

A Generation of Excellence: A History of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. By Craig Brown. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xiii + 352 p., ill., notes, bibl., ann., index. ISBN 978-0-8020-9232-8 \$65)

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Volume 32, numéro 1, 2009

Medical Sciences and Medical Buildings

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037632ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/037632ar>

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Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (imprimé)

1918-7750 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Almeida, M. (2009). Compte rendu de [*A Generation of Excellence: A History of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.* By Craig Brown. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xiii + 352 p., ill., notes, bibl., ann., index. ISBN 978-0-8020-9232-8 \$65)]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 32(1), 73–74.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/037632ar>

***A Generation of Excellence: A History of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.* By Craig Brown.** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xiii + 352 p., ill., notes, bibl., ann., index. ISBN 978-0-8020-9232-8 \$65)

More than twenty-five years ago, Paul Axelrod wrote a review on four books describing the history of different Canadian universities. He noticed that “library shelves are filled with forgotten, antiquarian accounts of Canadian universities which are celebrationist in tone and apologetic in theme” and that “such histories simply extolled uncritically the figures that, in the face of great odds, built and established the universities.”¹

Much the same can be said of Craig Brown’s new book on the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR). Written for the Institute’s twentieth anniversary, the author does not go far beyond the struggle-survival theme typical of institutional biographies. With no clear intellectual problem to frame the work, the book essentially recounts how CIAR evolved from scratches to its present *grandeur*. The reader will thus find a detailed description of meetings and decisions that made what CIAR is today, but will be left on his own to figure out how all these facts fit in the broader social, economic and science policy context of the 1980’s and 1990’s.

More daunting is the absence of tables and figures that would render intelligible the funding of the Institute which is presented in a peace-meal fashion. What portion of the funding base came from private firms and foundations, from the provincial and federal governments? How the funding did evolved trough time and did it influence the research programs of the Institute? Again, the reader will have to make up his own answer.

The most obvious flaw of the book is probably the absence of a discussion on what makes the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research a unique organization: its interinstitutionnal, interdisciplinary collaborative research programs based on networks of communications. Yes, the book is structured around the different programs that were created trough the years (Artificial Intelligence and Robotics; Cosmology and Evolutionary Biology; Population Health; Superconductivity; Earth System Evolution; Economic Growth and Policy; Human Development; The Science of Soft Surfaces and Interfaces; Law; Nanoelectronics) but nothing can be found on the sociology of the networks, or on how the researchers concretely interacted in this “institute without walls.” Apart from the annual meetings that the author describes to some length and that are not exactly innovative devices to coordinate research, there is little on an organizational model that would have a considerable impact on Canadian science policy.

1. Paul Axelrod, “Historical Writing and Canadian Universities: The State of the Art,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 89, 1 (1982): 137.

In effect, Janet Atkinson-Grosjean has convincingly argued that CIAR's network design was a major influence in the shaping of the Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, a program that she states as "the most dramatic change in Canadian science policy since the National Research Council was established in 1916."² For an institutional history to leave aside such an important organizational aspect is quite disconcerting.

But then again, one must be aware of the public targeted by this publication. CIAR boards and presidents have always been on the prowl for additional money (as illustrated in the book) and are maybe tempted to use this "success story" as a tool for fund raising campaigns. The coffee table-like edition suggests that this application was in someone's mind.

Finally, scholars will find some interest in the book, just like they did for the eulogistic and official histories of Canadian universities Paul Axelrod depicted a long time ago. This interest lies largely in the factual evidence gathered by the author who extensively used CIAR archives and interviews conducted with the "founding fathers." Future researchers will refer to the book for facts, events, and the occasional analysis since all the material used in the preparation of the book has been deposited in the author's papers at the University of Toronto Archives and closed for thirty years.

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Marie-Victorin à Cuba. Correspondance avec le Frère Léon. Édition annotée par André Bouchard. (Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2007. 217 p., notes, bibl., ann. ISBN 978-2-7606-2066-7 29,95 \$)

La littérature consacrée à Marie-Victorin, déjà abondante, s'enrichit d'un nouveau titre : l'édition de la partie la plus intéressante de sa correspondance avec son confrère en religion et en botanique, le Frère Léon, du Colegio De La Salle de La Havane. Cette correspondance s'étend sur 37 années, de 1907 à la mort de Marie-Victorin, survenue dans un accident d'automobile le 15 juillet 1944. Comme on peut s'y attendre, cette correspondance jette une lumière bienvenue sur la longue collaboration scientifique des deux hommes, auteurs conjoints de trois volumes d'*Itinéraires botaniques sur l'île de Cuba* – un monument de plus de 1100 pages, orné de 650 photographies, consacré à la flore de l'île.

2. Janet Atkinson-Grosjean, *Public Science, Private Interests* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), xiii.