



 The O. Voinnet's misconduct
A two countries case of fraud

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Session: Collaboration and Mobility*

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 **Comets**
Ethics committee of CNRS













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Who is Olivier Voinnet ?

A « star » biologist at CNRS
(ARN interference, immune defense mechanism of plants, eventually profitable in medicine...)


A research director at CNRS, 43 years old in 2015
(director of a lab in Strasbourg from 2002 to 2010)

Silver medal at CNRS, member of Académie des Sciences


On leave since 2010 at ETH Zurich
Leader of a 40 members research group at ETH
Very well financed by European contracts (ERC...) and Swiss funding



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First allegation of fraud in Olivier Voinnet's publications




Post publication peer review

Creator of the site:
Brandon Stell, CR CNRS
Director of the PubPeer foundation :
Boris Barbour, DR CNRS

Forum for discussion about published articles :
Supplementary informations, reproducibility problems, error discoveries...

*but also misconducts revealed:
plagiarism, falsification of data or figures...*

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First allegation of fraud in Olivier Voinnet's publications

- Revealed by **PubPeer** in september 2014

Manipulation of 7 figures (now 37...) published articles!

- PubPeer was nformed by the US competitor biologist Vicky Vance, who reviewed O.V.'s articles 12 years before
- Immediatly after: the fraud is revealed in large audience newspapers in France, Swissland, UK, Canada, etc

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Le Monde **science & médecine**

Des faussaires dans les labos

April 2015, Le Monde

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At CNRS


9 April 2015
 CNRS informs the public that it has set up a **committee of high level scientific experts** but states that the general content of O.V.'s results is valid

4 February 2015
 Report of the committee: « **manquement caractérisé aux règles de présentation des données scientifiques dans 6 articles dont O.V. est co-auteur** »

9 June 2015
 The CAP (Commission Administrative Paritaire) states that there is a misconduct contrary to the scientific integrity

23 June 2015
 The President of CNRS decides:
 Olivier Voinnet is **barred from CNRS for 2 years** at the end of his staying at ETH
 Patrice Dunoyer (co-author, head of Strasbourg lab) barred from CNRS for one year (with a 11 months conditional sentence)

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At ETH simultaneously...

ETH commission of inquiry: 5 Swiss members (3 from ETH, 2 external)
(names are published) beginning in January 2015


Mandated from the executive board of ETH to:

- ⊙ Examine and provide clarifications and judgments regarding potential misconduct in 31 publications provided by O.V. and criticized on PubPeer
- ⊙ Interview of O.V. or any other persons who might provide help in reaching conclusions

Conclusions (17 June 2015)

- ⊙ Classification of the identified errors and misrepresentations
- ⊙ Attempt to understand the origin of the problem
« In the race to explore radically new scientific terrain, O.V. and collaborators permitted image manipulation, sometimes seemingly benign, sometimes very serious »

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At ETH simultaneously (Ctd)...


ETH conclusions (Ctd): What has to be learned from the O.V.'s case ?
Such events are not easily controlled. PubPeer is a valuable forum
Need for better archiving systems for tracking the data
Clarification efforts needed from editors, funding bodies, research institutions...

Immediate action to address the damage to the data
Papers including distortion of facts should be retracted through O.V.'s request
Need to repair valuable data and correct them from errors

Further action to correct the working culture in the O.V.'s lab
Internal restructuring at ETH, O.V.'s lab integrated in the neighbouring labs
Reprimand to Olivier Voinnet
Need to strengthen scientific culture and education at ETH

Further sanctions
Funds from Swiss National Funds (SNF) questioned. ERC funds maintained.
EMBO medal withdrawn

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Retraction watch


Reveals major frauds
But also errors

2010 : ~ 15 retractions / month
2015 : ~ 60 retractions / month

Creators : Adam Marcus and Yvan Oransky
<http://retractionwatch.com>


After 7 O.V.'s articles already retracted, one more recently...

Archive for the 'olivier voynet' Category **14 October 2016**
[Eighth Voynet paper retracted — this one from Science](#)
[with 5 comments](#)



Olivier Voynet
A high-profile plant scientist who has been racking up corrections and retractions at a steady clip has had another paper — this one from *Science* — retracted. The retraction, of a paper that had been previously corrected, is the eighth for [Olivier Voynet](#). According to the notice, the correction did not address all the figure problems with the paper, which “cannot be considered the result of mistakes.”

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Management of this allegation in two countries

Independant management of the inquiries at ETH and CNRS

Very different procedures

- Expert names of committees revealed in Switzerland, not in France
- Report of expert committee made public in Switzerland, not in France (not legally allowed)

Different sanctions independantly taken

- Severe in France
- Mild at ETH
- Variable at the European level
(EMBO medal withdrawn, ERC funds untouched)

Large trauma in both institutions

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A new affair at CNRS and ETH

September 2016

A new franco-swiss affair of fraud in molecular biology

Serious doubts about graphs and figures in several publications by ETH and CNRS researchers (O.Voinnet is a co-author of some of them)

A joint inquiry committee ETH and CNRS

The committee is set-up by CNRS in cooperation with ETH
 The names of the experts cannot be divulgated
 The conclusions will be made public when the inquiry is over
 Sanctions will be taken conjointly

Cross-country cooperation to deal with scientific integrity is improving...


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Conclusion

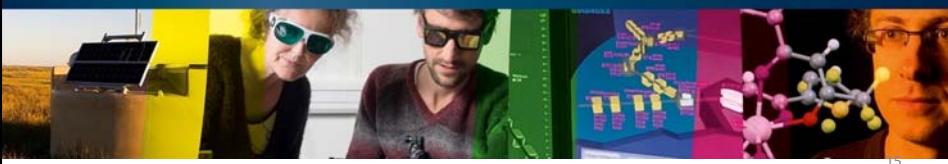
- **Two statements** and recommendations from COMETS to the CNRS
 - *How CNRS can respond to scientific integrity violations*
 - *Discussion and moderation of scientific publications on social networks and in the media: ethical issue*
- **A national committee** set by French Minister to deal with Research Integrity in all French institutions
- **A new law** in France to force ethics and integrity teaching to PhD students
- Soon creation of a **National Office for Scientific Integrity (OFIS)**

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Thanks for your remarks.



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