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THE 496

30 November 2014

THE PREVALANCE OF THE MASK IN THE TRANSITION OF RITUAL INTO THEATRE

What would man be - what would any man be - without his clothes? As soon as one stops and thinks over that proposition, one realizes that without his clothes a man would be nothing at all; that the clothes do not merely make the man, the clothes are the man; that without them he is a cipher, a vacancy, a nobody, a nothing ... There is no power without clothes. It is the power that governs the human race. Strip its chiefs to the skin, and no State could be governed; naked officials could exercise no authority; they would look (and be) like everybody else - commonplace, inconsequential.

-Mark Twain, "The Czar's Soliloquy"

If we take into consideration Twain's observation regarding clothing as an extension of the self, which is in many instances a more important determinant of social influence than the personality or character of a person, then what conclusions can be drawn regarding the potential implications of putting on a mask: an object which replaces what is arguably the most essential element of a person's unique physical identity? Do they cease to be solely human at that moment, instead subjugating their will to that of the spirit of the object, which then dominates the reception of their essence by human eyes? For some time periods and cultures this activity brought a great authority or power to the mask wearer in certain realms. Contemporary scenarios in which this is so are not commonplace. Spanning across vast stretches of time and place, various human societies have had the inclination to don some

sort of material object as an alternative to their face and perform as a spirit or creature other than themselves. From the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest in North America, to the Yoruba and Edo people of modern day Nigeria in Africa, masks have played an essential role in religious rituals and ceremonies. Masks have historically been essential in moments of performance when humans seek to interact with the world beyond their own skin in an elevated, more profound or consequential manner. While we call these objects "masks," which we tend to associate with something which *covers up* the true nature of something, for many cultures, the objects which they used in lieu of their faces were ways of transforming themselves into mediums channeling the divine. The masks that many societies have utilized throughout history have been intended as a means of gaining a glimpse of the true nature of things - tools *in the service* of truth - not disguises intended to hide it.

In contemporary times, stories in film are portrayed to us by actors who are so specifically chosen for their predisposed physical conformity to a manufactured consensus of character types, that actors become almost inseparable from the characters that the public expects them to represent. The faces of these actors are distributed through an extensive network of technology which magnifies, and glorifies these faces. 100 years ago the gargantuan full-screen sizes of actors' faces elevated them to super-stardom. Now, an actor's face is just as likely to be the size of a person's hand on their digital device: a commodity to be owned and discarded. Where and why did this shift in storytelling norms happen in the West? Just as a biologist may benefit from analyzing brackish waters where salt water and fresh water mix in order to better understand the moment when life passed from sea to land, so can it be of value to analyze periods in history when the phenomenon of performance in the West was at a key turning point in its evolution. This was a process which spans over thousands of years, from ancient religious rites involving masks, to contemporary storytelling forms which are now completely independent of masks. The two periods which shall be revisited here, in the service of better understanding the unique and essential contributions of each, are the masked theatre of the Ancient

Greeks and the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* of the 16th and 17th century.

THE ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE

In 500 B.C., Athens was witnessing and participating in what were arguably some of the very first manifestations of theatrical activity involving large sectors of the citizenry which were *not exclusively* understood within a religious context, but were rather beginning to become theatrical events *for their own sake*. While the theatrical festivals were begun under the auspices of praising the god Dionysus, they had quickly gained a momentum of their own, which threatened to develop into what was, at least to some degree, a new and independent societal function. While the extent to which this claim can be taken is a product of a fair amount of debate, the scholar Rush Rehm states that "the City Dionysia during the fifth century,[was] a festival that was viewed from an administrative standpoint as a secular, and not a religious, affair" (20). Prior to this distinct manifestation of theatrical activity, a gathering of spectators watching another group of performers was either within the context of a religious ritual, completely informal in nature and spontaneous, or political and specifically catered towards decision making and establishment of public policy - as was happening in Athenian democracy for example. People told stories around a fire, which was an exchange of ideas; people donned masks and costumes and did dances as spirits manifested and somehow manipulated or appeased; choruses sang and danced as entertainment apart of ritual celebrations such as funerals and weddings and ceremonies tied to specific deities; poets sang their songs from memory, or recited the repertoire of the era.

