Studying Think Tank Integration: Examples from Canada

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Abstract: Think tanks inspire both confidence and ambivalence in the popular imagination. Some see their position outside of government and universities as a mark of their autonomy from both scholastic musings and the interests of the State. Others view think tanks with suspicion and equate their work with a form of ideological predation destined to uphold the views of billionaires and corporations. The label "think tank" is also used to describe other organizational forms (e.g. university centers, consulting firms, government bodies) that do not always correspond to more established archetypes. This diversity and these ambiguities have complicated both the characterization of think tanks and the formulation of comprehensive research programs pertaining to their role and organization. These difficulties have typically been addressed with typologies that attempt to formalize the differences between think tanks, but their limitations as analytical tools are well known. More recent studies have utilized sociological theory (notably field theory) to allow these variations to become the subject of empirical investigation. Building on these initiatives and on the broader literature, I argue that the difference between think tanks can be understood when we account for their integration into distinct and differentiated communities—i.e. networks from which they draw board members, personnel, contacts, money, outlets, prestige and other resources. By using historical and contemporary examples taken from the Canadian context, I will demonstrate how spaces of discourse production and reproduction, such as think tanks, are governed by their role within these communities and by the composition and cohesion of the networks that support them. This can inform how we study and compare not only the relationships between think tanks and corporations but between think tanks and other social groups as well.

Keywords: think tanks, field theory, policy discourse, communities, networks

Introduction

Scholars that study think tanks still disagree on the right way to define these organizations. Many definitions describe an organizational form commonly attributed to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, for example: "independent, non-interest-based, nonprofit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process" (Rich, 2004, p. 11). Yet think tanks do not all correspond to this archetype. Typologies are used to account for this variation, but they also continue to blur

the lines between think tanks and other organizations that produce and disseminate policy relevant research. The most systematic definitions include long lists of what think tanks are not (e.g. Boucher & Royo, 2012). Part of the problem is that the *think tank* is not a natural form. Rather, it is an identity that can be claimed by organizations or ascribed to them by scholars, journalists and politicians. Dominant institutions like the Brookings Institution, the RAND Corporation and the Heritage Foundation have served as models for other organizations. They have also imposed their contours on popular and elite conceptions of what think tanks are or should be.

As the study of think tanks moved beyond the American context, the focus of definitions shifted away from organizational features towards that of function (see Pautz, 2012). In the comparative literature, the think tank label became more inclusive, describing most organizations devoted to the production and dissemination of policy relevant ideas regardless of their institutional affiliations. The difference between think tanks and other organizations such as university institutes and consultation firms became less meaningful. The number of identifiable "types" also multiplied as new organizations emerged.

Think tank types are useful labels. They can be used to group organizations and highlight some of their distinguishable features, namely their institutional affiliations and their preferred mode of intervention. However, think tank typologies are notoriously difficult to wield systematically and often come alongside lengthy caveats discussing the limits of their interpretative power (e.g. Abelson, 2009). They are also undertheorized, or what the French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard would call a "first observation" (Bachelard, 1967, p. 23). In order to properly understand and explain the role and social organization of *think tanks*, typologies must be interpreted through a more profound theoretical apparatus.

Thomas Medvetz (2012) offers a framework to describe different think tanks without resorting to a typology. His model uses field theory to reconceptualize the characteristics used to distinguish types of think tanks. I begin by presenting field theory and by summarizing Medvetz's model before expanding on its application. I then use this new understanding to describe think tanks as custodians of discursive systems buttressed by loosely defined communities. I also provide brief examples from Canada to demonstrate the versatility of this view. I close by exploring new avenues for research on think tanks.

Field Theory as an Analytical Lens

Field, capital, position and habitus are the concepts of field theory that are the most useful for this demonstration. A field is a domain of activity and a space constituted by relations between agents (individuals, groups and institutions). These agents have distinct dispositions (habitus) and compete over the material and symbolic resources (capital) produced and circulated within the field. They do so from distinct vantage points (positions) defined by the capital they control.

