

Ghost-management of scientific knowledge; Research Integrity does not mean unbiased research

By Marc-André Gagnon

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Conflict of Interest/Disclaimer

- Presenter's Name: **Marc-André Gagnon**
- I have no current or past relationships with commercial entities
- I received payment in 2020 from Justice Canada to serve as expert witness on drug pricing.
- I received payment in 2024 from SPUL (Laval University's Union of Professors) to serve as expert witness
- My research project on ghost-management is financed by SSHRC.

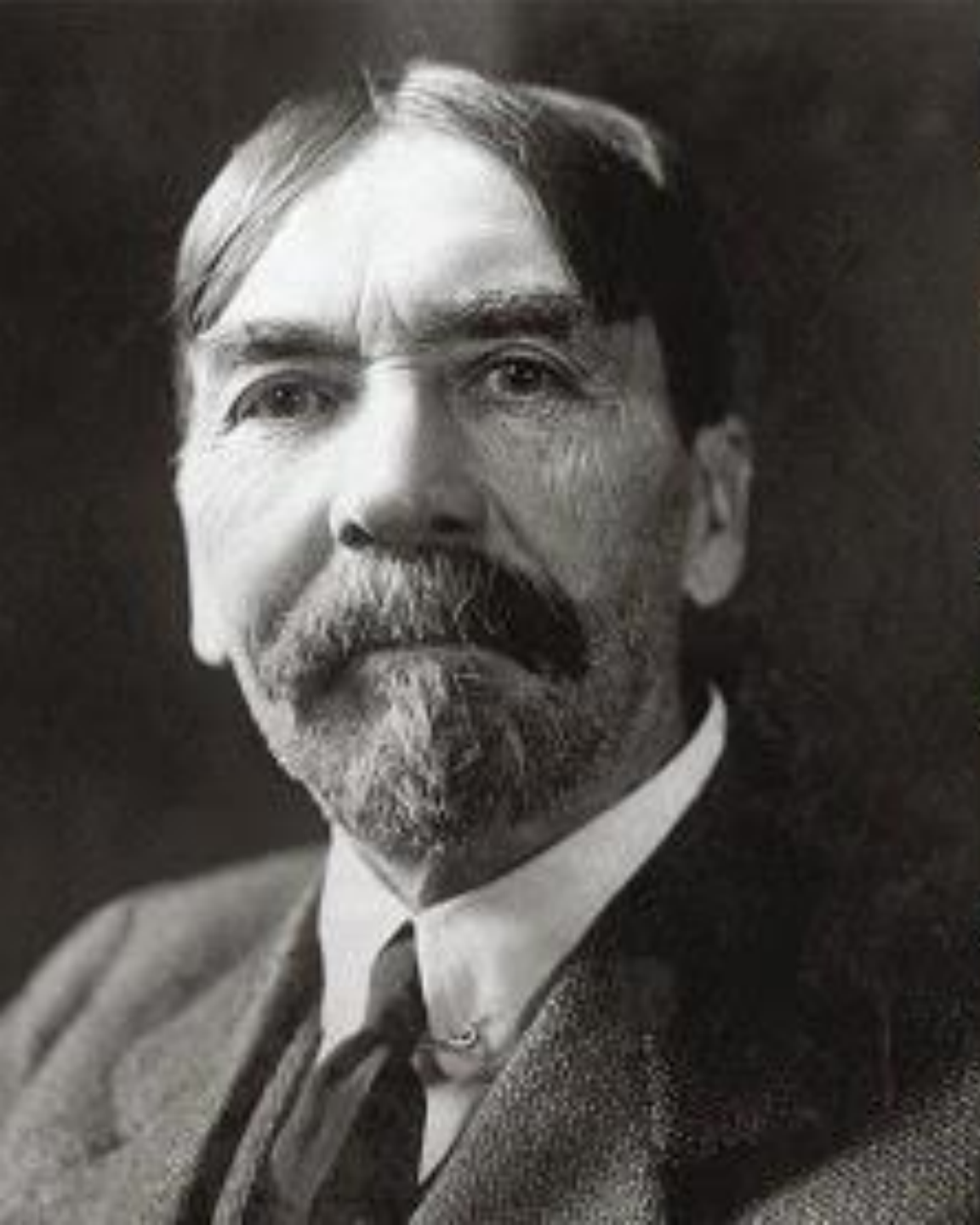
Marc-André Gagnon, PhD

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Thorstein Veblen
1857-1929

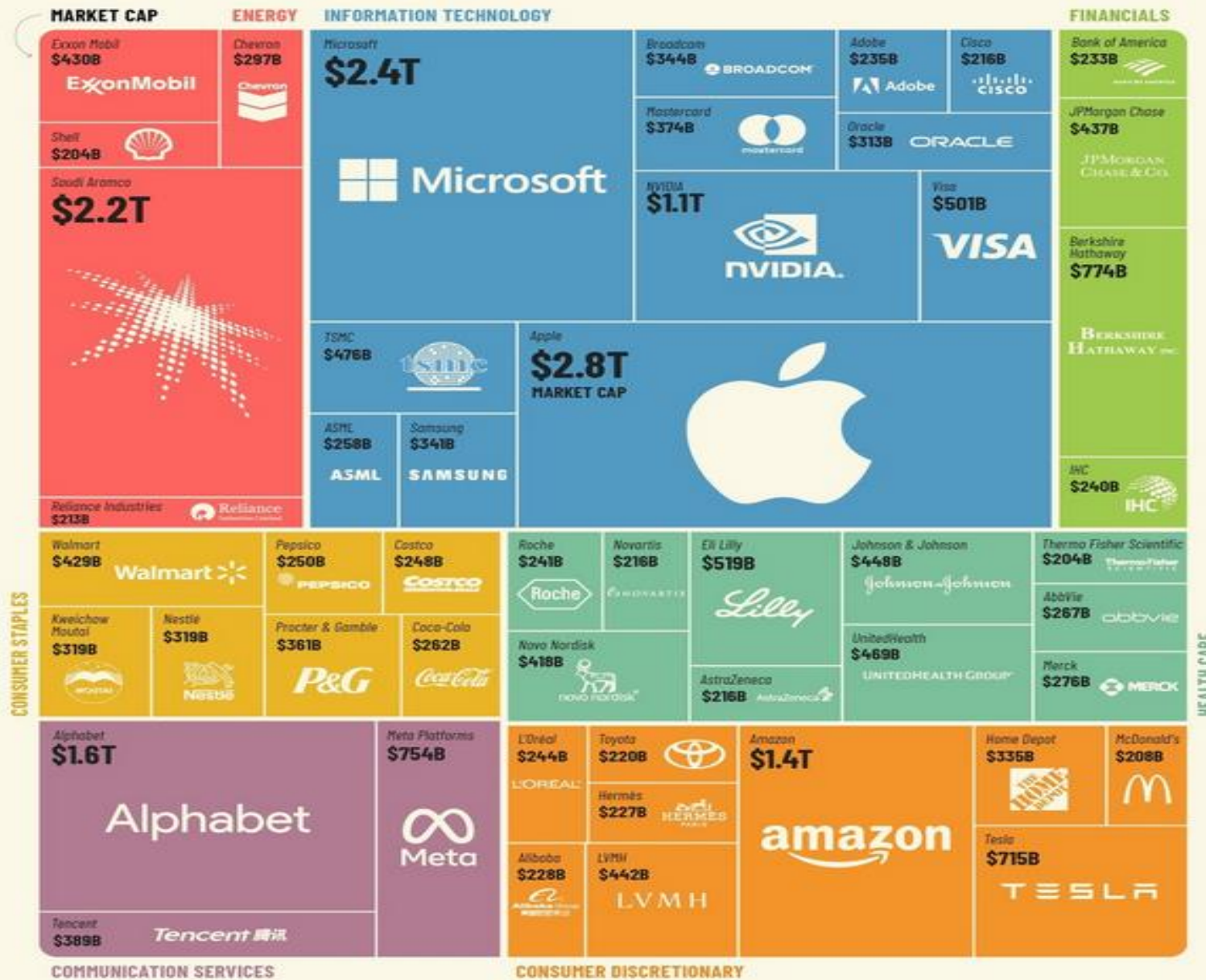
- *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, 1899
- *Theory of Business Enterprise*, 1904
- *The Instincts of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*, 1914.
- *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* 1915.
- *The Higher Learning In America: A Memorandum On the Conduct of Universities By Business Men* 1918
- *An Inquiry Into The Nature Of Peace And The Terms Of Its Perpetuation* 1919,
- *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation and Other Essays* 1919
- *The Vested Interests and the Common Man* 1919
- *The Engineers and the Price System* 1921
- *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times: the case of America*, 1923.



"It is always sound business to take any obtainable net gain, at any cost and at any risk to the rest of the community."

