

Co-authorship issue with a manuscript and confirmation of not being, and still refusing to be, a co-author with Pr. Stefan Treue; correction of publicly disseminated information about my Bernstein Fellow position during the first half of 2008; article “Receptive Field Shift and Shrinkage in Macaque Middle Temporal Area through Attentional Gain Modulation”
(<https://www.jneurosci.org/content/28/36/8934>)

Tzvetomir Tzvetanov, 31 October 2019

I am writing now, end of October 2019, about this article, coauthorship issue, and Bernstein Fellow period because I discovered in the previous months that my employer at that time (January-April 2008), the MPI Dynamics and selforganisation, and the research structure where I was located for the work, Deutsches Primatenzentrum GmbH, through the collegial structure Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience Goettingen (BCCN Goettingen), have disseminated publicly and officially two documents with wrong information about my project, work, and publication at the time when I was Bernstein Fellow or still located for work in Goettingen. This period ended in June 2008 when I decided to stop any work relations with Prof. Stefan Treue. This included retracting from the article cited in the title of this document.

This document also comes out because, after discovering in summer 2019 the partial information disseminated about me, I asked from the BCCN Goettingen to receive a “Proof of Work/Certificate of Work” for the 4 months of working time and to clarify the wrongful information that is disseminated. After email exchanges with the person who wrote the letter, a manager, I asked that the head of the structure, Prof. Dr. Fred Wolf, a BCCN member since its origin, directly takes care of the situation. I did not receive a reply.

The two documents that are disseminated are (1) a report of the BCCN Goettingen submitted at the end of 2008 to the Ministry for Education and Research of Germany (BMBF), where I appear as coauthor on the article from which I retracted (at the time of submission of the internal report the article was already accepted without me as coauthor) and (2) a publicly available link at the MPI¹ that also contains factual errors about my Bernstein Fellow period and persons involved in it.

Therefore, the BCCN Goettingen misleads the readers of the two documents about my Bernstein Fellow period, because any person reading these documents and my own scientific curriculum² will have a wrong, or fallacious, understanding of my work and actions from January to June 2008 at the BCCN Goettingen.

Therefore, the current document gives my explanation of what happened around the first half of 2008, that led to a retraction from co-authorship with Prof. Stefan Treue, and how I worked for 4 months as Bernstein Fellow.

1 https://www.ds.mpg.de/55658/MPIDS_Research_Report_2008.pdf

2 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tzvetomir_Tzvetanov; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2553-4741>

The article “Receptive Field Shift and Shrinkage in Macaque Middle Temporal Area through Attentional Gain Modulation” (<https://www.jneurosci.org/content/28/36/8934>) was submitted on 15 April 2007, the last revision sent on 17 June 2008, and accepted 14 July 2008.

I was originally first coauthor with Dr. T. Womelsdorf on this article, with authors’ order as follows:

Thilo Womelsdorf*, Tzvetomir Tzvetanov*, Katharina Anton-Erxleben and Stefan Treue

I asked the editorial board of The Journal of Neuroscience, three days after the last submission of 17 June 2008, to be retracted from the authorship list.

I did not have problem with the content of the article. About one-third to one-half of the work was done by me. For the modelling part, which I performed and is included in the paper, one can see an abstract at Cosyne 2005 (here http://www.cosyne.org/c/images/d/d4/COSYNE05_Abstracts.pdf).

To explain the various events that happened I must start one year earlier.

I had a work contract with the private company Deutsches Primatenzentrum GmbH (DPZ) until end of 2007, for working in the Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory (CNL) led by Prof. Stefan Treue. I wrote a grant proposal in spring 2007. From the start I wanted to submit it to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation). It was submitted in June/July 2007³. Because the success rate is not high, after seeing an advertisement about Bernstein Fellow Independent positions, and taking information from Prof. Treue about it (he was member of the BCCN committee at that time), I also submitted the same project to the local BCCN Goettingen. This application had a much shorter format. I informed the DFG of this double submission. Prof. Stefan Treue and the DPZ agreed in written form that CNL and DPZ are the hosting laboratory and institute for the DFG project. We also agreed that the Bernstein Fellow position would be carried at the CNL and DPZ. During 2007, when discussing about the project and funding issues with Prof. Treue, I already informed him that in the most positive case, if I am awarded both grants, I would directly start the funding from the DFG and not take the BCCN position. (in the most negative case, there was nothing to talk about).

