptions and adds a new understanding without specific categories. As Deleuze and Guattari’s theories underline, categories are always imaginary and do not explain the reality in a natural sense. Fitting a phenomenon into a formed description is only forceful in a negative way and can only be interesting to examine how certain elements are left out and do not fit. Throughout this thesis I have used the notion of conventional drug markets to compare it with Silk Road. Conventional drug markets are distinct and there is no one answer that fits them all. The only clear separation is the market environment being the physical world or online.
At one point, I did experiment with the idea of Silk Road just being a conventional drug market in a new suit, still representing the same old participants such as entrepreneurs, drug mules, consumers, etc. But when looking closer into conventional research, the characteristics of cryptomarkets seem to really separate from the older ones. Instead of being a drug chain consisting of different actors along the way, technological middlemen suddenly appears in the form of both web sites and third parties in transactions. Virtual drug markets partake in many different roles, but they are also helped by the mail service working as drug mules. Cryptomarkets’ complexity continues when discovering how there are different stages along a drug chain happening in the same place. Silk Road’s transactions have different goals, where some are made directly between drug makers and consumers, while others are vendors connecting with other vendors for further sales. Who is behind the screen name on Silk Road is impossible to know, but one thing they seem to have in common is their virtual image as individual entrepreneurs. Silk Road offers a structured environment for entrepreneurs to meet and act as a collective and organized group, but without giving up their individuality. Silk Road is not only about doing transactions, but also about participating socially in both the market and forum. By organizing the entrepreneurs in the way Silk Road does, a fitting market category would be a controlled entrepreneurial market. This opens up for a different understanding of cryptomarkets, underscoring the importance of being open minded and including multiple variables.

7.3 Deleuze and Guattari in Future Research

Deleuze and Guattari’s theories give a fruitful perspective on Silk Road and should be explored more in future criminological research. Their theoretical conceptions can be used to understand the complexity and chaos of other types of online criminal activity such as hacking and child pornography-rings. As in this thesis, it could help analyze the balance between individuals and social structures particularly present online. The Deleuze-Guattarian perspective should also be used outside the online environment and inspire researchers to undertake new analysis of conventional drug markets and other real world phenomenon. Hierarchies and binary opposites are too often accepted as natural ways of structuring criminal groups. Instead, one should look past terms and categories, which in a Deleuze-Guattarian sense, only create imaginary realities that disguise the chaotic reality with ordering social structures, and see what lies beyond them. Still, one should not discard the terms and
categories without accepting how they affect both the participants of the structure as well as the structure itself because of their perceived truthfulness. These Deleuze-Guattarian concepts introduce a different way of approaching social phenomenon and will lead to new perspectives on both traditional research topics and new ones.

7.4 Cryptomarkets: in Need for Research

Cryptomarkets are in need of further research and the possible topics are multiple. Many topics in need to be further explored are mentioned throughout this thesis, such as anonymity and trust. How trust is perceived in an online anonymous environment could be a whole thesis in itself: what makes people trust each other? How much does physical appearance stand for and how do the participants fill in those missing trust basics that disappear in this anonymous environment? The positives and negatives of total anonymity should also be explored further, both in connection to cryptomarkets but also for the Internet in general – how is social life online different than in the real world because of the option of hiding one’s physical appearance? This leads to other topics such as cryptomarkets’ impact on drug use around the world and how it affects conventional drug markets or traditional crime groups. And will there be a larger social division created among drug users, where people without Internet access will be marginalized? Other theories than Deleuze and Guattari should also be used to understand cryptomarket structures to add different perspectives and highpoints. Anyhow, the future research on cryptomarkets will definitely be exciting to follow and could also give important insight or inspiration towards understanding conventional drug markets.

Number of words: 38.412
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# Appendix

## Appendix A: A complete list of sales categories and drug subcategories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Categories</th>
<th>Listings</th>
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*The numbers derive from the amount of available products listed under different categories, and subcategories. This is an exact copy of Silk Road’s listings (Retrieved 26.10.2014).

<table>
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## Other Listings

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenethylamine</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antidotes</td>
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## Opioids Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opioid</th>
<th>Listings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AH-7921</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kratom</td>
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<td>Opium</td>
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## Ecstasy Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Listings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pentedrone</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentylone</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pills</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehylnone</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDAI</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethylnone</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butylone</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-MAPB</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-IT</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMA</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Dissociatives Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dioscorea</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DXM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethylketamine</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketamine</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methoxyketamine</td>
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<tr>
<td>MXE</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>PCP</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scopolamine</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiletamine</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

## Cannabis Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cannabis Type</th>
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<td>Clones</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentrates</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuttings</td>
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<td>Edibles</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>Hash</td>
<td>350</td>
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<td>Pre-rolled</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeds</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synthetic</td>
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<td>Topicals</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trim</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weed</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shake</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

## Steroids/PEDs Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Listings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clenbuterol</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanozolol</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methandrostenolone</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesterelone</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metabolism</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Growth Hormones</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCG</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluoxymesterone</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drostanolone</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromatase inhibitors</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabolic Steroids</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antagonists</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agonists</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: A complete vendor profile (Retrieved 15/9/2014).

