Erving Goffman and “The New Normal”: Havoc and Containment in the Pandemic Era

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Abstract

In this article, we explore two of Goffman’s “minor” categories—havoc and containment-- as the key for organizing/systematizing the more “major” categories—co-presence, the interaction order, presentation of self, the body as sheath, and frame analysis—in order to provide insight into the experience of the Covid-19 epidemic. Goffman offers a set of conceptual tools to understand our historical moment of the worst pandemic since 1918 and its context of social media contention, renewed calls for social justice, and the disruptive performances by President Donald J. Trump. While these “minor” concepts are not widely known except for Goffman scholars, they provide a rich interpretive framework for analyzing social regulation and the management of threats to social order across a wide range of historical contexts. In Goffman’s work, these terms are both descriptions of timeless human behaviors and openings into diachronic analysis of changing contexts. We unpack the explanatory power of these concepts in understanding the current moment of the Covid pandemic, as well as its connection to the context of contemporary phenomena such as fake news, internet and social media communication, and the attempt to regulate rioting bodies at the Capitol.

Keywords Body · Containment · Goffman · Havoc · Pandemic · Regulation

Introduction

In this article, we use a pair of Goffman’s “minor” categories—havoc and containment—to analyze the disruption of social regulation and the restoration of the social order. While these “minor” concepts are not widely known except

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among Goffman scholars, they provide a rich interpretive framework for analyzing a multiplicity of threats to and the regulation of the social order in general and across specific historical contexts.¹ As we look back on the pandemic and the Capitol assault on January 6, 2021, Goffman's paired concepts of havoc and containment and associated concepts such as performance, territories of the self, the body as sheath, the interaction order, and frames are useful for reflecting on the events and for moving from phantasmagoric spectacle to sociological analysis.

We argue for a generative reading of Goffman's work on havoc and containment in order to show its usefulness for understanding contention and the management of adverse events in the current era. By a "generative reading," we mean an interpretation of a text that uses a small number of definitions or specifications from the original formulation and applies them to a large range of situations to produce new insights. Generative readings have been applied to many works of theory; for further discussion of importing concepts into new territories and terrains, see Wacquant (1993), Willis (2000), and Burawoy's writing about "living theory" (2013).

The more familiar concepts of Goffman's writing—such as co-presence, the interaction order, presentation of self, the body as sheath, and frame analysis—can be integrated into the analysis of havoc and containment to provide insight into the experience of the covid-19 epidemic, the Trump presidency, and the January 6, 2021 assault on the Capitol.

A generative reading of havoc and containment can be useful to theorists, researchers, and students, and to anyone seeking insights into contemporary events. Theorists can use the pairing to build macro–micro links and integrate it with other conceptualizations of social control (for example, an early social-psychological formulation by Ross (1901/2009), Parsons on restoration of equilibrium, and Foucault on surveillance and punishment, *governmentality* and the management of territory (2009)). Researchers can use the concept in the field to guide observations of collective action, compliance with rules and regulations, mobilization, and relations between political leaders and followers. In pedagogy, it can be used to help students see current problems in a longer time perspective and understand the challenges of intervention in social arrangements. It is useful for understanding current events and reflecting on how both disruptions and the imposition of order unfold as processes driven by contending intentions and strategies.

Goffman can be read as a micro-interactionist, but also as a structuralist, and ultimately as a theorist who helps us to understand historical contexts and changing patterns of regulation. Goffman described himself as profoundly influenced by structural-functionalism and Durkheim.² Like Durkheim's ground-breaking work,

¹ We would like to thank Andrew Deener for his incisive comments on earlier drafts, the Editor, and the two anonymous reviewers of *The American Sociologist* for their insightful and detailed feedback.

² For interpretations of Goffman as a neo-Durkheimian see (Cahill, 1994; Cheal, 1988; Collins, 1981a; 1981b; 1988a, 1998; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015; Miller, 1982; Manning, 1980; 2010; Rawls, 2003). For a discussion of Durkheim's influence on Goffman's work, see the interview with him in (Verhoeven, 1993).

Goffman's writing can encompass new social realities—contemporary forms of regulation, havoc, and containment.

Durkheim too has come to be read synchronously, as a functionalist—and a number cruncher, but a closer reading reveals that he is intensely interested in large-scale historical change. The challenge that both Durkheim and Goffman addressed is to show how fundamental and apparently unchanging human interactions are historically contextualized. For both, regulation is a central feature of society that takes different forms in different epochs and societies. For Durkheim, these changing continuities include not only regulation, but also the links between regulation and solidarity, collective effervescence, and the ever-changing domain of deviance and punishment. Durkheim certainly saw regulation in historical context, as he makes clear in his discussion of anomie in market societies. For Goffman, regulation encompasses interaction, self-presentation, framing, havoc and containment, and stigmatization. Forms of regulation change, but the process of regulation remains one of the foundations of society.

Goffman only sporadically makes the diachronic or historical side of his work explicit (as in attention to marginalization of African Americans in *Stigma* (1963), his dissection of gender framing Goffman (1979), and reference to new media framing practices (Goffman, 1974; & Ytreberg, 2002), but it is implicit in much of his writing.³ Our application of Goffman's concepts *havoc* and *containment* to our historical moment show how these concepts defined in his essay "The Insanity of Place" are productive in analyzing larger processes of regulation and order.

Havoc, containment, and regulation form a coherent core that connects the nuances of interaction, the power of the interaction order, the constraints of framing, the "sheath" of the body and its stigmatization, humiliation and degradation, and the constant effort to perform a convincing self and garner deference and respect. These phenomena are all elements of social regulation that create, shape, and constrain social order and individual action in changing historical contexts. By reading Goffman across texts in a generative interpretation, we see that his conceptual tools are intertwined with regulation at its center (Rogers, 1977).

In "Insanity of Place" Goffman begins to make this theory of regulation explicit.⁴ Goffman offers the terms *havoc and containment* in order to understand the incoherence, irrationality, incomprehensibility and unbearableness of social life and the imperative to preserve social order from collapsing, dissolving or imploding.⁵ Goffman thereby enables us to see the cracks in the social order and understand containment as the constant effort exerted to recuperate transgressions and deviations back into that order (Goffman, 1963a, 1971, 1983).

Goffman gave special attention to havoc as the interactive disorder created by individuals deemed to be "crazy." These individuals fail to act according to the rules

³ For biographical accounts of Goffman's life and work see, Winkin and Leeds-Hurwitz (2013), and Winkin (1999, 2010).

⁴ For an extended analysis of Goffman's philosophy of containment, see Hancock and Garner (2011).

⁵ For the intimate connection to Goffman's personal life, see (Cavan, 2011; Shalin, 2014, 2016).

of orderly interaction. (Goffman, 1971, p. 365). Containment is the strategy of limiting the spread of disorder and protecting other spheres of interaction from its disruption.

Havoc has both a subjective and an objective dimension: some individuals are perceived to create havoc but once this perception emerges, the perceived havoc takes on a reality of disorder and precipitates efforts at containment. Havoc suggests a collapse in shared norms of what is true and false, real and imagined. The “crazy person” by their actions and discourse throws doubt on the shared order (Goffman, 1971:386). Goffman’s concept of framing (1974) returns to the issue of what is considered real, the establishment of the reality of things through social practices, and the potential fragility of “the real” when the shared order collapses in a situation of havoc.

Using contemporary examples such as the disruption of trust in the media, an unusual presidency, responses to Covid-19, and the attempt to regulate rioting bodies, we will offer a generative reading of havoc and containment. We will expand the concept of havoc to new contexts and precipitating events and examine how containment involves contention among actors who seek to impose competing regimes of containment.

A Generative Reading of the Insanity of Place

After a brief introduction to the original paired concepts *havoc/containment*, we will propose five ways of expanding the analysis to encompass more situations. In this instance, there are two basic elements. **Havoc** is an event or sequence of events with a disruptive and adverse impact on existing patterns of interaction; and **containment** refers to efforts to limit disruption and restore order and to constrain or remove the actors associated with the disruption. The restored order is rarely identical to the status quo ante because the acts of containment require innovation.