I received a positive answer from the BCCN in September 2007. In December 2007, I had to sign the contract for the BCCN position because I had no information about the DFG grant (contract with the MPI dynamics and selforganisation signed on 19 December 2007, start of contract from 1 January 2008). In the last days³ of December 2007 I wrote an email to the DFG manager of the grant application, Dr. Jan Kunze, to ask information about my grant. He responded that my grant application was accepted. I informed Prof. Treue and asked for the contract with the DPZ (Deutsches Primatenzentrum GmbH) to be written and started with the DFG grant. He replied that, because I already signed the Max-Planck contract for starting the Bernstein Fellow position and I was secured as a Guest Scientist at the CNL and DPZ for carrying the project, we should take information about what could be done with the BCCN grant.

In the first days of 2008, after the Christmas holidays, Prof. Stefan Treue handed me personally the official DFG letter that was send for informing us, me and the DPZ, about the acceptance of my grant. The letter was already opened and the official DPZ stamp about reception of the letter at the DPZ was 18 December 2007.

Beginning of January 2008, Prof. Stefan Treue argued that the BCCN grant should not be lost and we should ask what could be done with it. Since I was awarded the Bernstein Fellow position, I had no written information about the amount of the grant (out of paying the salary), that is, no detailed

3 Some dates are not exactly given because I do not have access to (1) my old GWDG email accounts, which were blocked by the company Deutsches Primatenzentrum GmbH in summer 2008, and (2) I cannot access my Gmail account from P.R.China, because access to Gmail is blocked.

information about the available funds (material costs, possibility to pay students or subjects, etc.), neither rules about its management. This was in stark contrast with the DFG grant, where all information and rules were clearly listed and available on its web site, or written in the grant proposal (details about the demanded funds).

I agreed that Prof. Treue, as member of the local BCCN committee, will take information about it. During the next 2-3 months of meetings, Prof. Treue informed me at each meeting that the last idea he had seemed not to work, and he will push for another option. Last, in March or beginning of April 2008, he informed me that he succeeded to have the contact information of the general manager of the BCCN grant, located at the "DLR" (Deutsches Zentrum fuer Luft- und Raumfahrt). He also informed me that, at the local level of Goettingen, it is not possible to do anything with the Bernstein Fellow position, i.e. take it or leave it. But he wanted to discuss with the general manager of the DLR, because he thought there should be some way to manage the grant.

During all this period, I always clearly and openly told him that I want to carry the research project with the DFG grant, and that I want a contract with the DPZ with this grant. He always acknowledged it, but he did not proceed to make a contract for me with the DPZ on the base of the DFG grant.

Last, in the first two weeks of April 2008, he informed me that the DLR manager told him that the grant of the Bernstein Fellow position cannot be used for any other purpose. Most important, Prof. Treue informed me that I am the sole decision maker on this grant, that it is to me to decide what to do.

From that point I contacted³ the head of the MPI dynamics and selforganisation and head of the BCCN Goettingen for cancelling my Bernstein Fellow contract with the MPI. The end of contract was signed on 21 April 2008 with termination day the last day of April 2008.

I informed Prof. Stefan Treue that my Bernstein Fellow contract finishes end of April and I asked him to start my DFG contract from May 2008. To use a euphemism, he was not happy. Prof. Treue did not respond to my request of contract, neither did he acknowledge, nor he refused. From end of April, without any response from the head of the DPZ and laboratory where the research project was supposed to be carried by me as independent researcher (Principal Investigator), I was without working contract.

The situation was difficult and complex also because of the involvement of other working issues. I had accepted, through the connections of Prof. Treue to the local Max-Planck International School (MPIS), to supervise in May-June 2008 a laboratory rotation student in the department CNL of the company DPZ.