Thorstein Veblen

MOST VALUABLE COMPANIES



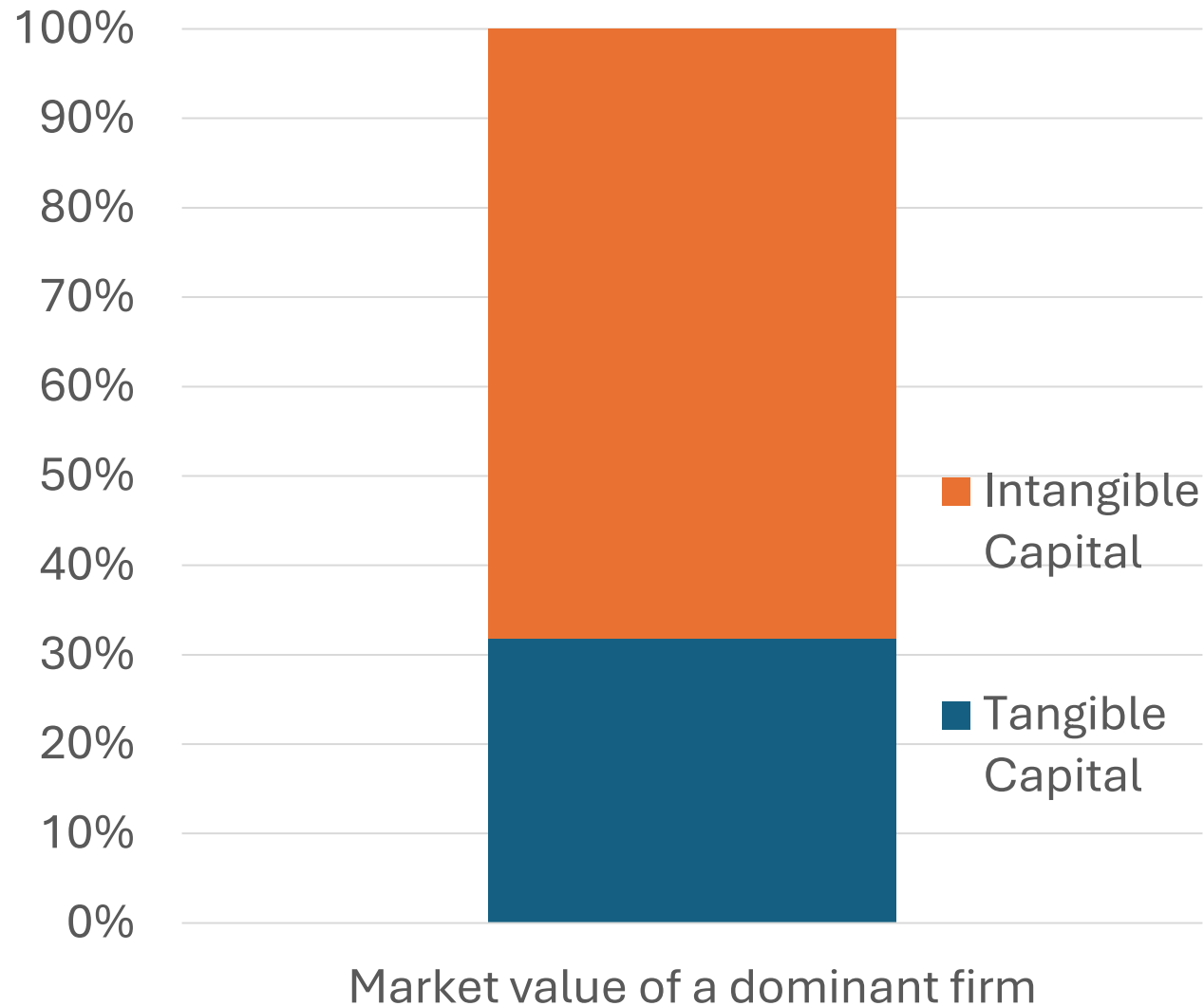
CONSUMER STAPLES

HEALTH CARE

COMMUNICATION SERVICES

CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY

Capital of a dominant corporation according to Veblen



Technology: Stock of on-going technical knowledge that requires material means to be put to use

Tangible Capital: Control over strategic material means of production (sabotage and predation)

Goodwill: Capacity to circumvent markets; Capacity to create needs, dependence on your commodity; Creation of friendly regulation; Capacity to create the social determinants of value.