1. The scale of analysis can be expanded from the micro to include meso forms in organizations and even macro forms in institutions and societies.
2. The causes of havoc can include non-human starting points (viruses; natural disasters); these starting points precipitate havoc among human actors and set in motion their efforts to contain it.
3. The nature of the order that is disrupted must be included in the analysis by exploring the existing regulatory regime. The onset of havoc and the effort to contain it are different in a strong, undivided, and resilient order than in a regulatory regime that is already weak and divided.
4. Intentionality and effects can both be included in the analysis. The intentionality of the human disrupter is always different from the interests of the forces of containment. The latter want a return to normalcy, a return to routine; this might involve a return to the status quo ante or **to a new order**. The (human) disrupter has a stake in changing the social order. Thus, the analysis of havoc can include a range of disrupter intentionality from an opportunistic use of non-human precipitating events through the desire to disrupt (the mental patient described by Goffman, Trump in the Capitol assault) to the intention to destroy or annihilate

(mass shooting incidents and other homicides, terrorist attacks, and revolutions). When does containment mean a return to routine, to a status quo ante (as might be the preference of the family of the mental patient and the Democrats during the Trump presidency) and when does it offer the opportunity to create a new order? And we can ask whether containment varies with the intentionality of the disruption—or primarily with its scale?

5. The game of moves and counter-moves is analyzed as a set of contending strategies of containment. After the disruption, this “game” sets in as clashing interests emerge, in contention over whether order will be restored at all and if so, whether it will be the old order (as is often the preference of the family of the mental patient) or a new order (see examples below). The family of the mental patient might prefer the old order, a status quo ante of tranquility; but in many cases, actors emerge who want to use havoc as an opportunity to create a new order. The actors make contested claims about the extent and causes of havoc and the best strategy for containing it; the power relations among these actors and their ability to mobilize resources influence the outcome. Are multiple actors contending to restore order or does a unitary and united set of actors focus on a single course of containment?

The Original Formulation in Goffman’s Work

The concepts of havoc and containment appeared in Goffman’s essay “The Insanity of Place,” first published in *Psychiatry* in 1969 and then added to *Relations in Public* as an appendix in 1971. The text of “The Insanity of Place” is the story of the family and the mental patient trying to negotiate social interactions, social boundaries, social norms, and in the end the definition of social reality itself. This is Goffman at his most literal and micro. He focuses on the unintentional or mostly unintentional behavior of the mentally ill, that which for the most part is beyond their control. Goffman is commenting on gestures, behavior, and language; in his comments, intentional and unintentional are included in the interaction mix to be observed and interpreted. The mental patient’s behavior is intentional from his own point of view, but he remains unaware or indifferent to the way it is perceived by others who tend to see it as beyond conscious awareness and control. The labels “mentally ill” and “mental patient” imply that other actors do not award agency to this individual. Their responses are to remove or control the individual in order to restore normative order, coherence, and functioning organization to the family. Goffman saw containment in the community as potentially providing a humane alternative to confinement, which at mid-century meant indefinitely long stays in a mental hospital (Goffman, 1971/2009: p. 336).⁶

While the essay itself is quite provocative, it has received little attention even within the arena of Goffman specialists. Although one article shows the centrality of havoc and containment for understanding Goffman’s corpus and its utility to

⁶ We would like to thank one of our reviewers for this insight.

compare and contrast the issue of power with Foucault (Hancock & Garner, 2011), most scholars who have engaged the essay have interpreted and applied it at a micro-level. The following are examples of these discussions: in terms of Goffman's biography (Cavan, 2011; Shalin, 2014, 2016); its impact on psychiatry (Sedgwick, 1982/2000; Crossley, 2006; Scull, 2006.), as part of the self (Travers, 1994), as well as extensions to more eclectic fields such as city commission proceedings (Futrell, 1999) and Go-Go dancing (Gonos, 1976). As a result, there have been few attempts to systematize these concepts into a coherent framework through which to analyze both contemporary and historical episodes of the eruption and reconfiguration of the social order.⁷

The pair havoc/containment has its origins in the examination of mental illness but it takes the analysis far beyond the behavior of an individual. In the case of the mentally ill patient, Goffman argues that disruptions to the normative order create situational havoc for everyone. A common response is to place a variety of labels of "mental illness" on the individual who is seen as the source of havoc. Havoc, however, as a concept must be theorized beyond labeling theory and in keeping with Goffman's own view of his work as an innovative form of structuralism, must be recognized as a social/organization phenomenon, as a disruption of order:

It is this havoc that the philosophy of containment must deal with. It is this havoc that psychiatrists have dismally failed to examine and that sociologists ignore when they treat mental illness merely as a labeling process. It is this havoc that we must [explore]. (Goffman, 1971, p. 357).

Havoc concerns sociologists because it describes the final breakdown of normative interactions and leads to the dissolution of a particular situation and ultimately of the social order. The result of havoc is the state where there is no longer a framework to make sense of others' behavior, or of social activity in general.

Havoc can be contained through removal of havoc-causers from society (for example, in the modern era by institutionalization of criminals and the mentally ill), but it involves not only physical removal—above all, containment is established by discrediting the havoc-causers and their challenge to existing frames. Their physical removal is a sign that they are not credible participants in the regulatory order.

The pair havoc/containment links micro and macro processes. Havoc makes us aware that social regulation and order are fragile. Havoc and its containment are potentially present in all social relationships and form the foundation of individuals' relationships with each other and to organizations and larger gatherings. Goffman provides us with a way to explore how the social order is a normalizing, regulating, rationalizing matrix of processes that serves to organize human interaction. He focuses on breaches and disruptions to that matrix by introducing havoc as the unpredictability of social transgressions. This tension, at the heart of Goffman's philosophy of containment, can be seen across society, and in the constant necessity

⁷ For other attempts to systematize Goffman, see Chriss (1993a, b), Collins (1987), Giddens (1987), Manning (1992), Turner (1988).

of society, as normalizing order, as institutions, as collections of actors, to manage, predict, problematize, and preserve social stability.

In the next pages, we argue that a generative reading that expands the initial “strict interpretation” may be useful for analysis of larger social processes of regulation, disruption, and contention over a new order.

In the generative reading that we propose:

ONE: The Scale is Expanded from the Micro to Include Meso Forms in Organizations and Macro Forms in Institutions and Societies

“Havoc” names the condition in which individuals are not able to be self-governing or self-sufficient in society. Havoc and its containment are potentially present in all social relationships; they are the foundation of individuals’ relationships with each other and form the foundation of organizations and larger gatherings. Thus the pair havoc/containment links micro and macro processes. The result of havoc is the state where there is no longer a code or framework to make sense of one’s own experiences, or for making sense of others’ or of social activity in general.

Goffman writes:

The self is a code that makes sense out of almost all the individual’s activities and provides a basis for organizing them The question as to what it is that is going on is not redundantly answered at every turn but must be constantly ferreted out anew. And life is said to become like a bad dream—for there is no place in possible realities for what is occurring. (Goffman, 1971, p.366).

When havoc is generated, consistency and identity are lost by individuals and the gathering, and so is predictability in interaction. As a result, sense-making has to be constantly re-established because meaning has been de-stabilized. When havoc occurs, individuals’ sense of competence to judge character, behavior, and situations is threatened. In Durkheim’s terms, havoc is the condition of anomie. Alternatively, it can be seen as an existential crisis of the individual extended to the entire social order. But the actors in the micro-situation are generally not aware of this embedding of disorder in the larger societal structure and they tend to see it as their own “personal problem,” experienced as a bad dream, a point to which we will return at the end of the article.

Expanding the interpretation from the micro, and the explicit familial context discussed in “Insanity of Place,” to both meso and macro level settings often involves a larger awareness of the societal implications of havoc and containment. As the situation moves from the impact of one individual’s behavior on a small group to a larger sphere of effects, perceptions expand as well but difficulties arise in finding shared frames to talk and think about the disruptions. The disruption moves quickly from the individual to the social and group level. The group cannot cognitively accommodate and discursively frame the insanity/madness, because we cannot rationally think the irrational; we perceive the world through order and rationality, an insight that Goffman shares with Foucault. We can experience as a sensation the world of

disorganization and irrationality, but we cannot collectively process, discuss, and comprehend it while we are in this state.