From the moment my contract with the MPI dynamics and self organisation was ended and that I had no contract with the DPZ, I considered that my responsibility of supervision within the DPZ structure was not valid anymore. Therefore, I contacted the secretariat of the International School to inform them that I am not employee anymore and that I cannot supervise the student. I also informed them that Prof. Treue or another Professor in the department, both leading independent groups, can accommodate the student with another laboratory rotation topic (see Appendix Emails 1).

The discussion escalated, and Prof. Treue considered that I should take my responsibility about the engagements I have made and not engage the responsibility of the CNL/DPZ for my own inactions about my contracts (i.e. leaving one contract before having signed another one) (see Appendix Emails 1, email from 8 May 2008). After a meeting, it was decided that I will carry the supervision of the laboratory student. I was still without contract.

Because of no contract with the DPZ, in the second half of May and beginning of June 2008 I took contact with the head of the MPI dynamics and selforganisation for discussing with him about my project and the possibility to be hosted in his department. I found out that the institute had experimental space for behavioural research and that he was interested. But I did not receive a clear and written answer about direct employment by the MPI and hosting of my DFG project.

On 9 June 2008, I received an email from Prof. Treue where he informed me that after talking with the DLR manager and the head of BCCN, the BCCN grant could be prolonged to the end of the year 2008, and then I could start the DFG grant (see Appendix Emails 2).

Therefore, I sent an email to Prof. Treue on 11 June 2008 to inform him that I will not stay and work in his laboratory, that I have taken contacts with another Professor for looking for a new workplace, and importantly that he must stop talking on behalf of my name to other third parties, whether DLR, BCCN, or other institutions or persons ! (see Appendix Emails 2). I also asked that we meet for discussing the different issues. I did not receive a reply for the meeting demand. But a reply arrived on 23 June 2008, only after the events below happened, a reply that was not responding to my demand (but it was too late).

In the meantime, we received the reviewers' feedback on the manuscript from The Journal of Neuroscience. The responses to the reviews were carried as a normal work by myself and the other authors. When we finished the draft of the responses to the reviewers (before 15 June 2008), Prof. Treue still did not acknowledge my demand from 11 June 2008 for a meeting, for fixing our collaboration and my grant issues. Thus, I asked in written form Dr. Thilo Womelsdorf and Prof. Treue to wait for the resubmission, to put it on hold, because I wanted to have the situation clarified with Prof. Stefan Treue. Dr. Thilo Womelsdorf, in agreement with Prof. Treue, resubmitted the manuscript on 17 June 2008, explicitly without my agreement. Dr. Womelsdorf knew of my personal situation and that I had no work contract from beginning of May 2008.

From that point onward, I decided to stop working with Prof. Stefan Treue in any possible way, directly or indirectly, through collaborations, to stop being co-author with him.

For this reason, first, I informed the Editorial Board of The Journal of Neuroscience that I retract my name from the article (email from 20 June 2008). Dr. Thilo Womelsdorf and Prof. Treue wrote back to me asking the reason of this retraction and to change my position. I did not change my position.

From my retraction email onward, Prof. Stefan Treue, through the company DPZ, also blocked all my work-related emails (ttzveta@gwdg.de; ttzvetanov@dpz.gwdg.de). Later, in July/August 2008, I went to the office of the GWDG for requesting re-access to my email accounts. It was responded (orally) that the email account can be unblocked only by the company that blocked it and has created it. I did not ask the company DPZ, that is, Prof. Stefan Treue, to unblock my email accounts.

I sent my retraction email from my Gmail account. I had informed The Journal of Neuroscience to use my Gmail account for further communications. I do not recall of any other email from The Journal of Neuroscience³. My name did not appear on the article when it was officially published.

After blocking my work-related email accounts, Prof. Stefan Treue, and at least 4 other former colleagues from DPZ, did communicate with me through my Gmail account.

Second, I sent an email to Prof. Stefan Treue on 26 June 2008 where I informed him that my name can not appear as co-author on any work related to him on which I substantially contributed but I did not lead. I wrote a list of the projects where I participated as a collaborator, not a leader (see Appendix Emails 2). I considered this second email as a personal obligation, because I explicitly did not want that my dissensions with Prof. Stefan Treue block in any way the work and

publications of my colleagues at the CNL/DPZ. It is my own and individual decision behind which I still stand.