Economic ghostmanagement in the biopharmaceutical sector

1. Scientific Capture

Control the scientific narrative about products:

- Ghostwriting to present scientific results in favor of corporate interests
- Non-disclosure of unfavorable results
- Intimidation of independent researchers

3. Technological Capture

Building barriers to entry for smaller firms through appropriation of technology:

- Strategic patenting and the multiplication of patents where the dominant patent holders can restrain innovation
- Establishing technological standards

4. Regulatory Capture

Influencing laws and regulations:

- Pharma industry is ranked the top lobbying industry in the US with declared spending of \$282 million per year (excluding Super-PACs)
- Omnipresence of revolving doors and conflicts of interests

2. Professional Capture

Influencing healthcare professionals is crucial for commercial success:

- Firms spend on average \$61,000 per year per physician to promote their pharmaceutical products in the United States.
- Firms spend \$15,000 per year per physician in direct payments.

7. Civil Society Capture

Instrumentalizing civil society through front groups:

- Systematic recourse to think tanks and patient groups
- Grassroots organizations captured through corporate funding
- Estimated that in 2018 Pharma companies spent \$953 M on funding patient groups in the United States

5. Market Capture

Capacity to restrain market competition:

- 296 collaboration agreements exist among the 13 dominant pharma firms.
- Mergers and acquisitions drove capital accumulation in 2018 in the pharmaceutical sector while unsettling innovation capacity

6. Media Capture

Connecting with public and elite opinion:

- \$6.4 bn spent on direct to consumer advertising in 2016.
- Massive use of PR and think tanks, transforming journalism into lobbying

References

1. Gagnon, Marc-André, 2015. "Shaping the social determinants of value through economic ghostmanagement: an institutionalist approach to capital accumulation." Published in Tae-Hee Jo and Frederic S. Lee (eds). *Marx, Veblen, and the Foundations of Heterodox Economics: Essays in Honor of John F. Henry*. Routledge.
2. Veblen, T. [1904] 1996. *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
3. Sismondo, S. 2007. "Ghost Management: How Much of the Medical Literature Is Shaped Behind the Scenes by the Pharmaceutical Industry?" *PLoS Medicine* 4 #9: 1429-33.
4. Miller, D. and C. Harkins. 2010. "Corporate strategy, corporate capture: Food and alcohol industry lobbying and public health." *Critical Social Policy* 30 (4): 564-589.

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Economic ghostmanagement in the biopharm

3. Technological Capture

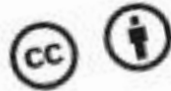
Building ha
fir

COCHRANE EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS AND METHODS

Open Access

REVIEW ARTICLE

Open Access



What did the scientific literature learn from internal company documents in the pharmaceutical industry? A scoping review

Marc-André Gagnon ✉, Miaoran Dong

First published: 27 April 2023 | while unsettling capacity

<https://doi.org/10.1002/cesm.12011>

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8 Ghost Management Captures

Scientific Capture

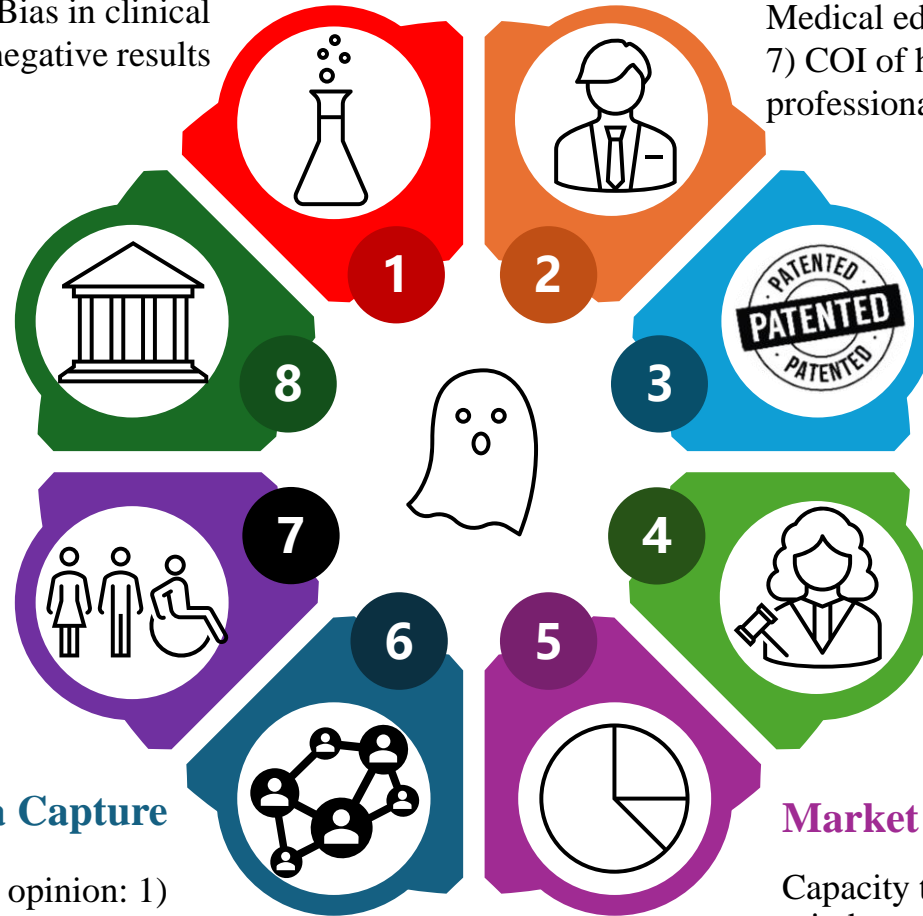
Control the scientific narrative about products:

- 1) COI in research; 2) Non-disclosure/selective reporting;
- 3) Ghostwriting/publication planning; 4) Bias in clinical trial design; 5) Downplaying negative results

Professional Capture

Influencing healthcare professionals is crucial for commercial success: 1) Detailing/promotional meetings; 2) Key Opinion Leaders (KOL); 3) Seeding trials; 4) Off-label promotion; 5) Medical education/training; 6) COI in clinical practice guidelines; 7) COI of health care professionals; 8) Advertising to health care professionals; 9) Gift and bribe

Other



Civil Society Capture

Instrumentalizing civil society through front groups: 1) Misinforming patients in recruitment; 2) COI with patient groups

Media Capture

Connecting with public and elite opinion: 1) Collaboration with journalists (COI in social network/"social production of information"); 2) Direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA)

Technological Capture

Building barriers to entry for smaller firms through appropriation of technology: Strategic patenting

Regulatory Capture

Influencing laws and regulations: 1) COI of regulators; 2) Self-regulation; 3) Lobbying efforts; 4) Revolving doors

Market Capture

Capacity to restrain market competition: 1) Influencing reimbursement decisions; 2) Unlawful commerce; 3) Market concentration; 4) Chargeback

Scientific Capture

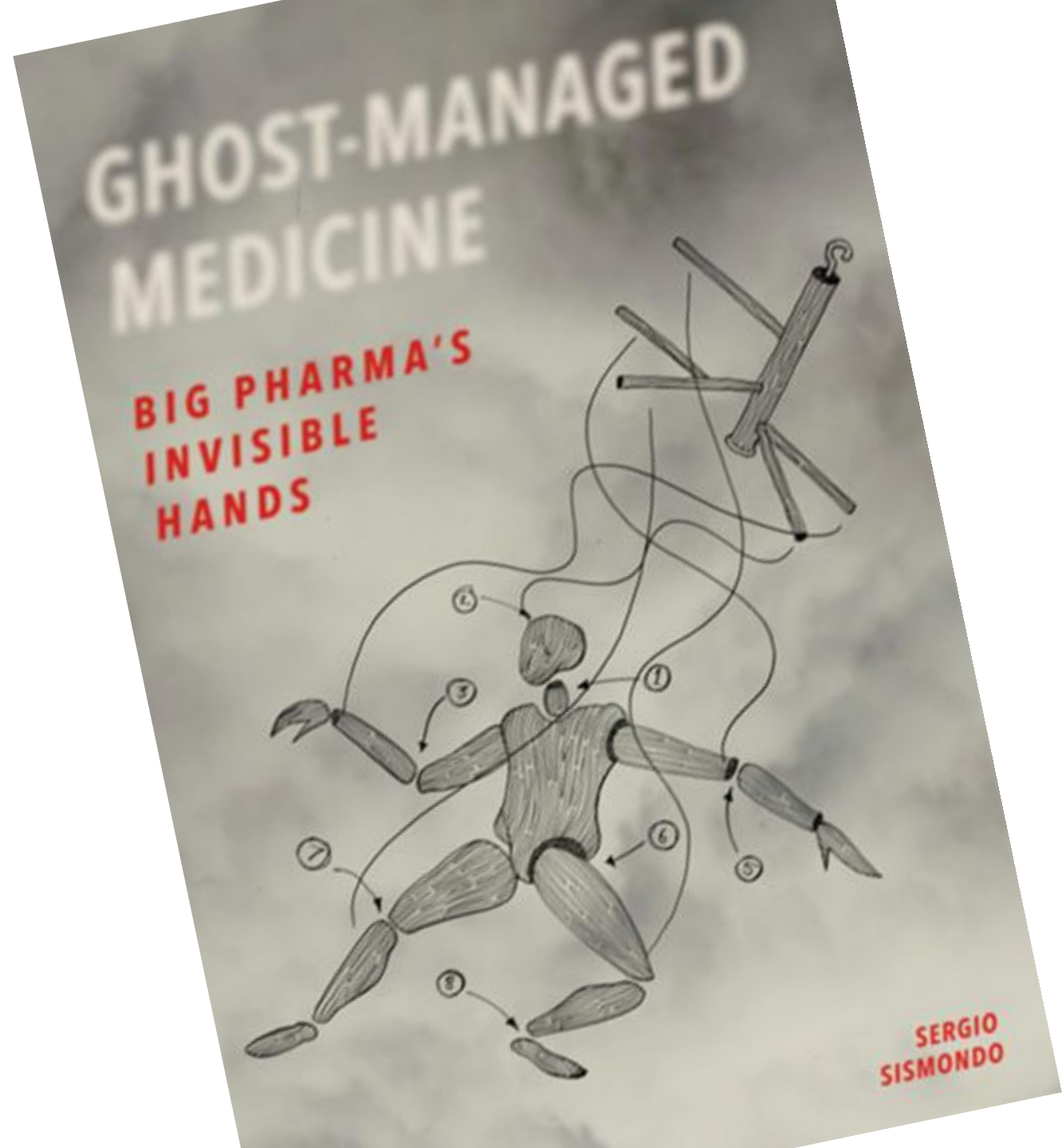
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Scientific Capture


