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# Chromaffin Cells in the Mammalian Adrenomedullary Tissue: Ultrastructural Aspects of Stimulus-Secretion Coupling – A Tribute to Odile Grynszpan-Winograd (1938–2023)

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1 ***Obituary***

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3 ***Chromaffin cells in the mammalian adrenomedullary tissue:***  
4 ***ultrastructural aspects of stimulus-secretion coupling.***

5  
6 ***A tribute to Odile Grynszpan-Winograd (1938-2023)***

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15 Short Title: Tribute to Odile Grynszpan-Winograd

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26 microscopy

27 **Abstract**

28 Odile Grynszpan-Winograd (1938-2023) was a French ultrastructural morphologist who worked in  
29 Paris in the second half of the twentieth century. She devoted her scientific life to the study of the  
30 adrenal gland anatomy. Through her countless electron microscopy images, in which she was  
31 undeniably an expert, Odile Grynszpan-Winograd pioneered the visualization of the liberation of  
32 chromaffin secretory granule content, providing an unequivocal anatomical demonstration of the  
33 exocytosis process. This seminal finding constituted a major advance in deciphering the stimulus-  
34 secretion coupling of the adrenal medullary tissue. By combining transmission electron microscopy  
35 with cryofracture, Odile Grynszpan-Winograd was also the first to illustrate gap junction plaques  
36 between chromaffin cells. However Odile Grynszpan-Winograd did not receive the entire benefit of  
37 her contributions, particularly with regard to the vesicular secretion of catecholamines, a subject that  
38 has been in debate for many years.

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44 **Fig. 1: Odile Grynszpan-Winograd, 1986**

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47 Odile Winograd was born in 1938 in Paris, France. She married in 1958 and obtained the same year  
48 her degree in Natural Sciences (Licence ès Sciences Naturelles). Henceforth Odile Diner, she was  
49 immediately appointed Lecturer and offered tenure as a Researcher at the Faculty of Sciences at the  
50 Sorbonne in Paris where she taught biology and cytology to both undergraduate and graduate  
51 students, until her retirement. At the same time, she joined the Laboratory of Cytology at Pierre and

52 Marie Curie University, headed by René Couteaux, a well-recognized 'ultrastructuralist'. As a doctoral  
53 fellow, Odile Diner became interested in the development of neural tissue, such as the sciatic nerve  
54 and the adrenal medulla. It was at the Electron Microscopy Centre of the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris  
55 that Odile Diner obtained her first micrographs. Benefiting from René Couteaux's expertise in the field  
56 of nerve histocytology, and in particular of the neuromuscular junction (sharing many common  
57 features with the splanchnic nerve-chromaffin cell synapse), Odile Diner combined transmission  
58 electron microscopy (TEM) approaches and histological staining techniques to decipher the  
59 development of the adrenal medullary tissue, first in rats and then in hamsters, mice and cats.

60 Odile Diner's work pertaining to the innervation of chromaffin cells in the rat adrenomedullary  
61 tissue was first briefly described in 1961 in a review article by René Couteaux on the various types of  
62 synapses [1]. The meticulous observation of more than thousand micrographs led Odile Diner to  
63 publish several observations in the field of neuroendocrinology, providing new data on the differential  
64 innervation of adrenergic and noradrenergic chromaffin cells. Her work was regularly reported in the  
65 *Comptes-Rendus hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences* [2-5].

66 After a divorce in 1965, she remarried in 1969 (she met her husband at the Sorbonne during  
67 the turmoil of the 'academic and student revolution of May 1968'), later giving birth to three children,  
68 two girls and a boy. From then on, she authored her articles under the name Odile Grynspan-  
69 Winograd. In 1972, under the supervision of René Couteaux, she defended a State Doctorate thesis in  
70 Natural Sciences<sup>1</sup>, entitled 'Morphological study of the adrenal medulla of the hamster: innervation,  
71 vascularization, release of secretory granules'.

72 From the onset of her doctoral research, Odile Diner's work was spiced up by a major  
73 challenge: tackling the 'vesicular secretion' hypothesis and identifying the sites of hormone liberation.  
74 During that period, many TEM observations were published, on the ultrastructure of hormone-storing  
75 cells such as mast cells, adrenal cells, pancreatic cells, and many others. Although the concept of  
76 exocytosis had emerged from biochemical and cell biology experiments, morphologists were still  
77 looking for a direct proof of the secretory mechanism. This issue has been the subject of much debate,  
78 both within Couteaux's team and abroad. For several years, Odile Diner searched for the presence of  
79 exocytosis sites in rat adrenomedullary tissue, but failed. She then turned her attention to another  
80 mammal, the golden hamster, already studied in other laboratories, and she succeeded in visualizing  
81 omega-shaped sites of 'exocytosis', or rather 'reverse micropinocytosis'. Indeed, this was how Odile  
82 Diner referred to her observations, which she presented at the joint meeting of the French and Belgian  
83 Electron Microscopy Colloquium in May 1967, and in an abstract published the same year in the *Journal*

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<sup>1</sup> The former French State Doctorate encompassed both the current PhD degree and the accreditation to supervise research.