A field is recognized by the *relative* autonomy of its activities (vis-à-vis other social fields in its environment) and by the specific kind of capital that it produces. These forms of capital (or power) are variations of four generic kinds: economic capital (funds, assets, income), social capital (accesses, affiliations, contacts), cultural capital (knowledge, ideas, knowhow, diplomas) and symbolic capital (authority and prestige derived from other kinds of capital). Capital can be accumulated, transferred, converted and mobilized according to the rules and exchange rates that prevail in the field. In the scientific field, for example, scientists compete for the recognition of their scientific authority, a kind of symbolic capital granted by one's peers and acquired through the mobilization of specifically

scientific cultural capital—i.e. legitimate theories, methods, arguments, etc. (see Bourdieu, 1975). The fact that practices within a field are equivalent to struggles over capital is almost always overdetermined. These struggles are constitutive of the activities that define the field—it is precisely scientific authority after all that is produced by the scientific field. As such, it is not necessary to assume that agents have a uniquely self-interested or strategic mindset, but they do need capital to achieve what they set themselves to do. Their available capital will also influence what they imagine to be possible from a given position.

At any given time, agents occupy distinct positions determined by the types and amount of capital they control relative to other agents. Since the field is constituted by agents and agents are defined by their respective control over capital, then the field can be understood topographically as a distribution of capital. But individuals are not solely determined by structure nor are they only defined by their current position. Part of the capital that defines them has been incorporated throughout their social trajectory (having occupied different positions in different fields). The result is what Bourdieu calls a habitus: attitudes, dispositions and perspectives structured by the incorporation of various forms of capital, including "instruments of knowledge and expression" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 409). This is key for understanding knowledge production as a social exercise at the intersection of individuals and structure. In relation to both objective and subjective structures: "agents construct the world, but they have not constructed the instruments of construction with which they construct the world" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 8).

Although there are exceptions, an agent's social position is typically correlated with their habitus. Both selection and self-selection are important for this. Incorporated capital is

needed to mobilize the cost of entry and agents are drawn to positions where their skills and dispositions are valued or yield high returns in material and symbolic resources.

At another level, the definition of the rules, stakes and hierarchies of a field are themselves objects of struggle that have evolved as a result of past struggles. As scientists compete to determine the distribution of scientific authority, for example, they also compete over what counts as being scientific (Bourdieu, 1975). Agents that form a field share a commitment to a common activity allowing them to compete over scarce resources, but the precise definition of that activity can depend on an agent's habitus and position. Both of these notions are important to understand the struggle over rules, stakes and hierarchies in a field. Dominant agents (i.e. those that have accumulated more capital) are advantaged in this struggle which consists in ensuring that what is most valued coincides with their habitus and position, in other words, what they have, what they do and who they are.

Thomas Medvetz (2012) sees American think tanks as forming a historically constituted network of organizations interfacing important institutional fields, namely the academic, political (and bureaucratic), economic and media fields. Together think tanks form an interstitial social field through which people as well as material and symbolic resources originating from these neighboring fields circulate. These resources include funds and wealthy patrons, political access and recognition, media visibility and scholarly credibility. Rather than corresponding to discreet types, different think tanks are defined in relation to their relative proximity to these fields and the forms of capital they provide.

For Medvetz, these relations also highlight the heteronomous nature of these organizations as they must submit themselves to a balancing act between maintaining their image as

purveyors of disinterested expert knowledge and signaling their willingness to cooperate with other social actors.

From this perspective, "types" of think tanks can be reconceptualized as positions within the interstitial "field of think tanks". A think tank's position is defined by its accumulation of specific types of capital – i.e. by its structural proximity to political, bureaucratic, academic, media and economic fields. These positions do not only describe the power of individual think tanks, but also their dispositions. In other words, they structure their affiliations, activities and modes of intervention (Medvetz, 2010, 2012). They also structure the "principles of legitimacy" they use to frame their knowledge production and mobilization (McLevey, 2015). Lastly, these positions explains the posturing of think tanks and policy experts in the classification struggles over what think tanks and policy experts are or should be (Medvetz, 2012).

The field of think tanks can thus be interpreted as an institutional field within which organizations and policy actors compete over resources and over the legitimate definition of their tasks. Those close to the academic field insist upon norms of social science research, those close to media favor concision and relevance and those close to the political, bureaucratic and economic fields defend their accountability to the concerns of actors and stakeholders in those fields. An institutional field, however, is not a field of intellectual or political posturing. Just as the struggles of the institutional field of universities are distinct from the struggles of the scientific field (Gingras, 1991; Gingras & Gemme, 2006), the "field of think tanks" itself should be understood as distinct from the fields that structure the political and intellectual positions of policy experts and think tanks. These include the intellectual, media, economic, political, and bureaucratic fields.