As we argued in a previous article (Hancock & Garner, 2011), Goffman's concept of havoc can be extended from the individual to the social level focusing on institutions, collective behavior, societal containment efforts, and media framing. In that article, we discussed a number of examples, 9/11 and its aftermath and the financial crash of 2008:

Those events (of 9/11) created a national havoc, which lead in tum to new "orders" and modes of social regulation such as the establishment of the Homeland Security Agency, the Patriot Act, the implementation of security procedures at airports, and the mediatized declaration of the war on terror. Another example of havoc and measures to contain it is the financial crisis of the autumn of 2008 in which the, Federal Reserve's bank bailout (recently revealed to be international in scope) prevented a complete credit freeze and cascading bank default. Havoc and containment exist at both micro and macro levels, and strategies of containment at, the macro-level have repercussions at the micro-level where they influence interaction among individuals, for example between TSA officials and passengers, or mortgage lenders and delinquent borrowers. (Hancock & Garner, 2011, p. 324)

TWO: A Generative Reading Calls for Consideration of a Wide Range of Precipitating Events, Including the Non-Human

In a generative reading, the causes of havoc are expanded to include non-human starting points (viruses and pandemics; natural disasters); these starting points precipitate havoc and efforts to contain it.

When havoc is precipitated by human behavior, we quickly attempt to contain it by labels such as "trouble-makers," "difficult colleagues," "crazy people," "mental illness," or "terrorists." These labels give us a false sense of security that we understand the havoc and can easily contain it. On the other hand, viruses and natural disasters appear to arise largely beyond human control (even when they are hastened by human actions such as the operation of "wet markets," destruction of coastal marshes, and other encroachments on natural environments.) Our framing of causes and precipitating events is often lacking, the events seem unpredictable, and risk assessment proves to have been unsuccessful. The uncertainty of knowledge about viruses, weather patterns, climate change, and disaster impact leaves human beings in situations of disagreement and even conflict about effective courses of containment.

In the case of the disease, the initial havoc leads to outrageous behavior in terms of how people "think" it may be contained at first. In the opening weeks of the Covid-19 epidemic, when it was not known if Covid-19 was communicable by air or touch, some people engaged in elaborate practices of washing all their groceries and everything they touched, in addition to their hands and clothing. When researchers

pinpointed that the disease was spread through the air by droplets or aerosol, masking became the key to keeping the disease from others.

Since there is no way to mark off the sick from non-sick, it was difficult to “contain” the disease in the usual sense. We were forced to change our responses to it and constantly adapt and adjust our sense of containment and social stability. The fact that we had only limited experience of pandemics after 1918–19 and that outbreaks began to occur in locations that had seemed relatively safe at first (rural areas of the US) added to the sense of havoc.

But the disease remained unpredictable in terms of its communicability, the identification of carriers, the manifestation of illness, and the threat of variants. Failures in testing, especially in the United States, led to outbreaks of the disease and a continued sense of havoc. This ambiguity created more uncertainty and doubt about channels of communication about the pandemic, and doubt and mistrust threatened to undermine social stability.

A sense of stability emerged as extreme and paranoid practices gave way to a normative order with regular practices of masking, hand sanitizers, social distancing, and shutdowns of indoor spaces to prevent “congregating.” As more information was disseminated and practices were adopted and normalized around officially sanctioned information, a new social order emerged to coordinate behaviors and keep people feeling safe and mutually invested in those practices. Havoc gradually gave way to a feeling of safety and containment.

THREE: A Generative Reading Includes Consideration of the Strength of the Prevailing Order

Assessment of havoc and containment requires attention to the prevailing order. If the prevailing order is strong and coherent, havoc is likely to have less impact and to be contained easily. Yet havoc often happens precisely in conditions of weak regulation, conditions that are already borderline anomic. There is a complex relationship between a weak regulatory regime and an outbreak of havoc—the two conditions interact with each other, sometimes setting off a spiral into uncontrollable havoc and extreme disruption, possibly succeeded by desperate efforts to not only contain the havoc but to also build a new more havoc-proof order. We will return to several examples that demonstrate the importance of the conditions under which havoc erupts.

For instance, the changes taking place in media during a period of about 25 years, especially the rise of social media, set new conditions within which Covid-19 erupted—new conditions for the discussion and interpretation of the impact of the virus. This new media order was quite different from the one that prevailed during the mid-century polio epidemic. It was more contentious, multi-voiced, and beset by public mistrust of government, science, and the media. While the public at mid-century were anxious about polio, they were more trusting of communication from authorities.

FOUR: Intentionality and Effects

Goffman in *Presentation of Self* (1959), *Stigma*, (1963), and in his writing on con games shows an intense interest in intentionality, although his Durkheimian concern with structure suggests that agency is not part of his conceptual repertoire. The structural premise does not preclude an interest in the intentions of participants in interactions and performances.

Although it is hard to get into the heads of the actors, their intentions are revealed in their actions. (Actions is a term that is preferable to behaviors, even if we do not understand their motivations fully). Intentions motivate both the causers of havoc and those who seek to contain it. The effect of intentionality is to produce a set of different and contending actions, the game of moves and counter-moves.

Attention to intentions allows us to expand the analysis to a large range of human havoc-causers, from the mental patient's frenetic behaviors to school shooters, terrorists, and cyber attackers. They all engage in intentional acts whose purpose is meaningful to them, if not to others.

The intentionality of the human disrupter is always different from the interests of the containers. The latter want a return to normalcy, a return to routine; this might involve a return to the status quo ante or **to a new order**. The (human) disrupter has a stake in changing the social order, perhaps in its permanent disintegration. Thus, the analysis of havoc can include a range of disrupter intentionality. The range includes opportunistic piggy-backing on the effects of natural forces, the desire to disrupt and provoke (the mental patient described by Goffman, Trump in the Capitol assault, the more playful type of cyber hacker), and in its extreme form, the intention to destroy or annihilate (mass shooting incidents and other homicides, terrorist attacks, revolutions). In turn, containment can mean a return to routine (the mental patient calms down and the family routine is restored) or elimination of the disrupting force (the patient is taken to a mental hospital) or creation of a new order. Containment efforts can vary with both with the intentionality of the disruption and with its scale.

The end-goal of containment is the same, but the issue of containment varies with the degree of intentionality-as played out in the outcome of the different and contending actions, the game of moves and counter-moves- of the form of disruption, the scale of the havoc, and the strength and resiliency of the order which is disrupted.

FIVE: A Generative Reading Considers the Entire Process Unfolding Over Time, with Contention Among Multiple Actors; a Game of Move and Counter-Move Emerges.

After the disruption, this “game” sets in; clashing interests emerge over whether order will be restored at all and whether it will be the old order (which is often the preference of the family of the mental patient in the original example) or a new order. We will discuss examples below.

Multiple forces of containment can contend with each other, as each individual or collectivity seeks to establish order. Some might strive to return to the status quo ante, others to impose a new regulatory regime. Intentions clash, in the game of move and counter-move; the overall effect is the net outcome of the game in which one party wants to continue to disrupt and other parties seek to contain the disruption and restore order, but perhaps a **new order**.

All of the examples below concern strategies of moving from havoc to containment, situations in which actors utilize the condition or state of social disorganization to advance their interests under the cover or with the distraction of havoc. Havoc affords an opportunity to restructure the social order, to impose a new regulatory regime. *Interest* in Machiavelli's sense guides the contending actors, each utilizing their own resources and strategies.

Indeed, following Machiavelli and his example of starting a war to distract the people, we can even discern cases in which havoc is not only seized upon as an opportunity, but also actively created by parties that seek to establish a new order. Skocpol discusses wars that accompany revolutions as a mechanism of consolidation for the revolutionary state (Skocpol, 2015). When the regulatory order before the eruption of havoc is weak, powerful parties are already able to form and to prepare to become the dominant force in the post-havoc order. Using the cover of havoc, a host of social actors can try to implement their agendas and establish a new social order.