What started happening in Greece was something new. All of these priorly distinct and separate activities found a common context within which to meet each other, and directly compete for dominance or cooperate towards a shared goal: a successful performance in a large architectural space specifically designed for this purpose. In his Performance Studies Essay, *Actuals: A Look Into Performance Theory*, Richard Schechner observes that, in the grand scope of human history, "we are ... almost unique in using ready-made spaces for theatres." The Ancient Greeks were among the first to

propose the idea of dedicating a space specifically for theatrical events. This is not to negate the undeniable religious character of the theatre competitions, as they *were* called the City Dionysia and were overtly understood to be festivals in praise of Dionysus - god of wine, ritual madness, fertility and spectacle. If, however, we are to lay out the overall progression of what we now call "theatre" across a broad historical spectrum, with our secular contemporary practice on one end, and the birth of spectacle in prehistory as a religious or spiritual phenomenon on the other, then there is no doubt that what the Greeks were doing is a valuable and important turning point in that process. One need only look to the very word *theatre* and come to see its root in the Greek word *theatron*, a place for seeing something, in order to be confronted with the formative role that the Ancient Greek theatre has played in the very existence of our own contemporary art form (Green and Handley 11).

However, a great deal of caution and care is warranted when making any attempt at exploring the distant past. In his book *The Greek Philosophers*, W.K.C. Guthrie eloquently articulates this point with respect to modern study of ancient philosophy: "...the Greeks remain in many respects a remarkably *foreign* people, and to get inside their minds requires a real effort, for it means unthinking much that has become part and parcel of our mental equipment so that we carry it about with us unquestioningly and for the most part unconsciously" (3). For example, we must take into consideration the degree to which the predominance of Monotheism has influenced our contemporary conceptual relationship with masks. David Wiles warns in his excellent book exploring the Ancient Greek mask, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy*, that "without a sympathetic understanding of 'idolatrous' religion, we shall never explicate the ancient mask except by means of a circular reasoning that is a function of our own vocabulary"(212). While the theater of the Ancient Greeks had taken a distinctive step away from the masked ritual of a strictly religious affair, it was certainly a far cry away from our contemporary notions of the theatre, which are in large part defined by the strictly secular realm which theatre is expected to inhabit.

Also concerning the illusory effects of contemporary assumptions, what the Greek word for "mask" actually meant to a Greek wearer of one bears very scant resemblance to what may come to the mind of a contemporary American when the word "mask" is mentioned. A major source of this discrepancy lies in the limitations of language itself. The word which the Ancient Greeks used to refer to the "masks" which they wore for their theatre performances was *prosopon*, the same word they used for "face" (Wiles *Mask and Performance* 1). This word likely had none of our negative connotations of falsity, concealment or deception. The Ancient Greeks literally would say, when they donned a mask for performance, that they were putting on a face, in order to *become* that character. This idea is reinforced by any close analysis of ancient Greek imagery where human figures are depicted holding masks (Green and Handley 22). There is no perceptible difference between how the images of masks are represented, and how human faces are represented, other than the absence of a body attached. It seems that to the Greek mind, there was no reason to graphically or linguistically distinguish between a human face and an object which was a face.

Rather than answer the question of what function the masks served in the theatre of the Ancient Greeks, the approach here will instead address the topic from the perspective of asking: what were the new social constructs *made possible* by the existence and use of masks? The very fact that there was even the *possibility* of an outdoor theatre performance in the presence of such large audiences in the Greek theatre was due in large part to the amplifying qualities of the masks. The masks surrounded the entire head of the performers, and the opening at the mouth served as a megaphone, amplifying the performers voice and making it comprehensible and audible to the audience (Wiles *Mask and Performance* 169). They also aided in the distinction of the different characters from afar, and allowed single performers to take on more than one role. In his book *Greek Tragic Theatre*, Rush Rehm articulates a potential dramatic contribution of the mask to the success of Greek theatre when he states that "one of the great discoveries of Greek drama is that the imagination of the audience is the theatre's

greatest resource"(41). He is supposing that the presence of the masks allowed, and even demanded, that the audience engage with the theatre through some degree of projection of their own imaginations, shifting and changing according to the action and the characters. It may be nearly impossible for the contemporary mind to relate to, or even conceive of, the collective use of imagination which possibly resulted in this social setting.