In order to properly understand the stakes that give meaning to the mobilization of think tanks and the contents of their interventions, we must identify the specific subgroups from neighboring fields that invest time, energy and resources into specific organizations. Looking only at the economic field, surely the stakes that give meaning to a think tank's activities will be different if it is supported by the labor movement rather than capitalists. Likewise, economic elites do not form a homogenous group. Attention should at least be given to the types of resources they command in the economic field (see Bourdieu 1997), and how these resources structure their engagement with think tanks and other policy actors. The same can be said for the disciplines and intellectual currents that are represented by think tanks as well as for the political factions and media outlets they favor. In other words, the composition of a think tank's community matters. It allows us to understand the social ties and alliances that sustain it and the resources and standpoints that structure its role and discourse production.

Although I am advocating a return to a concept of community, the policy network literature can only take us so far in understanding the social organization of think tanks. Concepts like advocacy coalitions (see Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999), discourse coalitions (see Hajer, 1995) and epistemic communities (see Haas, 1992) refer to ephemeral structures that think tanks can interact with and even integrate, but as theoretical constructs they do not describe the social organization of think tanks themselves.

As Lindquist (1989) has observed the allegiance of a think tank to the cause of and advocacy coalition can be ambiguous and inconsistent. Conceptualizing policy networks as discourse coalitions would likely not change this. Likewise, a think tank can integrate an epistemic community if it is dominated by individuals that share common definitions of

social problems as well as social, theoretical and epistemic norms and assumptions, but this is not always the case (Stone, 1996). These approaches treat think tanks as independent variables in order to examine network configurations. The think tanks themselves are not the primary focus of the framework.

The concept of an epistemic community also puts a strong onus on shared cognitive convictions, whereas the political identities of think tanks and the maintenance of social ties with those that provide access, visibility, funds and influence can be equally structuring (Medvetz, 2012). Furthermore, the policy network literature provides a glimpse into how think tanks integrate specific communities, but it is less useful for understanding the strategies of think tanks as autonomous competitors in the marketplace of ideas (Stone, 2004, pp. 14–15). Tomas Medvetz's use of field theory does this better.

By seeing think tanks as structured by their relative proximity to neighboring social fields and the resources they produce, we can allow two distinct levels of analysis to converge: that of the insertion of think tanks in specific networks and that of the position from which they elaborate their strategies in the marketplace of ideas. My argument is that we can deepen our understanding of the social organization of think tanks, by conceiving their relations to neighboring social fields as consubstantial to their integration into specific communities and support networks. Integration into these communities also serves as a proxy for their integration into the planning apparatus of economic actors (via the economic field), the policy-making process (via the political field and the bureaucratic field) and the broader socio-political discussion (via the media field and the intellectual field).

I would argue that this takes us beyond Medvetz's articulation of the *structural dependencies* that governs the behavior of think tanks, because we are led to put emphasis

on the *structural integration* that these dependencies imply. From this perspective, structural dependencies are made compatible with the subjective experiences of agents. By engaging with think tanks, individuals do not only satisfy material needs. They also live out their identities through their political and intellectual commitments. In other words, the resources made available by think tanks allow agents to yield returns while they simultaneously mobilize their habitus and actualize their dispositions.

The Four Parameters of Think Tank Communities

A concept of community designed to understand the social organization of specific think tanks would have at least four parameters of variation: 1) composition, 2) cohesion, 3) function, and 4) accesses and boundaries. A fifth parameter, the *vitality* of these communities, could also be studied, but I will limit my discussion to the four parameters just mentioned.

First, the communities that form and surround think tanks have distinct compositions. As organizations think tanks offer services, networking opportunities and forums for intellectual expression to a specific mix of subgroups from neighboring social fields. The social origins and trajectories of their members, employees, contributors, administrators, patrons, contacts and target audiences shape the material and symbolic resources and political and intellectual dispositions that converge upon the think tank. This convergence first appears with the alliances that give rise to specific think tanks. It can be explained by a symbiosis of the interests, resources and perspectives of those involved as defined by their position in their respective social fields (i.e. what Bourdieu calls a homology). These alliances must also be interpreted in light of the field dynamics and historical contexts that give meaning to the problems new think tanks are meant to address. On another level, the

composition of a think tank's community is consubstantial to its position in the field of think tanks. It can also change and evolve overtime. In essence, this community is composed of individuals and organizations that are intimately involved in the funding, production, consumption, administration and dissemination of the products and services delivered by the think tank. They are the networks from which it draws board members, personnel, contacts, money, outlets, prestige, arguments and other resources—or more succinctly: accesses (social capital), funds (economic capital), ideas (cultural capital) and credibility (symbolic capital).