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OPEN ACCESS PEER-REVIEWED
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Whose shoulders is health research standing on? Determining the key actors and contents of the prevailing biomedical research agenda

Federico E. Testoni , Mercedes García Carrillo , Marc-André Gagnon, Cecilia Rikap , Matias Blaustein 

Published: April 7, 2021 • <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249661>

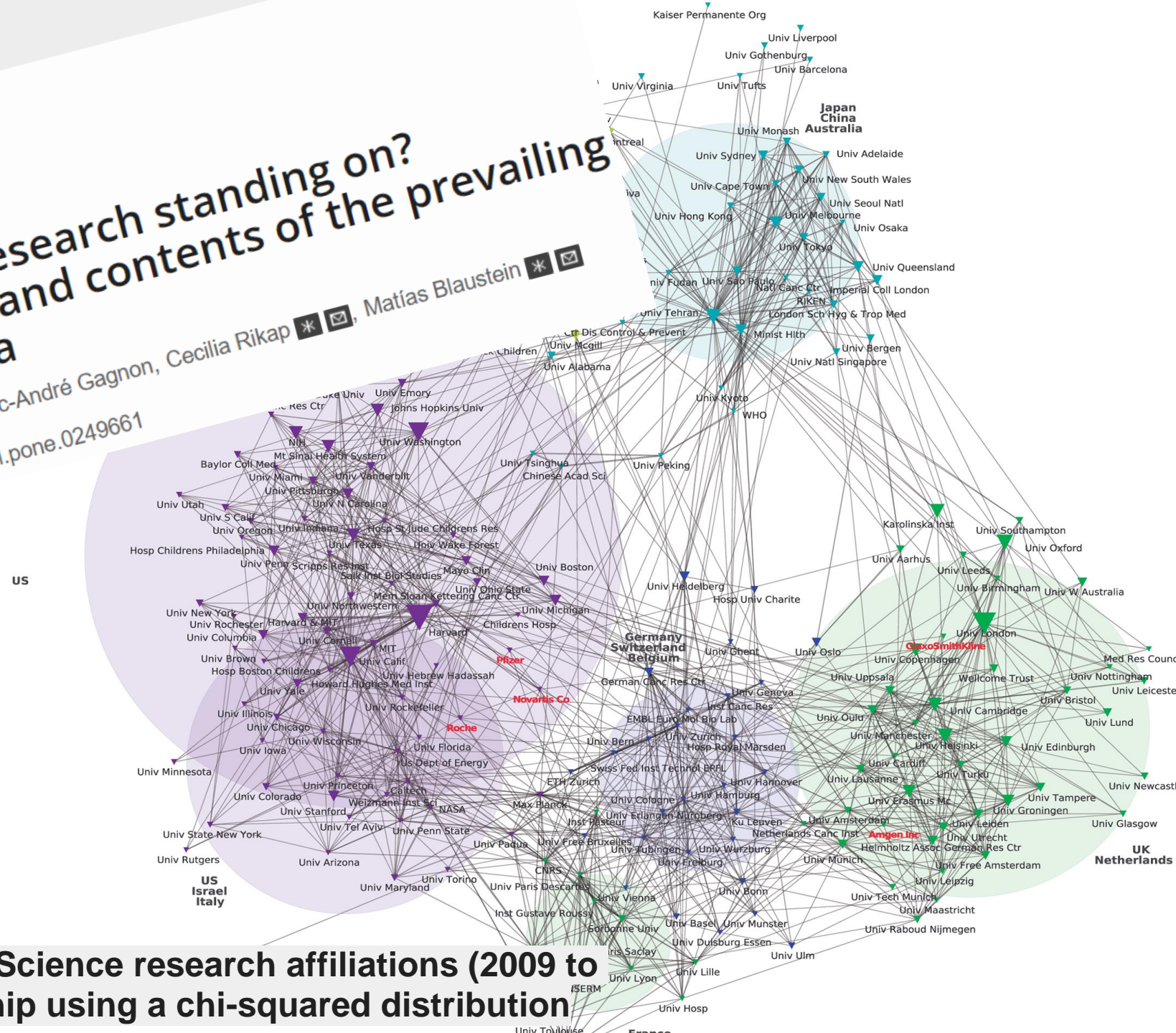
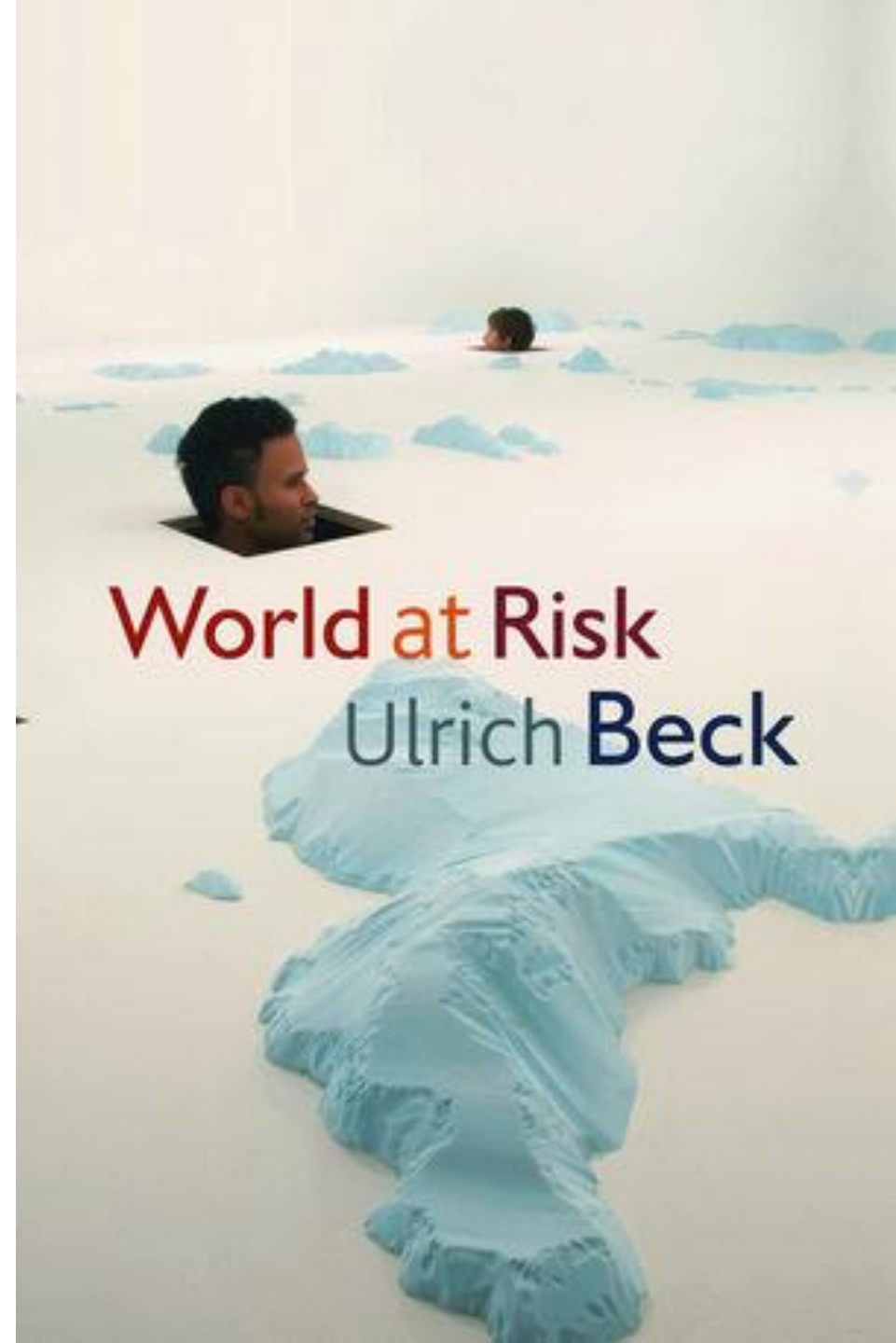