84 *de Microscopie* [6]. Her results on the expulsion of granules from the adrenal medulla were published  
85 as a full paper in the *Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences* in August  
86 1967 [7]. Although written in French, this article had a resounding impact on the field<sup>2</sup>. Actually, it had  
87 barely come off the press when William W. Douglas, a British endocrinologist world-renowned for his  
88 seminal work on the stimulus-secretion coupling of chromaffin cells at Yale University, in a plenary  
89 lecture held at the University of Cambridge in September 1967 referred to the work as one of the  
90 compelling evidence that catecholamine secretion from medullary chromaffin cells occurs by  
91 exocytosis [8].

92 In 1969, Herman Blaschko, the father of catecholamine metabolism, invited Odile Grynszpan-  
93 Winograd to present a seminar in his laboratory at the University of Oxford. He suggested that she  
94 consider a sabbatical year in a laboratory specializing in the study of endocrine glands. At the same  
95 time, other institutions in Europe and the United States approached Odile Grynszpan-Winograd to  
96 offer her such an opportunity. She declined the offers, choosing to continue her research and teaching  
97 in Paris and to take care of her family.

98 To understand the importance of this pioneering work, we need to go back to the state of  
99 knowledge when Odile Diner was looking into the organization of the adrenal gland innervation and  
100 secretion. Let's take a brief look at the history of exocytosis in adrenal chromaffin cells. Until the mid  
101 60's, the release of packed granule content by the exocytosis process was still poorly understood and  
102 even reluctantly accepted, particularly in chromaffin cells. The idea, published a few years earlier, that  
103 the membrane of a chromaffin granule can fuse with the plasma membrane in response to cell  
104 stimulation, had emerged from the pioneering anatomical work of De Robertis and Sabatini [9],  
105 Coupland [10] and Douglas and Poisner [11], but still stood as a hypothesis. In the early fifties, many  
106 laboratories in the neurochemistry field had focused their research on the elucidation of hormone and  
107 neurohormone source and properties. It was in 1953 that these molecules, present in adrenal  
108 chromaffin cells, were found to be exclusively localized in subcellular membrane-limited particles.  
109 These molecules, namely adrenaline and noradrenaline, described as the stress hormones (*i.e.*  
110 mediators of the so-called 'fight or flight' response), are released massively from the adrenal gland  
111 upon stimulation via the splanchnic nerve and recovered into the blood stream to exert their activity  
112 on multiple target organs, including lung, muscles, heart, etc... The name 'chromaffin granules' was  
113 used for the first time in 1957 by the group headed by Hermann Blaschko in the Department of  
114 Pharmacology at the University of Oxford. Later on in 1961, in the same laboratory, the use of  
115 radioactive phosphorous allowed the localization of ATP together with adrenaline and noradrenaline