Second, these communities have different degrees of cohesion that are maintained through work on the think tank's image and identity. Think tanks can be associated with particular systems of beliefs or values. They also work to balance this by preserving an appearance, at least, of autonomy. There is a duality at play where think tanks must maintain an aura of credibility associated with the social sciences, while simultaneously signaling their allegiance to specific values (Lindquist, 1989, p. 252). Thomas Medvetz (2012) describes this as a delicate balancing act. Think tanks seek to be socially relevant, politically engaged, obliging and entrepreneurial as well as accessible and brief, but they must also appear to wield scholarly credibility, scientific objectivity, intellectual honesty, cognitive autonomy and methodological rigor. Without a doubt, these dispositions are not equally valued by all think tanks, nor by the actors in the fields where they intervene and draw their resources. By managing their images and identities think tanks cultivate their symbolic capital, they also maintain the symbolic boundaries of their community and govern its cohesion. The signals embodied by their reputation and the preferences they express in the hiring process, allow mechanisms of selection and self-selection to draw the boundaries of group cohesion

with little recourse to overt control, if any. Many of those who study the think tank phenomenon, including Diane Stone (1996, pp. 64–65), have observed that administrators generally confer significant freedoms to members of their research staff, especially when resources abound and interests, values and beliefs remain aligned. Since think tank communities have different compositions, they also have varying degrees of cohesion managed by those that maintain the contours of their identity. Together composition and cohesion generate a particular grouping of perspectives, beliefs and preoccupations that structure the limits of a think tank's discursive ecology – i.e. what is said, what is heard, what is understood, and what is valued.

Third, a think tank's relation to its community allows it to assume a role or a function. This is akin to what it does for members of that community, but also to how these members interpret its value. Think tanks are usually created and sustained with a purpose in mind, allowing community members to give meaning to their investments in terms of time, money, energy and praise. A think tank's mode of intervention as well as how it presents itself and how it legitimizes its activities have been shown to be structured by its relative proximity to neighboring social fields (McLevey, 2015; Medvetz, 2010, 2012). Think tanks also contribute to the circulation of people and ideas between these fields (Medvetz, 2012). A think tank does this by forming and maintaining a community that is consubstantial to the ties that determine its structural position. Much of its work will serve to sustain and reproduce this community and its discursive ecology. This can include disseminating ideas, maintaining networks, holding conferences and luncheons and organizing training programs and seminars. Taken together its community's composition, cohesion and function corresponds to its modality of integration into the broader polity.

Finally, think tank communities are finite and thus have differentiated accesses and boundaries. This can be interpreted as derived from their modality of integration (i.e. their composition, cohesion and function). Think tanks occupy a niche that structures their relations to neighboring social fields. These relations suppose and imply different possibilities and constraints. Social actors are often aware of a think tank's identity, reputation and discursive contours and these can inspire confidence, ambivalence or mistrust depending on whom those social actors are. For example, professional public servants that are not politically nominated are probably more likely to trust a dispassionate and technical report from a centrist think tank. They may also interpret the discourse of activist think tanks as useful for assessing the mood and preferences of specific interest groups and stakeholders (Lindquist 1989). Conversely, political parties, staffers and activists are likely more trusting of think tanks that share their values and beliefs (Rich 2004: 83–86). The political leanings of think tanks also correspond to distinct funding opportunities and patterns (see McLevey 2014). In other words, the properties that allow a think tank to form a specific community and thus to occupy a certain social position can impede upon its ability to form or serve a different community and occupy a different position. These accesses and boundaries shape the allies they can depend upon and the volume and type of resources they can mobilize. It also delimits the roles they can play in policy debates and in the policy-making process – the avenues through which they "plug into the body of the leviathan" (see Eyal, 2013).

Examples from Canada

The point of this paper is to argue that studying think tanks and their communities through the lens of field theory can guide our understanding of both how they evolve and how they

occupy social space. My own research into the history of Canadian think tanks is principally about explaining their proliferation after 1970 as a reaction to the unraveling of the postwar consensus and to the elevation of expert discourse as a political resource over the course of the 20th century. However, I also explored the properties of think tanks and their communities by identifying the groups that come together to mobilize this resource.

At the beginning of the 20th century, clubs, intellectual circles, disciplinary associations and reform organizations carried into Canada the growing will to mobilize expertise to gain mastery over economic and social problems. They formed various communities made up of clergy, amateur reformers, middle-class professionals, businessmen and eventually social scientists. Some of these organizations would later become think tanks. The creation of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare (now the Canadian Council on Social Development) was shepherded by groups that would also lead the professionalization of social work in Canada. The Canadian Institute of International Affairs (now the Canadian International Council) was formed at the behest of businessmen and social scientist eager to produce enlightened thought on the role of Canada in the world, particularly vis-à-vis the British Empire.