ThePinkPanther

send a message
51 listings

vendor score: 48 out of 100
has been a vendor for 10 months
was last seen: today
ships from: Netherlands
ships to: Worldwide

report this vendor

.vendor profile

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ WELCOME TO TIPP's SUPER STORE ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

STATUS: 15-09-14 - Please people do not forget to leave a "5" star feedback if you are satisfied otherwise it appears completely empty

ADMIN QUOTE: All 2/5, 3/5, 4/5 currently appear as 1/5. The development team are actively working on fixing it

Hello everybody,

As you all noticed I have been away for a while due to security reasons. I have noticed major bad feedback in the past few days. This is something I am not happy about. Please wait with leaving feedback to early as I was not able to answer messages in the mean time while I was away. I am a 100% sure that most of you whom left bad feedback will eventually still receive there order, and yet you will not be able to change your feedback afterwards!! thnx for that.

To BE CLEAR I have been vending here for 9 months and gained one of the most successful status on SR. I would appreciate if some of you respect that and understand that this job aint always the easiest.

I never scammed one of you in my entire carrier!! I am positive that eventually this will have its turn in the right direction. Even thou I am back the once who left me 1 star without even given me a chance to solve it will not be helped whatsoever.

For those who kept there faith I want to apologize for my sudden disappearance there was no option for me left at that point. I will make everything right with you as I always do. And I want to thank you for your patience my heart is filled with gratitude towards you. Thank you for understanding.

Sincerely yours,
ThePinkPanther

✓ Update: 27-07-2014 - NEW PREMIUM Cocaine batch! This is truly the best cocaine you will find on here. Real quality cocaine is very hard to find these days. The prices went up everywhere so also with us. We choose quality over price!
✓ Update: NEW: Cocaine batch. Flake cocaine only the BEST of the BEST
✓ Update: NEW: Rolls-Royce 3D XTC pills rectangle with breaking line. The new generation 160mg MDMA party pills!
✓ Update: 100gr Premium dutch MDMA Crystals 84% EURO 997 - !!!
✓ Update: 50 gr Premium dutch MDMA Crystals 84% EURO 525. - !!!
IMPORTANT:
If you already contacted me use the REPLY button on your previous message with me. This way I can see what we have discussed about.
ONLY click "send a message" if it is your first one!

If you send us a message, DO NOT send again before we reply you, otherwise your message goes back to the top of my inbox which takes longer for us to get there.

BULK:
All Bulk orders from 1000 - EUR or more will be sent from Belgium.

Foreword:
Situated in the Netherlands/Holland gives us a widely range to access a big variety off all kinds of the best HQ drugs the world know about. You can assume that all our goods are definitely NEVER CUT with any kind of cutting, weigh resources, masking, wherewithal or any other tricks.

Everything you get with us is very carefully selected and tested with care for our beloved customers to use with true confidence!

__________________________________________________________________________

There is no other European country where you can find drugs as easy as here in Holland

__________________________________________________________________________

IF YOUR AIN'T DUTCH YOUR AIN'T MUCH

__________________________________________________________________________

We do not send to the USA!

Read the FAQ platform (end of page) before messaging me.

Hi to you all,
Welcome to ThePinkPanther
Former SR Vendor!
Former BMR Vendor!
Former Sheep vendor!
Former TonMart Vendor!

To all my old customers, I have been away for a while after the domino effect of underground sites falling. We all lost so much and may we as a community build our self's stronger now against scammers and governments oppressors.

Nothing has changed, same great price, great stealth, and especially great product. Everyone that has dealt with me knows I take good care of my customers.

__________________________________________________________________________

Why ThePinkPanther?
We provide:
- Great customer service
- TOP quality products
- Stable environment with a dedicated team
- Fast communication
- Best quality/price ratio
- Fast delivery
- Great refund policy
- Stealth packaging
- Reliability

__________________________________________________________________________

Refund policy:
IMPORTANT: Refunds and reships will be treated 7 days after the estimated shipping time frame of your country (you can find them further below the page).

- 100% reship or a 50% refund in case of a no show. After a reship no refund will be assigned.
- New buyers with no transaction history get a 25% refund in case of a no show.
- Australian, NZ, Denmark, Russian, Italy, CZ and Scandinavian policy.
25% refund or a 50% reship for those destinations (we conduct these rules as there is a higher risk involved for items to reach there destination).
Messages:
- If you already contacted me use the REPLY button on previous messages. If you are new to me open a new message.
- Read the FAQ platform (end of page) before messaging me.
- Please allow us to answer messages within 48h excluding the weekends. All messages will ALWAYS be answered please be patient!
- Do not message me about shipping times, a BTC advance and free samples. These messages will be ignored.
- If something is not answered in my vendor page feel free to ask me.