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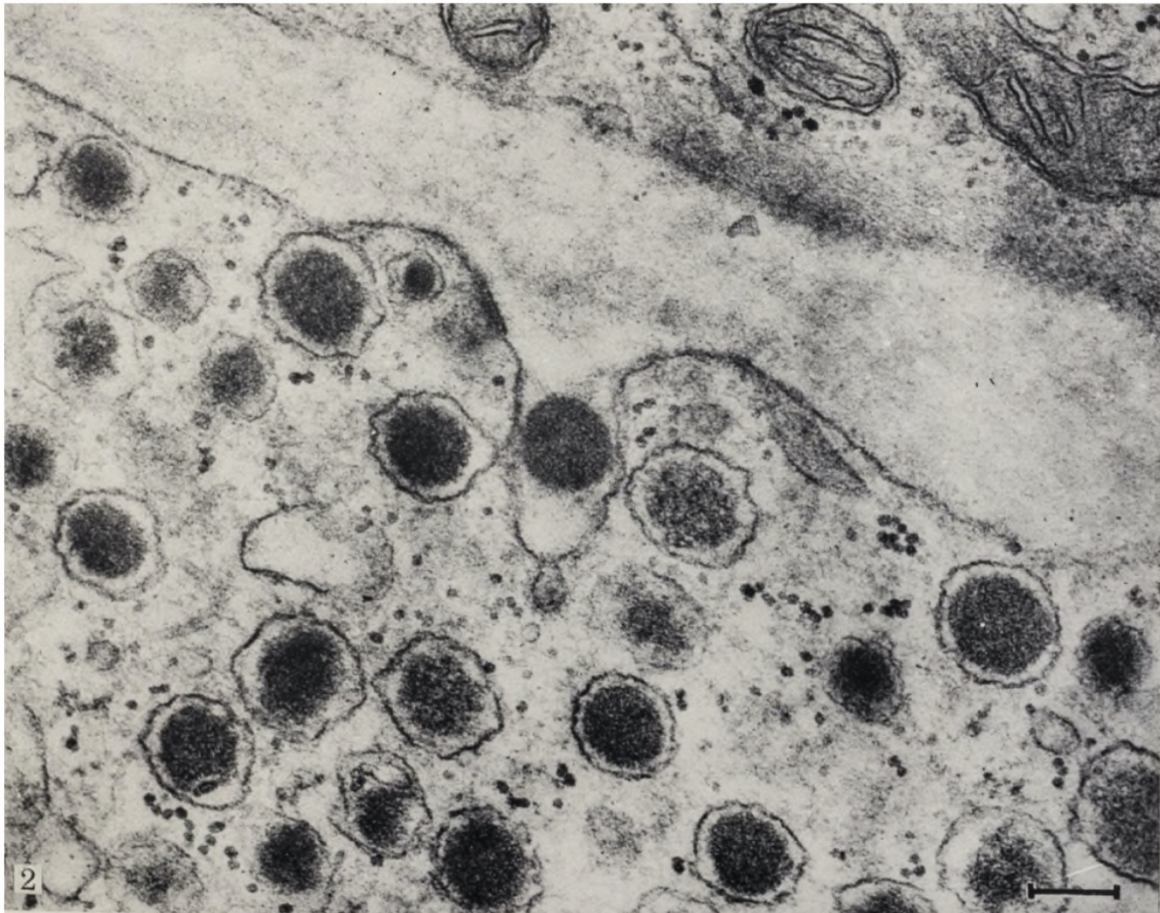
<sup>2</sup> At that period, the '*Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences*' were indexed in the *Current Contents*, the reference database for searching bibliographic content.

116 stored in these subcellular organelles, which could be isolated from the adrenal tissue by subcellular  
117 fractionation, a new technique at that time, implemented by high-speed centrifugation. The  
118 localization of adrenaline and noradrenaline in subcellular membrane-limited organelles questioned  
119 how, upon splanchnic nerve stimulation, they could be released into the bloodstream. In 1965, Peter  
120 Banks (University of Shieffield, UK) and Karen Helle (University of Bergen, Norway), working in  
121 Blaschko's laboratory, reported in *Biochemical Journal* that, upon stimulation of the adrenal gland, a  
122 granule protein is present together with catecholamines amongst the released material [12]. In  
123 parallel, Karen Helle developed a specific antibody against this chromaffin granule protein that was  
124 named chromogranin and, with the use of this antibody, she could demonstrate in 1966 [13] that the  
125 stimulation of chromaffin cells is followed by the release of chromogranin-immunoreactive protein,  
126 substantiating the original observation. To complete this crucial finding, on the following year, in a  
127 letter to *Nature*, the chromogranin protein was found to be secreted upon direct stimulation of the  
128 splanchnic nerve that innervates the adrenal glands [14]. The only suitable explanation for these  
129 observations was that the liberation of catecholamines requires the simultaneous opening of the  
130 granule membrane and the cell membrane towards the extracellular space. The interaction of the  
131 secretory granule with the cell membrane results in the fusion of the storage granule membrane with  
132 the cell membrane and the fusion produces the aperture of a pore through which the whole granule  
133 content, including catecholamines, proteins and smaller molecules such as ATP, ascorbic acid and  
134 others, is liberated into the extracellular space and then recovered in the blood stream. This process  
135 defines the exocytosis. The mention of the word 'exocytosis' in the title of a standing publication  
136 occurred for the first time in 1967 in an article published by Blaschko's group [15]. Interestingly, when  
137 they submitted their papers, late April 1967, neither Blaschko et al. [14] nor Schneider et al. [15] were  
138 aware that Odile Diner had already submitted an abstract a few months before her participation in the  
139 Brussels colloquium [6], mentioning the expulsion of isolated granules, and substantiating by direct  
140 morphological observations the forthcoming biochemical conclusion of the Oxford group.