In the 1920 and 1930, the expansion of universities and intellectual networks led to the formation of an intellectual elite that would eventually drive the expansion of experts within the public service. In the decades following World War II, Canada's policy research capacity grew and expert discourse became increasingly important for formulating political arguments. Outside the State, some groups of professionals became increasingly aware of the need to develop a research capacity to be taken seriously by the government and influence policy. Tax professionals (particularly tax lawyers and accountants) reacted by

forming the Canadian Tax Foundation in 1946. The Canadian Tax Foundation eventually formed various outlets and forums for these professionals to discuss matters of fiscal policy. It also began supplying technical advice to the Department of Finance, establishing a community at the juncture of networks of tax professionals and the bureaucratic field. A similar sentiment led to the transformation of Canadian Council on Child Welfare. While it continued to hold ties with professional social workers, the Council expanded its mandate in the 1930s at the same time as public relief programs played an increasingly important role in the world of welfare. It became the Canadian Welfare Council in 1935. Over the course of the ensuing decades, it intensified its relations with government agencies and politically moderate businesspeople. Its focus on policy research also became more important when it restructured and became the Canadian Council on Social Development in 1971, further confirming its conviction that policy influence would be best secured with the mobilization of research and analysis.

In the postwar period, the business community also began to build organizations devoted to economic research. These include the Conference Board of Canada (1954), the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (1954), and the Private Planning Association of Canada (1958), which would later become the C. D. Howe Research Institute in 1973. The alliances between economists and businesspeople that fostered these organizations often ensured their allegiance to the paradigms that dominated Canadian economic policy in the postwar period, namely an acceptance of discretionary macroeconomic interventions to stabilize economic cycles (i.e. Keynesianism) combined with a prudent expansion of international trade with the United States (i.e. continentalism). Meanwhile, the regional makeup of the community surrounding the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council explains its

preference—beginning in the late 1950s—for more comprehensive state interventions, particularly in the domain of regional development.

In the 1960s, more specialized communities also gave rise to think tanks, including the Canadian Peace Research Institute (1961-1981), the Vanier Institute of the Family (1965), and the Parliamentary Centre (1968). However, the expansion of the government's own research capacity was still largely outpacing these developments. This led to the creation of a series of arm's length advisory organizations known as government councils. These include, the Economic Council of Canada (1963-1993), the Science Council of Canada (1966-1993), National Council of Welfare (1969-2012), the Law Reform Commission of Canada (1970-1993, 1997-2006) and Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1973-1994). In the meantime, central agencies and various ministries intensified and institutionalized their use of policy analysis for program development and evaluation. The federal government also funded the creation of an independent think tank: The Institute for Research on Public Policy (1972). Each of these organizations maintained their own communities and their own discursive ecology.

While the Keynesian postwar consensus came under siege in the 1970s, activist think tanks began to emerge by forming highly differentiated communities with discernable agendas. The Canada West Foundation (1970) united businessmen and scholars to form an intellectual front for the economic interests of Western Canada. The Fraser Institute (1972) consolidated relations between members of the Canadian business community, pro-market economists and an international network of neoliberal think thanks and foundations. The Canadian Institute for Economic Policy (1979-1984) straddled the left flank of the Liberal Party of Canada and networks of scholars and intellectuals sympathetic to the cause of

economic nationalism and strong state involvement in national and regional development. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (1980) sought to counteract what it perceived as a rise in market fundamentalism by integrating a network of progressive scholars, political activists, and members of the labor movement.

Because think tanks have different communities that structure their relations to neighboring social fields, they also react differently to the restructuring of these fields. The crisis of the 1970s gave way to the rise of neoliberal ideals in the business community, the economics discipline and the political field. Canadian think tanks found themselves in a new political and intellectual environment. How this affected them depended largely and the composition of their community.

The discourse of center-right think tanks, like the Conference Board of Canada and the C. D. Howe Institute, evolved in tandem with the transformation of dominant thinking among economists, entrepreneurs and government officials, consolidating a shift from Keynesianism to Monetarism and from continentalism to neoliberal free trade. However, the Conference Board of Canada's proximity to the public service moderated its tone, while the C. D. Howe Institute opted for more open advocacy on certain issues (notably on public debt and free trade). Staffed mostly by economists and managed by businesspeople, the Economic Council of Canada also embodied the pro-market thrust, while the more diverse community of economic nationalists at the Science Council of Canada resisted partially to the prevailing mood.