A few examples of containers using havoc as an opportunity to impose a new order can illustrate this point:

- After the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, Aceh (Sumatra) was rebuilt with the help of Islamist forces and stricter observance of Sharia law became the rule. Here containment brought a new social order to a situation disrupted by a non-human precipitating event.
- During and after the Covid-19 epidemic, university administrators gained power at the expense of faculty. Here a non-human precipitating event allowed an interested party to shape a new, post-havoc order to its own advantage. This process had actually already begun with an earlier havoc event, the financial crash of 2008–2010, which had altered the landscape of university budgeting and financial resources.
- The financial crisis of 2008–2010 created havoc in financial markets and the larger economy. It was contained by government bailouts and afforded an opportunity for stricter regulation of financial markets, most prominently “Dodd-Frank,” legislation in 2010–2011 which tightened the regulation of bank capitalization and liquidity, regulated markets in derivatives, and established the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau within the Federal Reserve system.
- The Covid epidemic disrupted the Trump presidency and made possible the election of Democrats, which might have been unlikely in view of the rather strong pre-Covid economy. Here a non-human precipitating event was used by containing forces to shape the political balance of forces. In turn, these efforts precipitated Trump's claims about election fraud and his encouragement of a riot in

Washington (which we will discuss in more detail below). The assault on the Capitol offered a havoc event that allowed Democrats to seek changes in federal policies and spending, but the election also sparked new efforts by Republicans to change voting laws at the state level in their own containment counter-moves.

A generative reading considers the sequence of havoc and containment efforts, recognizes contending intentions of the containment forces, and traces the play of move and counter-move among these forces. These moves can take place in a wide range of arenas and strategies. One arena is media framing (for instance about questions such as whether electoral fraud had taken place or the identity of Black Lives Matter demonstrators and Capitol rioters). Strategies of contention can include elections, political maneuvering, violent acts, and expenditure of money and other resources. Because havoc often produces a leadership vacuum, contending forces can organize to fill this vacuum and place their participants in strategic locations. If havoc produces a decline in resources such as the one that took place in universities during the financial crisis, interested parties can step in with new resources or new plans. Here the analysis can move into areas that have been examined by theorists of social movements and organizational behavior.

Contemporary examples of extending havoc to the social realm can be seen in the terrorist attacks and responses to the events of September 11th. Those events created a national havoc, which led in turn to new “orders” and modes of social regulation such as the establishment of the Homeland Security Agency, the Patriot Act, and new practices of surveillance and population regulation. We can see another example of havoc and measures to contain it is the financial crisis of the autumn of 2008 in which the Federal Reserve’s bank bailout prevented a complete credit freeze and cascading bank default. As a result, we can conceptualize havoc and containment at both micro and macro levels; strategies of containment at the macro-level have repercussions at the micro-level where they influence interaction among individuals, for example between TSA officials and passengers, or mortgage lenders and delinquent borrowers.

Examples such as the effects of the tsunami in Aceh, the impact of the financial crisis and Covid-19 on university governance, responses to school shootings, and the multiple effects of the assault on the Capitol illustrate a few of the complex constellations of havoc and containment. These constellations vary in terms of the following characteristics: the type of precipitating event (human or non-human); the number and intentions of the havoc creators (ranging from the clueless to disruptive and mischievous individuals, to actively malevolent organizations); the status quo ante—the prevailing regulatory order and its strengths, weaknesses, and resiliency; the number of containment forces; and the range of intentions, goals, and strategies of the containment forces.

Having suggested this generative reading of havoc and containment, we will now apply it to two related contemporary situations: the Covid-19 epidemic and the January 6 assault on the Capitol.

First Example: COVID-19

We begin with a discussion of how the pandemic took place in a volatile regulatory climate, in both media and government leadership.

The era of the internet and social media had already ushered in a period in which Goffman's concepts of havoc and containment became applicable to disputes over reality and truth; these disputes became increasingly acute during the Covid-19 impact and demonstrations for racial justice. Profound divisions in the understanding of the pandemic, the institutions of government in the US, the meaning of elections, the truth of science, and the history of racial inequality in America emerged in the course of 2020. Covid-19-related phenomena intensified and accelerated diverging behaviors and contending notions of reality that had surfaced before the pandemic, in social media and online interactions, such as perceptions of the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, the anti-vaxxer campaigns, debates about global warming, and conspiracy theories, especially Q-anon. Havoc became evident in the Internet before the pandemic, in the encouragement, enabling, and acceleration of fake news, rumors, conspiracy theories, and discrediting of scientific knowledge in the name of anti-elitism. Hostile interaction online took place among people with polarized views and among trolls, bullies, and other individuals who enjoyed creating havoc on the web. Controversies about global warming began to signal antagonism towards science as the bedrock of what constitutes a fact. Russian meddling in the 2016 campaign, rumors and conspiracy narratives, and growing doubts about the sources of messages and the formation of public opinion suggested emerging havoc in the world-views of the US electorate.

The apparently unmonitored and “free” expression of anger in social media and online chat rooms contrasted with the increasing rigidity and unresponsiveness of corporate communication in which company representatives became unreachable, algorithms ruled personnel issues, and websites blocked efforts by employees and the public to contact organization power-holders. In a Durkheimian perfect storm, the corporate domain of over-regulation existed alongside under-regulated social media and dark-web discourses that began to broach the theme of havoc and called for disruption of normal regulatory behaviors and functions.

The pandemic intensified havoc, far beyond the effects of new media. By its very nature, a pandemic causes disruption, but through a Goffman lens the issue was not simply the “natural” jolt, trauma, and unpreparedness of populations and countries, but the additional disorder created by national political actors such as Trump and Bolsonaro who contributed to a “post-truth” information sphere. They interfered with efforts to contain the havoc of the pandemic and bring responses into line with norms of rationality, coherence and a consensual view of reality.

As havoc spread from the internet to the management of the pandemic, new forms of havoc proliferated, with the loose federalism and weak regulation characteristic of the United States as accelerants. Havoc in the United States was expanded by inconsistent orders of shelter in place and for “reopening” of the economy across states. Self-regulation, in effect often no regulation at all, took the place of a coordinated plan. At one level, this incoherence revealed havoc in the entire federal structure, with some governors opening up and others keeping things shut down. Some

of this variation reflected a rational assessment of real differences; Montana is not New York. Other responses were heavily ideological, and some were driven by the desire to cut state unemployment costs, for instance in Georgia. The result was what a writer in *The Atlantic* called “human sacrifices” in states where workers were required to be on the job (Mull, 2020).

Trump contributed the additional layer of havoc by saying different things on different days about reopening. He called for the “liberation” of Michigan and Virginia, giving support to armed right-wing demonstrators in the state capitals; he then reversed course and appeared to make reasonable suggestions about a nuanced strategy, recognizing regional differences among states. His day-to-day shifts in position contributed to a sense of havoc in which the daily interaction order was in constant flux. He both rode and accelerated the growing wave of havoc in information and the media.

Performing Havoc and Containment

Goffman’s work begins with a focus on havoc and containment from the perspective of individuals and families in *The Insanity of Place*; in *Presentation of Self* (1959), *Territories of the Self*, *Asylums* (1961), and *Stigma* (1963) he charts how individuals regulate their own interactional settings and attempt to contain havoc and disorder that might threaten their projects. But in a generative reading, this perspective can be extended to the efforts of collective actors to establish order after a havoc event, and the pandemic provides many illustrations of these efforts.

The dramaturgical concepts developed in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* apply not only to individuals but also to collective processes of havoc and containment, including teamwork and the organization of regions, territories, and performances.

Social media set the stage for new types of performances. While the preceding decades, the heyday of television, were marked by the “society of the spectacle” in which elites and celebrities were on display, social media created a world order in which everyone was potentially visible to everyone else. People saw themselves not only in the looking glass of the primary group or the workplace but on a huge stage viewed by a global audience. In the years before the pandemic, observers commented on how this expanded audience affected self-esteem, shaped performances, and brought influencers to the fore. The media had already created the spectacle of celebrity, but social media opened these performances in striking new ways. They made them apparently open to anyone, with a pseudo-democratic universal accessibility, and a superficially genuine opportunity for anyone to draw a following and for anyone to be judged by everyone, from enthralled followers to vicious trolls (Lumsden & Morgan, 2017a, b; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Phillips, 2016).

Social media had already encouraged masking, not in the literal sense, but in the sense of individuals concealing themselves for performances that were increasingly difficult to “see through” or to discredit. In Goffman’s day, the audience often included locals who could discredit performances and spotters who

were professionally wise to the masquerade. The global reach, technological potentials, and complete elimination of face-to-face interaction in social media added a dimension of the unreal and phantasmagorical to social media presentations, the basis of the growing obsession with fake news, deep fakes, and wildly manipulated images.