This a fundamentally opposite experience to that of most modern consumers of entertainment. When someone experiences actors presenting emotion on a screen, there is no space for the imagination of the viewer, and in fact, any engagement of the imagination is a hindrance or distraction. In all but the rare special occasion of a big hit film in a commercial theater, the social aspect of the modern experience of performance through technology is all but absent. It may not be necessary to discern whether or not these pragmatic benefits of the Mask in early Greek theatre were their primary *raison d'etre*, or if the very context which relied upon these benefits arose out of the utility of what was already conventional mask use. What is important to acknowledge, is that Ancient Greek theatre is *as impossible to imagine without masks as it would be to imagine the script of the contemporary sitcom without the television, the living room and the laugh track.*

The general category of Ancient Greek theatre can be further broken down into three smaller sub-categories, which each have their own special types of masks within the broader Ancient Greek Theatre: Tragedy, Old Comedy, and New Comedy. Tragedy, apart from its primary intent being to portray distress rather than inspire laughter, is also categorized by Bernard Knox as being exclusively preoccupied with "human as opposed to divine myth"(9). Without the masks of tragedy, there was so social precedence for the Greeks to accept an actor standing on the stage presenting himself as one of the great mythological heroes of their collective mythological history. The heroes which were represented, while human beings, were also understood to have a semi-divine status, and so the mask was a necessary mediating object in order for these mythical figures to be represented in any socially

acceptable and effective fashion.

Old Comedy deals more readily with divine figures, and is the genre which Aristotle juxtaposes as inferior to tragedy when he laments that while tragedy represents the actions of men as better than we are, comedy represents the actions of men as worse than we are (Wiles *Masks of Menander* 7). Kenneth S. Rothwell Jr. traces the masks of the Old Comedy more specifically to animal choruses and the ritualistic, drunken processions called "komos" in his fascinating study *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy* (14). The masks in the context of the Old Comedy, gave social permission for the actors to channel the maximum in obscenity, lewdness, and base humor that their imaginations could manifest, with no danger of social backlash or offense taken (except it seems by the likes of Aristotle.)

The New Comedy was the furthest removed both temporally and stylistically from the ritualistic beginnings of Greek theatre at the City Dionysia in Athens. The masks of the New Comedy are also the most extensively classified and recorded as thoroughly explained and explored in David Wiles' *Masks of Menander*. The forty-four assorted masks originally cataloged by Julius Pollux are divided into four distinct categories: old man, young man, slave and woman (75). Unfortunately, aside from a few scattered fragments, the only surviving texts of the New Comedy are those of the highly esteemed playwright Menander. Menander's texts, while they may be our primary source of information, were dependent upon the masks which gave them life for context. A famous relief shows Menander looking to three of these masks in search of inspiration. This image implies that the texts which Menander constructed, oftentimes were based upon the preexisting images of the masks types which would be expected to give the text life. Wiles' *Masks of Menander* makes clear that Menander "wrote for the masks that were the characters of his plays" (71), and he advocates for all classical scholars to consider the importance of this relationship in their work.

It may be a counterintuitive pursuit to question why the Greeks wore masks when they

performed theater, when to the Greeks of the 5th-3rd centuries BC there was as of yet *no imaginable* situation in which a person would present themselves as someone other than themselves *without* the face of another to assist that activity (Rehm 40). As an analysis of the Tragedy, Old Comedy, and New Comedy shows, these three new types of performance would not have been conceivable without the masks there to carve out the new social context in which these forms could develop. The more productive question to ask may be: when and why did the idea arise that it was possible to perform as someone other than one's self *without* a mask? First, the use of the mask in Greek performance had to decline along with Greek society in general. Then, the mask was essentially banished to the realm of idolatry when the Romans adopted Christianity. The mask retreated to the preference of street performers and pantomimes, and survived amongst the chaotic and wild remnants of pagan revelry which continued all the way into the 16th century in the form of carnival celebrations and local festivals. It is no coincidence that the reemergence of the mask as a more broadly socially acceptable performance tool in the West, was in direct correlation with the reemergence of an organized and sustained performance practice outside of a religious context: the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