The cohesion of a think tank and its community is an important qualifier. While maintaining porous boundaries and attempting to remain neutral, the Institute for Research on Public Policy began to shift to neoliberal preoccupations principally as a result of its

efforts to remain pertinent in the wake of changing political priorities (particularly on the subject of trade). More cohesive think tanks, like those involved in the war of ideas, were also affected by these changes in ways that are significant in light of the composition of their communities. The neoliberal Fraser Institute became a more credible sounding source for journalists and media outlets, and acquired more committed support from the business community. Conversely, the social-democratic Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives also grew considerably, but it did so as it found new allies that were mobilizing against free trade, privatization and cutbacks in social programs.

Throughout this period and since then, the Canadian think tank landscape continued to expand by forming discernable communities structured by their relations to neighboring social fields. More specialized think tanks have integrated policy networks comprised of actors from different fields united by their participation in specific policy sectors (e.g. security, international relations, international development, health, etc.). Many university research institutes began to behave more like think tanks as the norms of the academic field evolved and universities encouraged greater commercialization and utilization of academic knowledge. Some think tanks began establishing ties with central agencies and ministries as they became involved in the turn towards consultation, network governance and the "coproduction" of knowledge. They were also joined by consultation firms that strived in the context of New Public Management reforms. Think tanks invested in the war of ideas have also multiplied and are now found at provincial or regional levels even as they maintain ties to specific groups and national and transnational ideological allies. A few Canadian think tanks have also come to occupy the extended networks of political parties.

Towards a Comparative Topography of Think Tanks

The preceding overview is far too brief to provide a complete demonstration, but I believe that it shows why research on think tanks should give considerable attention to the modality of their integration in social space. I believe this approach to be complimentary, if not analogous, to other research programs calling for the study of think tank "constituencies" and their use of think tanks as knowledge-power devices or "dispositifs" (see Plehwe 2014, p. 112). The contribution of field theory is that it provides a language through which these investigations can be grounded in a social theory of practice. This language can also serve to untangle some of the fuzziness surrounding the idea of a "knowledge/power nexus" (see Stone 2007, p. 276). By focusing on the resources and habitus that converge upon think tanks, we can perform both diachronic and synchronic analysis of these organizations and their relations to other interests.

Historically speaking we can come to understand the founding of think tanks as the result of converging interests, perspectives and resources brought together in specific sociohistorical contexts. Furthermore, when studying the evolution of think tanks, we can see how they evolve, in part, as a response to the reconfiguration of the fields from which they draw resources and meaning.

Synchronically, we can study their social organization as a form structural integration to social space mediated by their community. By studying their composition, cohesion and function we can identify the social origins of the instruments of knowledge and expression with which they construct their discursive ecology. We can also understand the stakes that structure their interventions. On another level, the social organization of think tanks – and the accesses and boundaries they entail – serve as proxy to the integration of think tanks in

the broader polity. By describing the modalities of integration of think tanks, we can study the nature of their influence in new ways, notably as occupied roles and positions that cannot be reduced to the mechanical diffusion of ideas.

Finally, as we examine and compare the relationships think tanks maintain with corporations and other social groups, we can study the consequences of these relationships in terms of knowledge production. In this regard, I envision a three-step, potentially interdisciplinary, research program designed to compare think tanks on the basis of their modality of integration. The first step is morphological. It aims to describe the social organization of think tanks (i.e. the features of their community and the modality of their integration to social space). The second step is cognitive. Its objective is to outline the semantic parameters of the discursive ecologies think tanks maintain as a function of their community. The third step is epistemological. It seeks to evaluate a think tank's knowledge production on the basis of the relation between its community and its discursive ecology. A series of normative questions can emerge during this last stage, many of them drawn from social epistemology (e.g. Longino 1990, Fricker 2007). Are communities surrounding think tanks diverse enough to allow them to collectively question their own assumptions and foster the inclusion of preoccupations coming from different social groups? Can they construct knowledge that does not marginalize the lived experience of specific groups or non-elite citizens? Are their community members well versed in the tenets of mainstream science or are they disassociating their discourse from well-established scientific knowledge without good reasons? Are they capable of encouraging dialogue between rival understandings of the social world or are they consolidating mutually exclusive worldviews? These questions appear to be more important than ever.

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