Analysis of **teams and team presentations** is a major observation of *Presentation of Self*, which illuminates many aspects of media coverage of the pandemic, especially the performances of national leaders. Team performances are key ways of containing havoc. For example, Trump's daily "press briefings" were reduced to one-way performances rather than interactions with reporters, as reporters' questions amplified havoc from the President's perspective. But the team performances revealed the difficulties of containing havoc by managing teams. Goffman argues that "managing the line" is a key challenge for teams, and in the briefings with Birx and especially Fauci, these challenges came to the fore, as Trump and his science advisors focused on diametrically opposed ways of containing havoc. Trump spoke without a mask, but was flanked by masked medical advisors. Fauci broke rank and contradicted the President. Only the ritual presence of Pence added a note of solemnity and reassurance of traditional order.

These rituals of team presentations were repeated within many institutions, such as hospitals and universities. Ritualistic texts and newsletters were issued with reassurances, and banners affirmed, "we are all in this together" while in the background, plans moved ahead for layoffs.

Regions and region behavior (another theme in *Presentation of Self*) became a major mechanism to contain havoc and manage human responses to the pandemic. Authorities tried to designate areas as off-limits, control movement through the territory of cities and the nation, and define safe and unsafe spaces. The entire vocabulary of "shelter at home" and "lock down" framed this effort to control spaces. The temporal dimension was linked to the spatial one as the phased reopening involved a timetable of changing closures of areas.

Region behavior is also linked to the behavior of team members in the front-stage and back-stage regions and to the importance of those whom Goffman termed "non-persons." In Goffman's day, they were servants in the home of employers, but in the pandemic era they are the silent "instruments of labor" as essential workers in grocery stores and mass transit, roles disproportionately filled by women and people of color.

Managing Bodies to Contain Havoc: The Body as Sheath and the Mask

Managing bodies became a major strategy of containing havoc precipitated by the virus. In *Territories of the Self*, Goffman returned to themes that had been broached in *Presentation of Self* but that were now elucidated in the context of havoc, disorder, and containment. Goffman uses the concepts of "preserves" and "territory" as underlying elements of social organization. These concepts

elaborate the concept of “claims”—claims to exercise autonomy, agency, and maintain security over our person and possessions and to ward off threats to them (Goffman, 1971, p. 29). In the new virus-based interaction order the concept of “personal space” took on a new centrality. Personal space is “the space surrounding any individual, anywhere within which an entering other causes the individual to feel encroached upon, leading him to show displeasure and sometimes to withdraw (Goffman, 1971, p. 29–30).” “Personal space continually changes with an individual’s sense of surroundings and assessment of offenses to this sense (Goffman, 1971, p. 31).”

The new practice of social distancing, maintaining a distance of 6 feet from others at all times, was a technique to avoid being exposed to the virus and slowing the spread of the virus to others. Social distancing also involved “staying at home”, “self-isolating,” quarantining,” or “sheltering-in-place”—all practices by which individuals avoided crowded public spaces and confined areas where they might have come into direct contact with people. This spatially regulated ordering affects an individual’s sense of interaction, and requires coordinating one’s actions and body with those around oneself.

Goffman observes that one’s “use space” or the territory of the self that is “immediately around or in front of an individual” must be “respected because of apparent instrumental needs,” implies that distance is both instrumental but fundamental to sustaining both the self and the social order. Goffman offers the example of a gallery-goer who “can expect that when he is close to a picture, other patrons will make some effort to walk around his life vision or excuse or minimize their momentarily blocking it (Goffman, 1971, p. 34–35).” During the pandemic, navigating the grocery store or the pharmacy were governed by new considerations, expressed in signage on floors, walls, and windows, as well as public announcements; all directly instructed and demanded the need for reflexivity about personal and use space.

The “sheath” bridges personal-use space and public space. Goffman defines the sheath as “comprised of the skin that covers the body and, at a little removed, the clothes that cover the skin.” The sheath functions to cover those parts of the body that are of social concern, and different parts of the body are afforded different concern, “... [the] body will be divided up into segments conceptually” since “across different cultures, the body will be differently segmented ritually (Goffman, 1971, p. 38).” The sheath took on new forms with the corona-virus interaction order, most notably around the mask requirement.

Wearing a mask, a face-covering which conceals the nose and mouth, protected others and oneself from virus exposure and virus transmission. Whether abiding by state enforced rules of face-covering or by unspoken local norms, individuals regulated the presentation of self, and thereby affirmed the body’s appropriateness in the presence of others and its key role in containing havoc. Face-covering also promoted what Goffman refers to as a “supportive interchange”—those actions or behavioral patterns with which individuals display respect, courtesy, and deference towards others in interaction and prevent interaction crises (Goffman, 1971, p. 145).” The simple regulation of face-covering connected the multiple territories of the self, one’s presentation, and the coordinated interaction with others in order to regulate the interaction order, contain havoc, and sustain social life (albeit within

a new set of social psychological and physical norms that must be inculcated and normalized). Refusal to cover one's face signals an opposed view of the social order and adherence to an alternative and intensely felt defiance.

The mask creates its own regulatory structure and a line between wearers and non-wearers and the associated interaction logics. Havoc is structured through institutions and draws on the slightest hint of flexibility or doubt in knowledge and information. People constructed opposing versions of the meaning of mask regulations, often around the contrasting pair “public safety” and “individual freedom.” In some localities shame adhered to wearing a mask and in others to not wearing one. Two different regimes of interaction and regulation emerged, sometimes producing confrontations in stores like COSTCO and Walmart.

At first masks were scarce, now they have become part of the new abnormal in urban areas, even becoming the objects of fashion coordination. The mask is no longer something one wears to conceal, to protect identity, or to avoid the identification by others, but rather unironically as a signal of civic good will. The mask gradually became to be regarded by many as a necessary part of the interaction order of everyday life and was seen as a complement to slogans such as “we are all in this together.” This statement was found spray-painted on building walls, hanging from signs in apartment windows, or from a doctor's office. It reminded everyone that this facial barrier connected us ever tighter together during our mutual perseverance in a world where people were dying by the thousands each day. The mask homogenizes us, by making us more anonymous, and merges us into a momentary solidarity of keeping each other safe and alive. But the mask had to become adopted; it had to be reconfigured from a symbol of the infected and stigmatized to a symbol of mutual concern for oneself and others and a sign that we were united to contain the havoc produced by the virus.

The havoc created by the invisible enemy of the pandemic forced a reorganization of the social order. Yet masking was seen by some as a reminder of havoc and surrender to it. Masking was seen as referring to humiliation, degradation, and death. It affirmed that the virus was now “in charge” and that humans were weak. It meant that we had to admit that we could be infected with the virus by anyone around us, even the asymptomatic carrier.

The body as sheath is closely related to the analysis in *Stigma*, which addresses visible signs of the discredited self. Stigma was already present as a concept in both *Presentation of Self* (1959) and *Asylums* (1961), but it became centrally important with Goffman's analysis of stigmatization and resistance to stigma in 1963, perhaps in response to the growing strength of the civil rights movement. During the pandemic, racial-ethnic disparities in illness and death rates signaled the marginalization and high-risk conditions of Black and Latino communities. Anti-Asian imagery and hate crimes drew on infection imagery such as “the Chinese flu,” and “Kung flu” which appeared in the President's rhetoric. Old age triggered the stigmatizing assumption “likely to die of Covid.” The pandemic created new situations of stigmatization, many of them riding on the new vehicles of hostility in social media, in trolling and the circulation of hate messages through underground platforms.

The imagery of the virus underlines the value of Goffman's distinction between visible and hidden stigma. Trump characterized Covid-19 as “the invisible enemy”

and although this was intended to refer to the tiny size of the virus, it rather astutely included another dimension of invisibility, namely its social invisibility. Some communities experienced few cases in the earlier months of the pandemic, making it easier to discredit the threat of the pandemic and to adhere to the fake news that it is a “shamdemic.” The social invisibility of the virus not only fueled the conspiracy theory of the “shamdemic” but also encouraged individuals who were not in affected networks or communities to engage in normal sociability and even in exuberant events such as crowding in Wisconsin bars and mass pool partying at Lake of the Ozarks.