THE COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

In 1517, the German catholic priest Martin Luther had famously delivered his *Ninety Five Theses* to the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Saxony, an act of defiance which would culminate in the full scale rebellions and shifts in power which would come to be known generally as "The Reformation." This shift of power, and the accompanying manifestation of public discontent, resulted in a number of responses and policy changes of varying degrees from the Roman Catholic Church, which would come to be called the "Counter-Reformation." Venice, one of the cities that is famous for its particularly raucous carnival festivities, is also one of the cities which stakes a claim in the birthing process of *Commedia* (Katrinsky 93). Venice was one of the more thriving commercial centers in Europe at the time, which meant an increased dominance of merchants, and a reduced dominance of the Church

authorities. This is also accompanied by the fact that while "the European Renaissance began in Tuscany (Central Italy), and centered in the cities of Florence and Siena, it later spread to Venice, where the remains of ancient Greek culture were brought together, providing humanist scholars with new texts" (wikipedia *Renaissance*). Amidst this particular historical situation, possibly somewhere in the vicinity of either Venice, or Padua, but quickly spreading throughout Italy and north into parts of what is now Germany and France, a new theatre form came into being. A type of performance which would only over 100 years later be called what is now its agreed upon name: *Commedia dell'Arte* - literally translated as "comedy of craft or skill".

This new theatre was distinct from the performance activities of the preceding periods in a multitude of ways. This new theatre form, is distinguished from the "low" unrefined street comedians or *buffoni* on the one hand, and from the Academic and refined *Commedia Erudite* on the other. The close alliance of the *buffoni* with the activities of prostitution, selling of hack wares and other assorted carnival mischief and mayhem, meant that they were only able to avoid censoring by the church authorities during the brief and chaotic period of carnival. The *buffoni* also had little aspirations of being granted "legitimacy" by the higher-class elements of society at the time (Katrinsky 35). The *Commedia Erudite*, offered little of substance to the general public, and was strictly scripted and performed by amateurs. Hence, the longer and more specific name classifying this new performance genre: *Commedia dell'Arte al'Improvviso* - Comedy of Craft or Skill (meaning not street *buffoni*) in the Improvised Fashion (meaning not fully scripted *Commedia Erudite*). These newly-formed, full-time professional theatre companies managed not only to perform before the general public for money outside of carnival time, but also to perform for members of nobility at weddings and private celebrations throughout Europe. These troupes also advertised and delivered a new element on the public stage previously deemed unacceptable by church authorities: female performers. As a result of these developments, the newly forming *Commedia* troupes were able to create the first autonomous

organizations of touring professional actors. These newly forming social organisms, were inconceivable without the very thing which also linked them with the theatre of Ancient times: the masks.

As in the case of the Ancient Greek theatre, it is important to acknowledge a difference in the potential connotations associated with the masks of this era. In 16th century Italy, the word would have been any number of assorted dialects depending on the geographical location, but the literary Italian word would have been *maschera*. While this word is clearly a more direct parent of our word "mask," the connotations attached to this word would also have been quite different, in some ways quite possibly *more* negative depending on the perspective: "probably from medieval Latin *masca* - 'witch, specter,' but influenced by Arabic *maskara* [i.e.] buffoon" (etymonline.com). The masks which the early practitioners of *Commedia dell'Arte* were utilizing were very closely related to, and in certain instances inseparable from, the many masks and characters which appeared on the streets during the highly chaotic and rebellious Carnival season. These masks were embodiments of remnant spirits, and comic reversals of the relationships between masters and slaves, harking back to pagan times. For over a thousand years they were only deemed socially acceptable during a very brief and specially designated time period. The author and scholar John Rudlin illustrates the contrast between sensibilities of that time and our own, when he points out that "a masked man had no right to bear arms during Carnival season in medieval Italy because he was considered to have divested himself of his own identity by assuming another persona, for whose actions he was therefore not responsible"(34).