In June 2008, during my short visits in the CNL for supervising the laboratory rotation student and recovering my personal belongings, I was notified by the former office co-worker that someone from the DLR tried to contact me. I phoned back and I found out that it is Mr. Dr. Rainer Loose (his name later changed to Dr. Rainer Girgenrath), the DLR manager of the Bernstein grants, whom I never talked to before, nor did I know his name until he tried to contact me. He wanted to know what happens. I simply answered that I was leaving the CNL/DPZ.

Also, I contacted a lawyer in Goettingen for asking help and advice on my work-related problems. After oral explanation of my situation that person did not see what could be done. Nevertheless, this lawyer agreed to help in correcting the "Certificate of Work" (Arbeitszeugnis), an official document that an employer must provide on request of the employee.

My side of the story ends here. I tried to put the facts. I know the other side involved in this story is telling a biased version about this period (cf. further below about the short discussion I had with Dr. Andrei Gorea in spring 2013 about my retraction from coauthorship).

This is my side of the story about how I arrived at the point of not being coauthor on the paper in the title of the current document, about the DFG project I wanted to carry at the CNL/DPZ, and about how I had to deal with a Bernstein Fellow position in Goettingen. During the BCCN period (January-April 2008), the project had no direct involvement of Dr. JM Herrmann (whom I had met few times). My application documents to the BCCN Goettingen and to the DFG do not mention him as collaborator. But the DFG grant did mention other CNL/DPZ collaborators with whom, after June 2008, I could not collaborate with anymore. That was my own decision. Whether the finished manuscripts or ongoing projects in CNL/DPZ on which I collaborated were later published or not, projects which in my personal opinion were all good scientific works, does not officially concern me. I explicitly asked not to be author and I wrote that I have no problem that this work is published without me as co-author.

What happened after these events? I briefly summarize it. I contacted three research institutions in Goettingen for possible hosting of my independent DFG research project (MPI dynamics and selforganisation, Uni-Medizin Goettingen, Department of Psychology at University of Goettingen). All three refused. Then I contacted a research institute that was external to Goettingen, at the Leibniz Universitaet Hannover. They accepted my application, and I became a commuter during the time my wife was still working in Goettingen.

I still refuse to propose Prof. Stefan Treue for reference letters. I always openly state it in any application to a work where it is demanded. If people ask an explanation, I give mine. After leaving Germany and about 2 years of father-at-home period, in the first half of 2013, I received two positive replies to my scientific work search. One was from Dr. Andrei Gorea for a 2 years postdoc in Paris and the second was for a 3 years Research Associate position in Hefei. I did inform both sides that I will not give letter of reference from Prof. Stefan Treue. Only Dr. Andrei Gorea openly said that he will personally contact Prof. Stefan Treue. At our second meeting, Dr. Gorea asked me what is my story with the retractions and I gave him my explanation. He proposed me the position.

Each reader makes its own opinion of my side of the story.

I sincerely wish that people, especially young scientists, understand that science is work. That is, one has a job with rules, written and not-written. If the rules break down, you have to rely on people. If people turn out not reliable at one place, one must move. Most people in science know how badly things can turn out. Importantly, there are people in science providing help.

I do maintain that I refuse to be co-author with Prof. Stefan Treue on any work he was leading and on which we were collaborating. This includes the article of “Receptive Field Shift and Shrinkage in Macaque Middle Temporal Area through Attentional Gain Modulation”.

This document clarified, from my point of view, what was for me the Bernstein Fellow Independent Research position that I received at the BCCN Goettingen, and what happened before, during and shortly after this period.

Appendix Emails 1

The emails listed here are not all the email exchanges I still have from the first half of 2008. I put only the emails sent by me or Prof. Stefan Treue that are directly confirming some of the claims in the main text where the email is referenced.