Containment Through a Reconstitution of the Interaction Order

The emergence of virtual interaction and with it an annihilation of space and physical presence, the absolute dominance of the image, and a privileging of the visual over all other senses, had already appeared with the internet and social media. (See Chayko, 1993 for a further discussion of the emergence of these new forms.) These trends were accelerated with the impact of Covid-19. New modes of interacting emerged, including physical distancing (peculiarly labeled “social distancing”), interacting with masked faces, and conversing with images of talking heads through the medium of zoom and other online platforms.

With the pandemic and the efforts to contain the havoc it threatened, the norms of interaction shifted dramatically. Most notable was the imposition of “social distancing”—something of a misnomer for physical distancing. Computer- and phone-aided interaction created new forms of interaction, a “new normal” that included the etiquette of zoom meetings and the protocols of online classes. Meanwhile, the “social distancing” of people has drastically transformed norms of physical contact, such as expressing affection and “feeling close.” These changes have built on earlier changes associated with the internet and telecommunications, such as phone sex and cam porn, online dating, and connecting to friends (and sometimes, with the public in general) through the posting of photos on social media sites.

New norms of interaction emerged in the pandemic. Interaction moved to new sites (from three-dimensional real spaces into virtual spaces), but a closer look suggests the norms of interaction also changed. For example, the norm of zoom meetings specify that mikes remain muted, eye contact is avoided, and “chats” with text messages can take place to undercut, mock, and disrupt the main visual course of the meeting. These changes both enhanced and undermined the power of the authority figure. Zoom meetings focused attention on an authority figure, “the host” who holds the floor. It amplified the authoritarian elements of pre-zoom presentations such as the “absolute power” conferred by the power point (Tufte, 2006). The changed temporality of zoom meetings makes them seem interminable. Participants hide their images, becoming invisible and “leaving the meeting,” as an expression of highly visible detachment.

New expectations for interaction expressed the risks of the pandemic but they can continue to create additional havoc in private spaces and times. Behaviors begin to be constrained by imagined others, who might be either sources of infection or

disapproving invisible monitors policing private behaviors. For example, people moved from “normal” expectations (wash hands, avoid touching the face) to behaviors that are irrational for all but frontline health-care workers, such as washing groceries; wiping down packages and mail; wearing gloves, a mask, and eye shields all at once. In the emergent interaction order of the pandemic, people became unclear what is risky and how much risk they want to take. Widely differing standards were observed, from careless congregating in bars to the choice never to leave one’s home. (See Jenkins, 2008 for an insightful and wide-ranging discussion of the extension of concepts in *The Interaction Order* to twenty-first century forms of interaction, including information technologies, surveillance technologies, global impression management, and “deception as a sophisticated new industry called public relations and advertising (Jenkins, 2008, p. 166)”).

The efforts to contain havoc by new regulation of interaction inadvertently set off additional havoc in the growth of scams and cons. This phenomenon was already associated with the Internet; during the pandemic, it greatly accelerated because it became easy to play on the public’s fears and generosity and because the absence of face-to-face interaction facilitated deception. Goffman was always fascinated by cons, and the new forms promise to be a fertile area of inquiry.

Framing and Havoc

The internet and social media set in motion massive new efforts to alter and control framing practices (a key concept in Goffman’s later work). From the relatively top-down agenda setting and framing practices of the mass media in an earlier age we moved into a period of intense contention over framing and over knowledge, truth, and reality itself. Framing is about making things real (Craib, 1978).

Framing is a major way of attempting to contain havoc and to restore regulation and order, but it is also a practice of creating havoc and a locus of contention. This dual use of frames can already be seen prior to the pandemic, in contention over internet sites and social media content. Fake news and false information—and the claim that a news item is fake news—exemplify these contending trends.

The fragmentary, pastiche or collage-like construction of reality through framing practices is closely linked to the formation of a fragmentary, contingent, and continuously performed self and a sense of uncertain knowledge. These characteristics of social media and internet imagery were already apparent before the pandemic, as revealed in YouTube videos, the circulation of rumors and conspiracy theories, and the collage or pastiche-like self-presentations on sites like Facebook, Instagram, and the fleetingly popular Snapchat. Social media accelerated and expanded these characteristics—not only of the individual self, but also of social reality collectively experienced. As life is dislocated from spatial constraint, the collective self (of the nation or a community) becomes a fragmentary patchwork of contending interpretations, constantly created, disseminated, and attacked through social media such as Twitter and platforms such as 4chan and 8chan.

The pandemic produced a new round of fake news claims and attempts to “weaponize” real and false information. Goffman used the concept of “frame traps”

—misrepresentations—for the situation in which incorrect views are confirmed and become permanent and irrevocable descriptions of individuals. This analysis can be applied to incorrect views of a situation that are circulated in the media, whether intentional or unintentional, such that these views are “confirmed by each new bit of new evidence or each effort to correct matters so that indeed, the individual finds that he is trapped and nothing can get through” (Goffman, 1974, p. 480).

Contending Visions of Containment—what Will the New Order Look Like and Who Will Produce and Impose it?

During the pandemic, Covid-19 became the epicenter of “the culture wars” emerging out of a storm of ever-exacerbating political issues. The pandemic became the prism through which all other issues were refracted, depending on the news cycle and the framing of that cycle. Covid replaced climate change as the central issue about society, with deniers of climate science now deniers of science, viruses and epidemiology. On the Left, social upheaval aligned with protests against police brutality, calls for abolishing the police, and demands to dismantle white supremacy. On the Right, social upheaval was met with law and order campaigns, anger over looting and the destruction of private property, and an individual rights-and-freedom frame of opposition to mask-wearing and business shutdowns. The rights-and-freedom frame was co-opted by groups on the extreme right, and on January 6, 2021, Capitol rioters paraded the symbols and memes of freedom as well as those of white supremacy. The changing and contending media frames nevertheless continually circled back to the ways in which all of these events, individually and in their interrelated totality, were driven or produced by the “frame trap” of the pandemic.

Second Example: Havoc Uncontained at the Capitol

“It is the curse of kings to be attended by slaves that take their humors for a warrant to break within the bloody house of life....”

(William Shakespeare (1980), *The Life and Death of King John*: 4.2. 208–210)

The assault on the Capitol on January 6, 2021 provides a contrasting example of havoc and containment. In this instance, havoc was believed by many political commentators and journalists to have been initiated by the actions of an individual, President Trump. After the initial round of havoc, havoc escalated as multiple contenders entered the situation with competing visions of order and competing claims about the responsibility of the President and the truthfulness of his assertions.

When an Individual Initiates Havoc

Goffman begins his discussion of havoc with remarks about the behavior of the person designated as the patient. The behavior disrupts the internal order of the family; but even more so “It is, however, when the family’s external functioning

is considered that the full derangement is seen (p.369).” He lists a number of the signs that this is taking place and they are remarkably similar to descriptions of Trump’s behavior in mainstream news sources: “Misplaced enterprise occurs. Family incomes are squandered on little examples of venture capitalism.” “Contacting is accelerated. The telephone is increasingly used. Each call becomes longer and more calls are made. Favorite recipients are called more and more frequently.... Critical national events, such as elections, war policy statements, and assassinations, are taken quite personally...Perceived slights in public places lead to scenes and to the patient’s making official complaints to officials....Association is intensified. ...Finally, relating is expanded....Occasional workers, hired by the patient to help in projects, will be transformed into friends to fill the gap that has developed, but these will now be friends who can be ordered to come and go, there resulting a kind of minionization [sic] of the patient’s social circle....” The associated footnote: “A form of social organization sometimes bred by very high office; this is best illustrated today, perhaps, in the Hollywood entourage.” (1971, p. 371).

The patient’s extreme openness to all encounters, possibly leading to “unsuitable relationships” and “insulting rejection,” places him “in a position to penetrate all social boundaries a little.” (p. 375). Goffman comments, “the manic activity I have described is obviously located in the life of the privileged, the middle and higher classes.” Hacking asks where the line lies between ill and healthy behaviors; and these behaviors of the patient overlap the habits of frantic speculators and exuberant entrepreneurs. (Hacking, 2004; Widdick, 2003).