Albeit in different ways, like the masks of the Ancient Greek theater, the masks of the *Commedia dell'Arte* were an essential ingredient in its coming into being and developing out of its earlier incarnations. During carnival time, masks were used by street hawkers to attract attention and differentiate them from the throngs of people - thereby increasing their chances of making a sale and making a living. The Zanni-Magnifico or Zanni-Pantalone character pairs were instantly recognizable

by their masks, without needing to speak a word of audible text, nor present a skit in its entirety to a sedentary audience (Katrinsky 93). This was essential to the success and continued growth of these early seeds of the later more sophisticated *Commedia dell'Arte* troupes, which were dependent on the contributions and purchases of the general public when they performed out in the street during very raucous and competitive festival periods. The masks in *Commedia* were also essential to its widespread success and popularity across a wide variety of regions and dialects. The general public for the *Commedia dell'Arte* spoke a variety of entirely different dialects and languages, oftentimes completely mutually incomprehensible, even across what is now called Italy, and especially throughout Europe as a whole. A form of theater which was built around masked archetypal characters, with very distinct movements and easily recognizable personality types, was very well suited to broad appeal across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The masks allowed for something enjoyable and engaging to watch, as sculpture and dance, even if little of the dialogue or specific story was able to be followed due to incomprehensible language.

As with the New Comedy of the Greeks, the *Commedia dell'Arte* is defined by stock characters. However, it can be a small deception to present what was at various times an almost immeasurable cornucopia of character names and distinct personalities as a fixed canon of seven or eight memorable characters. What is now classified as the *Commedia dell'Arte* was historically not an institutionalized or curated set of rules or parameters. The traditions of *Commedia* were not maintained by academia, nor distributed through an organized and controlled structure, but rather were very vibrant, anarchic, and constantly evolving phenomena, much of which may be forever lost to history. Nevertheless, it is in the interest of a better understanding the stock character nature of the *Commedia* to focus on a few of the characters who maintained a longevity and success across many of these evolutions and migrations. Zanni can be the general term for all characters in the lower servant class, or a specific servant character who is the closest to an animal; the longer his nose is, the dumber he is purported to be.

Pantalone is the old miserly Venetian merchant. Il Dottore Gratiano, or the Doctor, is the caricature of the learned man from Bologna, or the caricature of what passed for a "health professional" in that era. Pulcinella, is an amoral, violent, clowning bufoon with a large hooked nose; the infamous Punch from the English Punch and Judy tradition is his direct descendant. Capitano, is the bragging, womanizing, cowardly Spanish soldier. Arlecchino and Brighella are two more characters from the general category of the servants or *zanni*. The lovers, or the *innamorati*, came in male-female pairs, and were the source of innocence and the transcendence of love over human depravity and personal avarice. They were granted the most dignity within the Commedia tradition. Whilst many of the other characters spoke the dialect from their respective localities, the lovers were the characters who spoke the Tuscan dialect, or what was the official literary Italian at the time and is now the language spoken in present-day Italy. They were also the first steps towards non masked public performance, in that they were usually the only characters which wore no masks (Rudlin 67-159).

Maurice Sand, in *The History of the Harlequinade*, asserts and supports a direct connection between many of these stock *Commedia* characters and the Comedy traditions of the Ancient Greeks. Joseph Kennard advocates a similar view in his book *Masks and Marionettes* (10). A primary component of *Commedia dell'Arte*, aside from the masks, was the loose adaptation of assorted story lines from the more academically oriented *Commedia Erudite*. These plays were themselves a product of the cultural trends and scholarly pursuits quintessential to the Renaissance, which looked backed to Classical Greek and Roman times for inspiration, ideas and ideologies. Many of these ideas, being from a polytheistic society, were inherently counter to the dogmas of the of the Roman Catholic church. Plutarch and Menander are mentioned as ancient hero's: embodiments of the theatrical aims and ideals of the *Commedia dell'Arte* troupes (Herrick 211).

This new performance trend, with its heretical underpinnings, did not advance unchallenged by the church authorities of its day. The *Commedia* scholar M A Katrinsky, explains how "in 1565,

Cardinal Borromeo condemned fortune telling, begging, and acting, and decreed the banishment of ... (professional actors and itinerant street entertainers) from his territory, views evidently shared in the highest ecclesiastical circles" (42). However, the combination of popular appeal, the legitimization granted by the nobility's repeated employment of these new theatre troupes, and the church's declining authority seemed enough to ensure the survival and continued growth of *Commedia* in spite of its unfavorable status respective to the church. For example, in the early 17th Century, *Commedia* migrated to Paris where it was especially successful, developing into a tradition which deserves to be studied in its own right (Oreglia 145). *Commedia* troupes toured throughout Italy, and all of Europe, with much financial success and to much critical acclaim.