Fwd: Ahmed

From: tzvetomir.tzvetanov<tzvetomir.tzvetanov@gmail.com>

Time: Sunday, Jun 9, 2019 3:55 PM

To: Tzvetomir Tzvetanov<tzvet@qq.com>

----- Forwarded message -----

De : **Prof. Dr. Stefan Treue** <treue@gwdg.de>

Date: jeu. 8 mai 2008 à 08:46

Subject: Ahmed

To: Dr. Tzvetomir Tzvetanov <tzveta@gwdg.de>, Tzvetomir Tzvetanov <tzvetomir.tzvetanov@googlemail.com>

Hi Tzvetomir,

as you must have realized from the email exchange with Sandra Drube I was very irritated by your email to the Neuroscience Programm concerning the lab rotation of Ahmed. You had agreed to supervise Ahmed for his lab rotation and he had elected to come to the lab specifically for the project he arranged with you. I cannot understand nor accept that you want to abandon this supervision simply because you have neglected to properly arrange for a succession of your work contracts.

Since Monday Valeska and I have supervised Ahmed and showed him how to do some simple psychophysical measurements of repulsion effects in direction discrimination. I have done this under the assumption that you would contact me to let me know how you want to proceed. As several days have now passed it is of great urgency that you take over the supervision of Ahmed. He will come to the lab again today around noon.

Please let me know how you plan to resolve the issue of the lab rotation supervision as it directly affects the reputation of the lab in how far others (such as the neuroscience PhD-programm) can rely on professional behavior from our side. Because of the seriousness of this issue we have to resolve it before we can proceed with the DFG-financed contract.

Sincerely,
Stefan

Fwd: AW: Laboratory rotation of Ahmed El Hady

From: tzvetomir.tzvetanov<tzvetomir.tzvetanov@gmail.com>

Time: Sunday, Jun 9, 2019 3:59 PM

To: Tzvetomir Tzvetanov<tzvet@qq.com>

----- Forwarded message -----

De : **Prof. Stefan Treue** <treue@gwdg.de>

Date: ven. 2 mai 2008 à 18:55

Subject: Re: AW: Laboratory rotation of Ahmed El Hady

To: Sandra Drube <gpneuro@gwdg.de>, El Hady, Ahmed <atarek1@gmail.com>

Cc: Tzvetomir Tzvetanov <tzvetomir.tzvetanov@googlemail.com>, Dr. Alexander Gail <agail@gwdg.de>

Dear Ahmed,

I am sorry for the email exchange between Dr. Tzvetanov and Sandra Drube that you have received today, suggesting that your lab rotation next week was in doubt.

Of course your lab rotation in the Cognitive Neuroscience Lab will happen. Please let me know your course schedule for Monday and when you will come by.

Best regards,
Stefan Treue

On May 2, 2008, at 12:35 PM, Sandra Drube wrote:

> **[email from Sandra Drube taken out by T.Tzvetanov]**

>

> Von: Tzvetomir Tzvetanov [mailto:tzvetomir.tzvetanov@googlemail.com]

> Gesendet: Freitag, 2. Mai 2008 12:12

> An: gpneuro@gwdg.de

> Cc: Prof. Dr. Stefan Treue; agail@gwdg.de

> Betreff: Laboratory rotation of Ahmed El Hady

>

> Dear Sandra Drube,

>

> Since i am not any more working in the Cognitive Neuroscience

> Laboratory of the German Primate Center,

> I would like to inform you that i will not be able to supervise the

> laboratory rotation of Ahmed El Hady

> involving psychophysics and modelling of motion processing.

>

> Concerning Ahmed's lab-rotation, Pr. Stefan Treue and Dr. Alexander

> Gail can propose a different subject.

>

> Please accept my apologies for this late information and for any

> inconvenience it creates,

>

> Sincerely,

>

> Tzvetomir Tzvetanov

Appendix Emails 2

Fwd: association to the CNL

From:tzvetomir.tzvetanov<tzvetomir.tzvetanov@gmail.com>

Time:Sunday, Jun 9, 2019 3:43 PM

To:Tzvetomir Tzvetanov<tzvet@qq.com>

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Tzvetomir Tzvetanov** <tzvetomir.tzvetanov@googlemail.com>

Date: 2008-06-26 21:27 GMT+08:00

Subject: Re: association to the CNL

To: "Prof. Stefan Treue" <treue@gwdg.de>

Dear Stefan,

I am very disappointed that you have decided to answer my email so late and only after a sad and important decision on my side. I was expecting you to contact me for discussing, as I wrote you, the projects on which we collaborate.