Fig 2. Top 200 Health and Bio-Medical Science research affiliations (2009 to 2018) plotted according to co-authorship using a chi-squared distribution

Ulrich Beck and Risk Society

Goods versus evils (risks)

- Goods are tangible and self-evident
- Evils (risks) are not self-evident: requires research and resources to identify. If risk assessment determines profitability, systematic corporate strategies will be deployed to create bias in order to inflate benefits and minimize risks.
- Relations of Definition as Relations of Domination: Who decides what is and is not a risk?
- Agnotology and the production of ignorance.





Article

Producing Ignorance Through Regulatory Structure: The Case of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Lauren Richter¹ , Alissa Cordner², and Phil Brown³

Sociological Perspectives
2021, Vol. 64(4) 631–656
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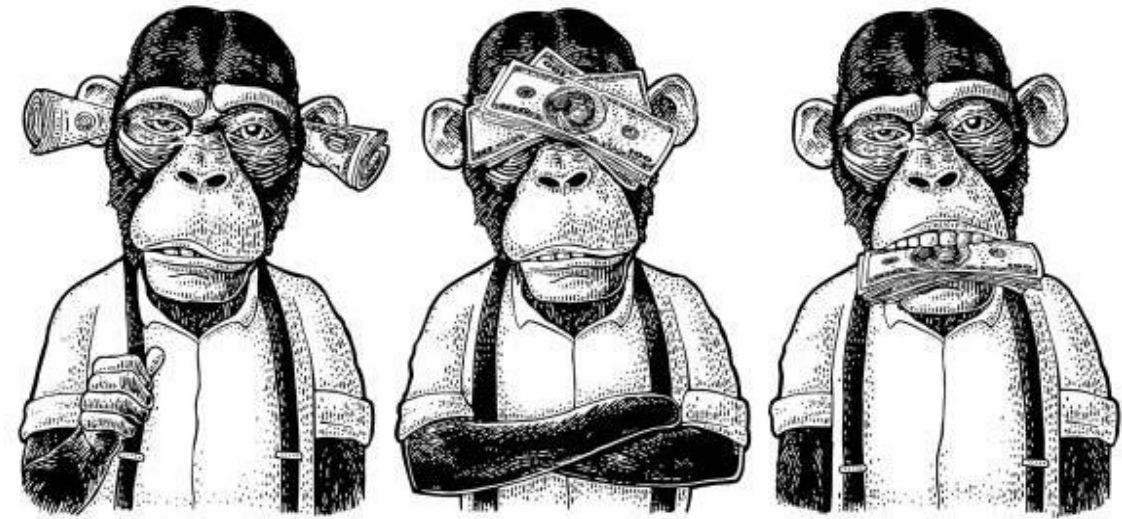

Lawyers to Plastics Makers: Prepare for ‘Astronomical’ PFAS Lawsuits

At an industry presentation about dangerous “forever chemicals” lawyers predicted a wave of lawsuits that could dwarf asbestos litigation, audio from the event revealed.



Institutionalized regime of ignorance

Richter L, Cordner A, Brown P. Producing Ignorance Through Regulatory Structure: The Case of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). *Sociological Perspectives*. 2021 Aug 1;64(4):631–56.



Three levels of ignorance

1. **Selective ignorance** (manufacturing doubt). The information known behind regulations is biased and limited.
2. **Forbidden knowledge:** CBI (Confidential Business Information), Grandfather Clauses of the Toxic Substance Control Act, shortened deadlines for product evaluation (for which firms are not required to submit their study results).
3. **Nescience:** Risks that could have been known and measurable become radical uncertainties, externalized uncertainties placed upon stakeholders of civil society (workers, communities, users, university researchers, and decision-makers). (neither precautionary principle nor risk management)

Take-Home messages

- Ghost-management capacities are central to corporations' success
- When it comes to science, the objective of corporations is not to produce knowledge, but to control the scientific narrative.
- Corporations can choose to do bad science and disinformation; initiatives for research integrity are thus important. Mostly good, but cherry-picked science.
- But other types of bias even if all good science:
 - Dominance of research agenda based on financial incentives (COI is about making some voices more dominant)
 - Institutionalized regime of ignorance.
- Research Integrity is wrong to focus only on the quality of the research. Other systemic biases are corrupting science. In many ways, successful commercialization can often be a symptom of scientific failure.

MERCI!
THANK YOU!



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