141 In 1970, Herman Blaschko and Anthony David Smith invited several prominent senior scientists  
142 to participate in 'A Discussion on subcellular and macromolecular aspects of synaptic transmission'.  
143 Odile Grynszpan-Winograd, although still a young scientist, was also invited to this Symposium held in  
144 London, and contributed to the Proceedings published the following year in the *Philosophical*  
145 *Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences* [16]. This article, which reports  
146 her key observations, became her most notable contribution. Indeed, it has been recognized among  
147 the 'adrenal medulla community' that Odile Grynszpan-Winograd (ex-Diner) provided 'the first  
148 convincing morphological evidence that exocytosis is responsible for secretion from chromaffin cells'  
149 [17], giving a substantial support to the exocytosis concept derived from biochemistry experiments.



150 She indeed reported a series of landmark TEM images showing secretory granules apposed to and  
151 fusing with the plasma membrane, in hamster adrenal chromaffin cells (shown in Fig. 2). A couple of  
152 years later in 1974, Hermann Blaschko and Anthony David Smith invited Odile Grynspan-Winograd to  
153 contribute to a chapter in the *Handbook of Physiology*, Endocrinology section [18].  
154



155  
156 **Fig. 2: Representative exocytosis figure in a chromaffin cell.** Example of a granule-containing  
157 membrane invagination in an adrenaline-secreting cell (from [16], with permission).  
158

159 The ultrastructural observations of Odile Grynspan-Winograd paved then the way to many  
160 other works using later more sophisticated ultrastructural techniques, *i.e.* freeze-fracture cytology  
161 [19], immunogold staining [20], or confocal microscopy, all of them confirming the liberation by  
162 exocytosis of catecholamines but also other hormones and neurotransmitters from various tissues.  
163 We now know that exocytosis is the mechanism by which hormones, neurohormones and  
164 neurotransmitters are released upon stimulation of endocrine/neuroendocrine cells, nerve endings  
165 and neurons. It is a concept well established and fully recognized although the intimate mechanism of

166 fusion between the two membranes, granule membrane and cell membrane, waits to be resolved.

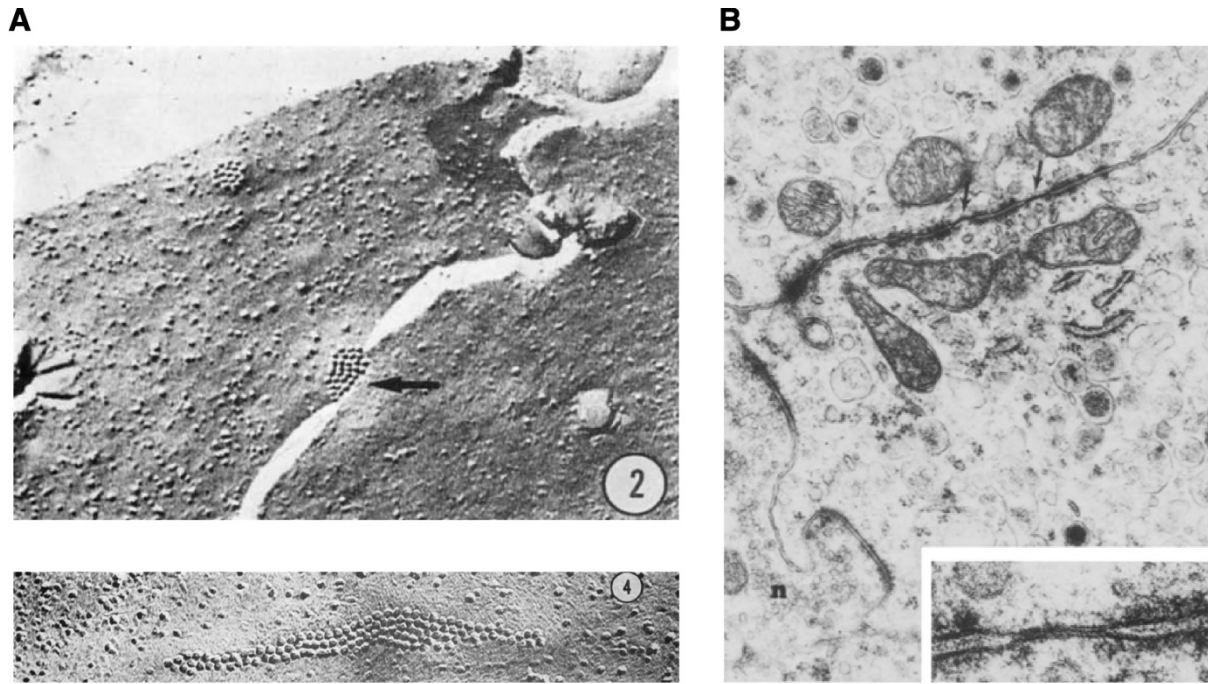
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168           However, in her professional environment, Odile Grynszpan-Winograd had to face some  
169 skepticism, owing to a group of neurochemists who did not accept the ‘vesicular secretion’. These  
170 scientists believed in a non-vesicular release and put all their efforts in attempting to demonstrate that  
171 there was a controlled diffusion of neurochemical molecules through specific pores, simultaneously  
172 occurring on both the granule (or vesicle) membrane and the cell membrane. A specific protein  
173 element was then believed to play such a role and was named the ‘mediatophore’ or ‘vesigate’ [21].  
174 This hypothesis however has been definitively rejected at the beginning of the 90s when the  
175 mediatophore was found to be related to a transporter protein, close to the H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase involved in the  
176 translocation of catecholamines from the cell cytoplasm towards the inside of chromaffin granule [22].  
177 Nonetheless, this skepticism has poisoned the neurochemistry community, and particularly the French  
178 one. In this conflictual atmosphere, we think that Odile Grynszpan-Winograd did not receive the entire  
179 benefit from her observations that she would have deserved. Nonetheless, her papers from the 1970s  
180 are still cited today to illustrate the secretion of endocrine glands. Her article published in the  
181 *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences* [16] has been  
182 cited around a hundred times. Her contribution to the exocytosis concept was really a brick into the  
183 wall.