Given that before this extreme action I decided to break any contacts with you and the people working under your authority, the only remaining connections we have must be dealt with.

I am asking that my name is not used as co-author on manuscripts on the projects I did not lead, but on which I have substantially contributed. In my opinion, these projects are:

1. Speed psychophysics and physiology of Dr. Pinar Boyraz (2 manuscripts in preparation, one of psychophysics and one neurophysiology with modelling and psychophysics)
2. Psychophysics of image perception and natural image statistics + neurophysiology of spatial attention in area MST on motion tuning of Daniel Kaping (PhD director: Stefan Treue) (2 manuscripts in preparation + one possible manuscript in the future)
3. Psychophysics of border ownership and feature-based attention of Nobuhiko Wagatsuma (PhD director: Dr. Ko Sakai)(possible one manuscript in preparation)

I have no problem with their submission without me as coauthor. I have been paid during my stay in the laboratory for this work.

Concerning the different projects I have been still working on in the laboratory, the data are property of the DPZ together with all the material I have accumulated. I will therefore not ask them.

Nevertheless, I have some personal belongings together with material from my PhD thesis that i brought with mein the laboratory. I would like to take them. Please inform me when and who to contact for having access to my former desk and the above material.

Concerning my future, I am officially asking a certificate of work (in german: Arbeitszeugnis) which I need for the Federal agency for work (Bundesagentur fuer Arbeit) and my future work search. This work search does not concern you in any way. Please write the certificate in german for my official work search, which i'll take care of making a translation in english.

I would appreciate to have this certificate as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Tzvetomir Tzvetanov

2008/6/23 Prof. Stefan Treue <treue@gwdg.de>:

Dear Tzvetomir,

I have received your email informing me about your decision not to continue working in my lab. I am sorry to learn from your email that you find the conditions inappropriate for a proper working environment. Given that you have not contacted me I assume that you rather not talk about these issues. If that is a wrong assumption or if you want to talk about anything, ket me know and we can set up a meeting.

I interpret the total breakdown in communication between us, the wording of your email and your actions (letter to the Journal of Neuroscience) as a wish from your side to sever all connections to the lab as quickly as possible. I therefore relieve you of the responsibility for supervising the lab rotation of Ahmed and I am canceling your guest scientist contract and your key card . Should you have any personal items at the DPZ please let me know and we will return them to you. Please return your DPZ-keys as well as any items that belong to the DPZ to the personnel office. If you want to visit the lab please get my approval in advance. I will be back on July 7th. Any communication until then has to be done by email.

As you know I see it as my responsibility to provide a supportive and positive environment for the members of the lab. It is a great personal disappointment for me that I appear not to have succeeded in this regard in your case. I hope hat you find a more suitable environment elsewhere.

Sincerely,
Stefan

On Jun 11, 2008, at 3:15 PM, Tzvetomir Tzvetanov wrote:
Dear Stefan,

I would like to inform you that i do not intend anymore to stay and work in the laboratory.

For myself, I do not consider that the appropriate conditions are met for a proper working environment.

We can meet for clarifying this issue and explain you my decision.

As you have been informed, I have taken contacts with Pr. Theo Geisel of the MPI dynamics and self-organization where my research could be performed and I will recontact him for discussing this possibility.

In any case, I would like you to consider that from now on you cannot speak on behalf of my name with any third party, wether it is the Bernstein Center, DLR, or any other institution/foundation/person.

With respect to the scientific projects / publications on which we collaborate, we can clarify the issues at our meeting.

Gruss,

Tzvetomir

On 09.06.2008, at 14:39, Prof. Dr. Stefan Treue wrote:

Hi Tzvetomir,

how long are you in today and tomorrow?

There is a problem with the funding for the equipment we requested for your Bernstein Group that we need to talk about. In short, the DLR, the supervisory organization for the BCCN funding, has a problem with you running the Bernstein Group while being funded from the DFG for a separate project. They do not want to grant the money for the equipment in this situation. I talked to them and Theo Geisel and the best solution would be if you would return onto the funding from the BCCN until the end of the year and switch to the DFG funding only then.

We can discuss this later this afternoon (just before the journal club?) or tomorrow.

Cheers,
Stefan

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