Address:
Make sure your address is COMPLETE and send to me in the following order.
Name/username !!!!
Street-name/house-number
Zip-code
City
Country !!!

Shipment:
Shipping to P.O. Boxes is at own risk! No refund or reships
We do not ship orders during the weekends
All orders will be send within 24 hours.
All orders are vacuum sealed and professionally packed
Note: business envelopes and printed labels used

Estimated shipping times:
Holland 1-2 days
Europe 2/10 days
Scandinavia 5/14 days (includes Denmark)
Australia and NZ 10/21 days
Russia 7/14 days
Asia 71/4 days
Africa 7/14 days
South America 7/21 days
Canada 7/17 days

Crazy listings:
To spread some love to the community we randomly open The Pink Panther's Crazy day listings. These listing are listed for wholesale prices. They open once in a while for you to profit and enjoy from. So if they are up you should take your chance, because they are limited and will vanish on any moment.

Products:
MDMA - Made from chinese PMK oil and platinum!!!
Cocaine - First hand cocaine at least 84% pure
XTC - Hard pressed pills 150 mg (Variety coming soon)
Speed Paste - High Quality speed paste 74% pure

At last but not least.
We treat our customers in the best of our ability. If there is any issue regarding customer care/ delivery or product please notify me before leaving any negative feedback. I am always open to resolve any issue you have. There comes a lot of hard work with running a solid working company. Please respect that and give us a chance to dispute.

Contact:
If SR goes down you can contact me on thepanther@safe-mail.net

Grrr,
The Pink Panther
FAQ

Q: How do I FE
A: Once your order is marked shipped you are able to press the finalize button.

Q: When will my order reach my door?
A: The shipping time frame of your country is stated on your vendor page. I can’t give you an exact date as I do not work at the postal office.

Q: My order didn’t arrive? Can I get a refund/reship?
A: Yes, you can, but refunds/reships will be handled 7 days after the estimated shipping time of your country. A lot of orders arrive during these days and I cannot afford sending double orders.

Q: Did you send my order?
A: ALL orders are send we do not hold anything back! We do not jeopardize our reputation and hard work by scamming people!

Q: Why did you cancel my order?
A: Could be 3 things: An incomplete address, invalid pop or you are from the US

Q: When will my order be shipped?
A: As soon as your order is marked “shipped”. If there is an exception it will be updated in the beginning of your vendor page.

Q: Do you send to the USA?
A: NO. I ship everywhere except the United States of America.

Q: Will you share tracking with me?
A: I never share tracking numbers only with bulk orders.

Q: What does your stealth look like?
A: I use business printed labels and envelopes along with MBB bags. All sealed and packed discreetly.

Q: Why is it that some people are negative?
A: we are getting 50 orders a day answering over 100 messages a day. It is impossible to satisfy everyone in the way we wish.

If SR goes down you can contact me on thepanther@safe-mail.net

PGP key

---BEGIN PGP PUBLIC KEY BLOCK---
Version: GnuPG v1.4.12 (MingW32)

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---END PGP PUBLIC KEY BLOCK---

vendor feedback

30 day average: 4.60
60 day average: 4.70
Overall average: 4.80

table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rating</th>
<th>feedback</th>
<th>item</th>
<th>freshness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>awesome stuff, clean, mega rush!!! can redose more than you would normally get any feeling from too so mega long session possible! nice!!</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/10 thank you</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Splendid!! (=^_^=)</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very Good Quality... Fast shipping.</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>thx a lot :)</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>infoxicator - germany: Always 2-3 Days shipping / best Stealth / best Stuff / best Vendor</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 day delivery, nice stealth bang on weight lovely gear. best 90E blow i ever had thanks mate, keep on the good work! will be back for sum more soon!</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Everything great as usual!!!</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Generous weight, good gear, will buy again</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Everything great as usual!!</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Generous weight, good gear, will buy again</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rapid delivery, great stealth &amp; an absolutely fantastic product. Can't recommend enough!</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>arrived a little bit later than expected but finally there, thanks man</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A++++ Top shit</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>really great base</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>painy is the best. really strong. took about 2 weeks.</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>took a while but my orders were sorted out by thepinkpanther, he is a 100% trusted vendor with the best mna on the market</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very quick delivery as always and great stuff. Many thanks.</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>fine good service</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>good service good product</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Great stuff, arrived sooner than I hoped. Have ordered before and will order again.</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>very good product and service as always</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>very good product and service as always</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>everytime all perfect :) PP best!!!</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perfect! As usual! I thanks, next command very soon!</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>everything perfect 5/5</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Great as always.</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Everything OK.</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>very nice hash A++++</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arrived in good time. cheers</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>BROWN SLUGAAAR. order with confidence!!</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: A complete product site (Retrieved 15/9/2014).