It was not until more than two hundred years after its birth, that *Commedia* was transformed into something distinctly different from its nascent state. In Italy, the end of *Commedia dell'Arte* is attributed to the decline of the mask as advocated by Goldoni, a Venetian author writing in the *Commedia dell'Arte* vein. In Paris, *Commedia* ceased to be when the returning Italian Comedians created a new form of theatre by fusing with the French *Opera Comique* (Oreglia 147). The masks and spirit of *Commedia* would not regain importance until their revival by various European intellectuals and artists in the 20th century, most notably Jacques Copeau, and later various aspects of the British academy (Wiles *Mask and Performance* 102). The academic revivals and studies of the *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition, however, seem to bear a greater resemblance to the stilted *Commedia Erudite* revivals of the Greek and Roman Classics than to the anarchic, improvisational *Commedia dell'Arte* troupes which parodied and stereotyped the various personalities of their day. In 16th century Italy, there was still a direct social and physical connection with the historical roots of the masked comedy. Contemporary revivals of *Commedia* have been brought to life through, what seems to be in many cases of this sort, the distorting filter of the ambitious intellect. Something of the essential connection to the ancient ritual aspect seems missing. If a true revival of a masked theatre tradition were to be

possible, as it was in 16th century Italy, perhaps it would have to grow somewhat organically out of one of the contemporary ritual remnants of medieval masked revelry: Halloween or Mardi Gras for instance. This would also necessitate a shift in contemporary sensibilities toward a greater attraction to the spirit and intentions of live masked theatre, as opposed to the wide-spread preference for psychological naturalism delivered via the medium of the screen.

CONCLUSION

It is an interesting parallel, to consider that the contemporary screen, as a mediating object between performer and observer, plays a similar role that masks played in the Greek theatre and the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Perhaps modern-day actors must submit to the camera in much the same way that masked actors submitted to the mask. The drastic cultural and social changes which coincided with the use of masks in Ancient Greek times and 16th Century Italy are testaments to the power of performance methods which encompass a visible interaction between human individuals and material objects replacing their faces. This parallel can be further explored, by considering how the prevalence of digital identities and social media, functions as a new category of mask: mediating interactions and conversations between individuals and the social body. Perhaps this is the next unexplored frontier for the invention of socially and politically transforming performance methods.

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The transition paradigm has been somewhat useful during a time of momentous and often surprising political upheaval in the world. But it is increasingly clear that reality is no longer conforming to the model. Many countries that policy makers and aid practitioners persist in calling "transitional" are not in transition to democracy, and of the democratic transitions that are under way, more than a few are not following the model. Sticking with the paradigm beyond its useful life is retarding evolution in the field of democratic assistance and is leading policy makers astray in other ways. In summary, mask mandates and use were poor predictors of COVID-19 spread in US states. Case growth was independent of mandates at low and high rates of community spread, and mask use did not predict case growth during the Summer or Fall-Winter waves. Strengths of our study include using two mask metrics to evaluate association with COVID-19 growth rates; measuring normalized case growth in mandate and non-mandate states at comparable times to quantify the likely effect of mandates; and deconvolving the effect of mask use by examining case growth in states with variable mask use. Tom Woods published charts last year showing the ineffectivity of masks in various locations around the world. They're worth looking at. [Link]. Movie theater chains AMC, Cinemark, and Regal Cinemas have removed their mask mandates for customers vaccinated against Covid-19, sending some critics into a tailspin panic. Plenty of others, however, joined in on the AV Club's worry and blasted theaters for moving away from mask mandates ahead of the summer blockbuster season. "I'm never going back," one user vowed. "Basically means they knew I ain't and anyone like me ain't had no intention of coming back anytime soon, anyway," "Californication" actor Evan Handler added. In 2014, the Obama administration imposed a moratorium on GOF which included halting funding for projects, however, this decision was overturned three years later by the National Institute of Health (NIH). One of the two scientists' biggest critics was Professor Kristian Andersen at the department of immunology and microbiology at Scripps research facility in California, who described Dalglish and Sorensen's first paper last summer as 'complete nonsense, unintelligible, and not even remotely scientific.' The Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued a statement on April 30 last year saying: 'The Intelligence Community also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.'