The next section of “The Insanity of Place” discusses the response of the family. The family is drawn into disorder; containment is as much a process of restoring the routine of family life as it is a matter of coping with the behavior of the patient. Goffman comments (1971, p. 382):during the disorganization phase, the family will live the current reality as in a dream, and the domestic routine which can now only be dreamt of will be seen as what is real.” Although the details of *The Insanity of Place* apply to the situation of the patient and the family, the dynamic makes sense on a larger scale as well, in the life of organizations and even of nations. Near the end of the essay (1971, p.387), Goffman writes, “These divisive alignments do not—in the first instance—constitute malfunctioning of the individual, but rather disturbance and trouble in a relationship or an organization.”

It is beyond the scope of our analysis to address the question whether Trump’s actions were “reflections,” “symptoms,” or “causes” of the characteristics of the presidency and the current turn of political events, since these terms are metaphors and would require much deeper and sustained analysis to do them justice. However, it can be cursorily stated that Trump is a “reflection” in the sense that his presidency and popularity with a segment of the public became possible when a set of key changes took place in several institutions of the media and public opinion. These included the rise of social media and especially Twitter, replacing late twentieth century forms of news coverage such as the major TV channels and print media; the impact of Fox News, especially on elderly less-educated whites; and the popular following for celebrity news. The Republican Party had gone through major changes since the early 1990s, and under the leadership of Newt Gingrich had begun to define itself primarily as a party dedicated to the obstruction of initiatives

of the Democrats; Republican moderates as well as traditional conservatives lost power within the party (Sykes, 2018). These types of changes in the sphere of political opinion and the media helped Trump's rise as a candidate in the Republican Party. Long-standing cleavages in cultural and political orientation—the “culture wars”—were skillfully addressed by Trump operatives, with effective use of focus group and survey methodologies. Whether one chooses to use the term “symptom” depends on whether these cultural and political shifts are seen as pathologies. From Goffman's perspective, it seems clear that team-work, back stage preparation, and a calculated presentation of self-produced notable results.

Individuals and organizations can discern and then bring together scattered societal and cultural trends into unifying frames that gain public attention and support. Trump was able to collect and then condense into his rhetoric and actions many previously disparate frames, symbols, concerns, and trends.

Trump not only pulled together scattered cultural themes but also demonstrated a carefully nurtured ability to create disconnections among his various personas, each of them performed for a different audience. For example, Trump could appeal to supporters of the Israeli right and at the same time, pronounce words of comfort to rabid anti-Semites after the Charlottesville march. He set in motion the brilliant initiative to develop a vaccine and pay for it with taxpayer dollars but publicly demeaned scientific knowledge and said no words of encouragement to the vaccine hesitant in his base. His use of armed force was restrained in comparison to that of G.W. Bush and Hilary Clinton, he parted company with John Bolton on issues of intervention, and labeled Liz Cheney a “war monger”; yet he freely used jingoistic rhetoric.

Ultimately, these multi-sided performances contribute to havoc through multiple contradictory presentations and implied promises. Part of the essence of charisma, as Weber stated it so acutely, is that the charismatic leader supersedes rational-legal and traditional authority, that he is not bound by these customary and rationalistic limits, and that charismatic authority is expressed in deliberate indifference to the norms that bind people in traditional and rational-legal settings. Inconsistency and disruption are used as signs of charismatic authority and are part of the repertoire of charismatic performance; and being caught in lies, contradictions, and “craziness” shows that the individual has successfully abrogated ordinary coherence and morality.

Performance, actions, and existing structures can reduce the likelihood of containment and enable havoc to emerge. Ambiguity in the performances and the containing structures encourages an explosion of havoc in action; ambiguity is closely related to the breach and blurring of boundary-defining practices in both discourse and structures. We will trace the performative and structural enabling of havoc and the ambiguities that encouraged mob action at the Capitol and weakened efforts to contain it. The breached and blurred boundaries include those between peaceful protest and mob action, between law-and-order discourse and the myth of the freedom-loving outlaw-rebel, between playful carnivalesque pageantry and serious domestic terrorism, and between rioters and law enforcement.

Havoc as Performance: The President Sets the Stage

The January 6, 2021 assault on the Capitol by a mob illustrated a round of cultivated havoc. It was preceded by the Presidential election, in which Donald Trump lost soundly to challenger Joseph Biden Jr., and the Georgia senate election, wherein the two Democratic contenders, considered longshots, won both seats in a historic vote. An atmosphere of mistrust and anger in substantial segments of the Republican base was created by Trump's oft-repeated claim of election fraud and his refusal to concede the election months before votes were even cast; Trump began to perform a ritual designed to create a feeling of doubt and ambiguity about the election results. This prelude to havoc at the Capitol was advanced by the many dramaturgical effects generated by the President, such as rallies, TV appearances, and numerous tweets that saturated discussion across the American mediascape and were repeated by Trump-endorsing pundits in the echo-chambers of the right. The intensity and repetitiveness of these performances remained high during the closing days of 2020, well after the vote in the Electoral College, and thus they set the stage for the events of January 6 2021.

The results of the senatorial election in Georgia on January 5 meant that the Republicans had lost the White House, and now both houses of Congress had fallen under Democrat control. Media frames began to tilt towards suggesting that the President had been responsible for the defeat, and this framing sparked further efforts by the President to present himself as a victim of election fraud. The President and his allies repeatedly claimed that the country's voting machinery was manipulated in order to delete millions of votes for Trump; they charged that tampering had taken place with voting machines to flip votes from Trump to Biden and that foreign powers such as Venezuela were involved. They claimed that fraud was perpetrated by counting the ballots of dead people. Furthermore, large numbers of votes for Biden were supposedly added after in-person ballots were counted in the wee hours of the morning on election night.

Trump fulminated at every turn with tropes of fear, fraud, conspiracy, theft, and monstrous crimes of injustice against "great patriotic Americans." The President's self-presentation as a victim of election fraud was not a solo performance, but one for which White House and the Department of Justice loyalists were rallied as a support team to call on senators and congressional representatives to contest the certification of the Electoral College vote. Trump remained defiantly committed to the claim of fraud and a vast conspiracy despite all rulings and evidence from courts, public officials, mainstream media, and even the former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (Christopher Krebs).

A Speech to Stop the Steal: An Ambiguous Invitation to Havoc

The President's long, rambling speech at 11:30 on the morning of January 6 included a summary of the grievances that he had been rehearsing for months, but he now interspersed phrases of suggested aggression and violent imagery, all skillfully

formulated to avoid any direct incitement. This speech constituted the “winking of authority” in Shakespeare’s words, ambiguous coded signals containing a dog-whistle call to violence.

[W]e want to be so respectful of everybody, including bad people. And we’re going to have to fight much harder... We’re going to walk down to the Capitol, and we’re going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we’re probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them, because you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong.⁸

In the previous two months, social media had cultivated a wide-open invitation for all Trump supporters to come and gather for a “wild” time on the day of Congressional certification of the vote; supporters were called to “fight hard,” “show strength,” and “take back the country.” The suggestive atmospherics of anger and resistance to the certification of the electoral-college vote were constantly signaled in the speech, although the literal wording was ambiguous and could be construed as within the bounds of constitutional rights to freedom of speech and peaceful protest. Trump skillfully used appeals to both wildness and law, legitimacy, and order—a combination that resonated with parts of the base who simultaneously use outlaw imagery and law and order discourse.

The President called out Vice-President Mike Pence, asking what actions he might take that afternoon and whether his actions would be loyal to Trump and Trump loyalists or would betray the President and the people’s will.

I hope Mike is going to do the right thing. I hope so. I hope so because if Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election....States want to re-vote, the states got defrauded. They were given false information, they voted on it. Now they want to recertify; they want it back. All Vice President Pence has to do is send it back to the states to recertify, and we become president, and you are the happiest people....

In the speech, Trump suggested that those who did not heed his wishes were weak and were failing to do the right thing to correct voter fraud and restore justice to the American people. He implied that the people’s wrath would fall on Pence if he as vice-president failed to challenge the certification process.

When you catch somebody in a fraud, you are allowed to go by very different rules. So I hope Mike has the courage to do what he has to do, and I hope he doesn’t listen to the RINOs and the stupid people that he’s listening to.

The implication of this call to the Vice President was that the will of the people and the President overrides the formal procedures, and that an official who fails to overturn these procedures will himself face punishment for cowardice. The

⁸ Excerpts of speech taken from Boschma (2021).

punishment for formalism is left intentionally vague, undetermined, and construed to be a form of justice that is within reach if the people decide to “not to take it anymore.”