1 gr Platinum Dutch MDMA Crystals 84% >>>> FREE SHIPPING<<<<

🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟 (255)
￥0.062674

vendor: ThePinkPanther 🐧

ships from Netherlands
ships to Worldwide

We do not send to the USA!! Read vendor page before messaging me!
Address MUST contain the following info:
Name/surname !!!!
Street-name/house-number
Zip-code
City
Country !!!

NO poynote!

OFFER>>>>>>>>>>10 GRAMS OF PINKY'S PLATINUM MDMA CELEBRATION!!! >>140 EUR<<<<
LINK>>>>>http://silkroad6ownwtk.onion/items/10-grams-of-pinky-s-platinum-mdma-celebration-140-eur

Looking for ORIGINAL PLATINUM DUTCH MDMA than look no further. We have by far the best MDMA quality straight from the source. made by a dutch cook.

"Real" MDMA is made with a element called platinum. This element is expensive and hard to get and is often replaced by something much more cheaper.

Our MDMA Crystals is made with Chinese pink oil and the essential element platinum.

FE listing!!

Also check our famous CrazyPanther listings for more incredible offers!!!
http://silkroad6ownwtk.onion/users/thepinkpanther/items

What do you get with us:
Great customer service
Best Product
Fast communication
Best quality/price ratio
Fast delivery
Refund policy
Stealth packaging
Reliability

FE Item!

shipping options
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>description</th>
<th>estimated delivery</th>
<th>shipping price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FREE Shipping</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**more images**

**item feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rating</th>
<th>feedback</th>
<th>freshness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Splendid! (=^_^=)</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>good service good product</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Great stuff. arrived sooner than I hoped. Have ordered before and will order again.</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Everything OK</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>all good</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>stuff correct</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Item received quickly, over weight and good quality. Thank you</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5/5 - Good stealth, made it to Aus. Quickest yet - 11 days. Quality is good.</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Fast shipping, average quality as the effects only lasted 3h</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>great mdma, fast delivery.</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Perfect. Really good mdma</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Fast delivery ! Thanks</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>super fast shipping</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>great, arrived fast and perfect! :-) very happy, will repeat</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>all very good thanks!</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>TOP Quality</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Shulgin's magic, the real deal - reasonable timing and great stealth</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Nice product, good stealth. would use again</td>
<td>6 days</td>
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</table>

30 day average: 4.75  
60 day average: 4.72  
Overall average: 4.80

**vendor feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rating</th>
<th>feedback</th>
<th>freshness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>all good</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>stuff correct</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Item received quickly, over weight and good quality. Thank you</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5/5 - Good stealth, made it to Aus. Quickest yet - 11 days. Quality is good.</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Fast shipping, average quality as the effects only lasted 3h</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>great mdma, fast delivery.</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Perfect. Really good mdma</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Fast delivery ! Thanks</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>super fast shipping</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>great, arrived fast and perfect! :-) very happy, will repeat</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>all very good thanks!</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>TOP Quality</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Shulgin's magic, the real deal - reasonable timing and great stealth</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Nice product, good stealth. would use again</td>
<td>6 days</td>
</tr>
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30 day average: 4.80  
60 day average: 4.70  
Overall average: 4.80
Appendix D: The front page of the Silk Road Forum (Retrieved 8/9/2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silk Road Discussion</th>
<th>67,379 Posts</th>
<th>Last post by Ofprez on 06/11/2014, 12:03 PM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>2,413 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by LordBaz on 07/24/2014, 11:45 PM</td>
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<td>Cryptocurrency</td>
<td>2,903 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by Prez on 04/21/2014, 02:27 PM</td>
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<td>Legal</td>
<td>2,356 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by Administrator on 06/06/2014, 03:25 PM</td>
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<td>Shipping</td>
<td>1,328 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by speedoflight on 05/30/2014, 09:30 PM</td>
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<td>Drug Safety</td>
<td>1,913 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by nobody6000 on 07/30/2014, 03:30 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy, Economics and Justice</td>
<td>1,304 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by Administrator on 06/08/2014, 03:09 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off Topic</td>
<td>8,017 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by nothing22 on 06/08/2014, 03:09 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ross Ulbricht Case &amp; Theories</td>
<td>369 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by Administrator on 06/08/2014, 03:09 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newbie Discussion</td>
<td>361 Posts</td>
<td>Last post by tipher on 06/08/2014, 03:09 PM</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Product Requests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product Offers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rumor Mill</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bug Reports</td>
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<td>Feature Requests</td>
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<table>
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<th>Silk Road Market URL</th>
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