184

185           In the 1980s, Odile Grynszpan-Winograd also experimented with cryofracture (a microscopy  
186 technique which had become ‘fashionable’), but she quickly realized that it was only useful if  
187 observations were performed in parallel with conventional TEM. The combination of these two  
188 microscopy techniques led to another major contribution by Odile Grynszpan-Winograd to the  
189 understanding of stimulus-secretion coupling in the adrenal medulla, through her work describing the  
190 intercellular junctions between chromaffin cells (focal tight junctions and gap junctions), in several  
191 animal species [23]. At the time of publication in 1980, this work received less attention than that  
192 describing exocytosis sites, but it was nonetheless the first to illustrate gap junction plaques between  
193 chromaffin cells, using the freeze-fracture technique (shown in Fig. 3). Today, this pioneer observation  
194 remains the morphological substrate for more recent work demonstrating the physiological role  
195 played by gap junctions in adrenal catecholamine secretion, *ex vivo* in rat adrenal slices [24], and *in*  
196 *vivo* in anaesthetized rodents [25].





197  
 198 **Fig. 3: Electron microscopy pictures illustrating gap junction plaques between chromaffin cells. A.**  
 199 Freeze-fractured specimens illustrating gap junction plaques in hamster chromaffin cells (from [23],  
 200 with permission). Most gap junctions are organized in small clusters (upper panel). Large gap junction  
 201 clusters (lower panel) are less frequently observed. **B.** Electron microscopy picture of a junctional  
 202 complex between two adjacent adrenaline-containing chromaffin cells in the mouse (from [26], with  
 203 permission).

204

205 Although electron microscopy, the cutting-edge technique commonly used in biology in the  
 206 1950s-1980s, has gradually lost ground to other histological approaches, the experimental data  
 207 generated by this technique are still the benchmark in various fields of biology today. The spatial  
 208 resolution achieved by this cell/tissue microscopy remains a major advantage. In the case of adrenal  
 209 chromaffin cells, Odile Grynszpan-Winograd's micrographs will continue to set the standard in the  
 210 field.



211  
212 **Fig. 4: Odile Grynspan-Winograd at a banquet in honor of René Couteaux.** From left to right: C.  
213 Bouchaud, R. Couteaux, J. Koenig, S. Tsuji, M. Israel, J. Gautron, J. Auber, ?, A. Barets, Odile Grynspan-  
214 Winograd, J. Taxi.

215  
216

217 We are pleased to offer this tribute to Odile Grynspan-Winograd's achievements in the field  
218 of the histology/morphology of the adrenomedullary tissue. Her observations added a major brick in  
219 the wall of knowledge.

220 Dr. Odile Grynspan-Winograd passed away on September 7th, 2023, in Paris.

221  
222

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