We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen. You don't concede when there is theft involved. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore, and that is what this is all about. And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with, we will stop the steal...

You will have an illegitimate president. That is what you will have, and we can't let that happen... We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore.“

Echoes of Historical Right-Wing Populist Calls for Havoc

Trump's strategy of havoc and a new containment order drew on a long history of authoritarian populist rhetoric; these discourses insist that “the people” are not yet defeated but that they are rightfully indignant and ready to regain what was taken from them unjustly.⁹ Their dire circumstances are no fault of their own but the result of fraud, manipulation, and conspiracies by shadowy elites. Therefore they must “fight like hell” to express their grievances and save their country, following the lead of an authority figure who embodies their ethos and their will, above any formalistic electoral procedures.

The rhetoric and the performance bind together several themes that connect the call for havoc and the vision of a new post-havoc order: victimization and the people as victims of conspiracy and fraud; an anti-elite stance without reference to class divisions; the need to save or redeem the country; suspicion of formal democracy; an ambiguous play between order and anarchic upheaval; and the embodiment of the true interests of the people in the person of the leader.

These forms of rhetoric (with origins in the discourses of ancient Greek demagogues) have been used in modern times to articulate and mobilize racial, nationalist, religious, and territorial *resentiment*. Examples include French nationalist and revanchist discourse after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71 (Onishi, 2021); the myth of the *Dolchstoß* (“stab in the back”) in Germany after World War I (Bittner, 2020); Fascist and Nazi ideology with its contradictory images of the people as victims and the people as strong and the need to destroy existing institutions to restore law and order. The “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” ideology used similar discourse; the narrative portrayed the North as aggressors trying to destroy the southern economy and way of life, but its coded message called for violence to reconstitute white supremacy. (Cox, 2021).

⁹ Here we are using the term “authoritarian populism” in a much looser sense than in the Hall-Jessop et al. debate in NLR during the Thatcher administration. See Jessop (1984) and Hall (1985).

Havoc as Pageantry

After Trump's remarks concluded and the gathering of supporters began their "walk" towards the Capitol, the panoply of groups started to come into focus:

America First, right wing death squads clad in balaclavas, kilts, hockey masks, Holocaust deniers with swastikas and 6MWE shirts, Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, MAGA fans, Q-anon Believers, militia members, all marked by their differing group colors, insignias, symbols such as the meme of Pepe the Frog, with many carrying their own identifying group banners, including the confederate flag. Men wore military camouflage and tactical gear, skull-faced gaiters, MAGA shirts and hats, some attendees were dressed in all black, while others took a much more celebratory approach dressing as Captain America, the American Bald Eagle, and Hunter-Warrior types in animal pelts and Viking horned helmets, while still others slathered themselves in facial and body paint.

This bizarre combination of the serious militia types and the costumed heroes, the self-identifying groups collected with their raised flags, all gave the event a strange and distorted dystopian pageantry. Their fashion was functional to create as great a spectacle to emphasize an absolute otherness of difference to the political establishment. This otherness was one which exuded the mockery of authority, power, and tradition through a carnivalesque of the body and its imagery, yet replaced the liberating potential of rebellious images with an unfettered nihilism. This aesthetic provided a visual parallel to the actual havoc brewing; it represented the suspension of the real, the abrogation of everyday normality and civility, and the license to act without the usual norms, laws, restraints, and conventions of society.

Unleashing Havoc: Destruction, Intimidation, Assault, and Death

With these thoughts and images swirling around in their agitated minds, the protesters made their way to the Capitol, up the steps, and then proceeded to assault, destroy and denigrate all they could. They shouted for the death of Vice-President Pence and other officials. They began to scale walls, break down doors and windows. As the insurrectionists made their way into the building they stole art, smashed windows, sprayed graffiti on the walls, destroyed furniture, stole private property, smeared feces on the walls, all expected to cost at least 30 million dollars in repairs. But they came not only to trash a building, but to harass, intimidate, and perhaps execute members of the House and Senate. They came armed with chemical irritant sprays, lead pipes, pool cues cut to batons, flak jackets, gasmasks, guns, tasers, baseball bats, truncheons, knives, brass knuckles, teargas, and zip-ties. While clearly premeditated in preparation, they were now caught up in the fury and the fire of the mass-minded mob rolling through the hallways looking for their prey. A gallows was built outside to hang Vice President Pence, while members of the insurrection walked the hallways screaming out politicians' names trying to find

their locations in hopes of taking them hostage. They beat police officers guarding entry points (including beating one of them with a Blue Lives Matter Flag pole, while threatening to shoot another with his service revolver); they battered others with fire extinguishers and crushed another's head in a doorway.

Havoc in Bureaucratic Structures of Containment: The Breakdown of Defined Spheres of Competence, Communication and Execution

Yet another realm of havoc created by the Capitol insurrection was the delayed and incoherent response by law enforcement. The different law enforcement agencies that protect the federal government had no coordinated plan, and they were not prepared for the event of January 6, despite calls on Parler, Telegraph, and other right-wing online forums to bring guns and ammunition and to prepare for violent encounters. Despite social media mentions of violence, bloodshed, and confrontation, the security forces of the capital appeared to suffer from a “failure of the imagination” in planning for the day, a phrase that suggested to some observers that it was mainly a failure to imagine white demonstrators engaging in anti-social behavior. The barriers were weak and the Capitol police were not prepared to prevent the crowd from breaking through the barriers and entering the Capitol.

Different agencies had conflicting and inconsistent assessments of the threat and the risk level of what was happening at the Capitol. The Pentagon, National Guard, FBI, DC Metro Police, and the Capitol Police had not developed any coordination or joint response planning. This uncoordinated organization not only led to the complete failure to contain the insurrection, it also led to the inability to contact the National Guard and the four-hour delay for them to arrive on the scene. The failure in communication and coordination left DC Metro and Capitol police poorly staffed, poorly equipped, and unable to execute basic safety protocols in the line of duty. Finally, the 19+ passages and tunnels linking the numerous buildings on Capitol Hill and adjacent areas created confusion, not only among the rioters, but also among security forces who were trying to lead members of Congress to safety.

Havoc in Boundary Defining: Who is In/ Who is Out?

One final realm of havoc created by the insurrection was distinguishing which members of the police were protecting the Capitol from the insurrectionists and which were enabling them in their plot to overthrow the electoral vote and apprehend politicians. Some police defended passages and steered rioters away from the members of Congress, while others were captured on video taking selfies with the insurrectionists or even given them unhindered passage into the building. Inside enablers, cooperators, and sympathizers undermined the police effort from the start, breaching the boundary between law enforcement and rioters and making containment efforts weak and ineffective.

Similarly Senators and Congressional representative themselves played an ambiguous part and engaged in a sub-rosa support of disorder by pretending that the

certification of the Electoral College vote could be anything other than a ceremonial event.

The Curtain is Lowered

After the riot, the event was framed in a wide spectrum of discourses by media, on social media, and in the impeachment process. It was labeled a disturbance, a riot, an insurrection, an insurgency, and even an attempted coup. Ironies abounded: A President who encouraged an insurrection against the government of his own country, a police officer beaten with a pole with a “Blue Lives Matter” flag flown atop, the failure of police to imagine white people rioting, a disorderly mob that favors law and order. Even on his last day in office, Trump attempted a dramatic staging, with the Border Wall as the backdrop; and Jim Jordan was awarded the Medal of Freedom while the President showered pardons on his team loyalists.

Conclusion: The Dream of Havoc

Although the Influenza epidemic of 1918–19 claimed over 600,000 lives in the United States and perhaps as many as 30 million worldwide, it was quickly forgotten. Little was written about it in history books, and few Baby Boomers can remember their parents talking about it. Like a dream, it slipped “out of time,” out of the realm of the routine and normal, and then faded away. The carnivalesque atmosphere and strange pageantry of the assault on the Capital give that event as well a “suspension of ordinary time” feeling. Goffman highlights this odd dream-like perception in his discussion of havoc.

For if an intellectual place could be made for the ill behavior, it would not be ill behavior. It is as if perception can only form and follow where there is social organization; it is as if the experience of disorganization can be felt but not retained. When the havoc is at its height, participants are unlikely to find anyone who has the faintest appreciation of what living in it is like. When the trouble is finally settled, the participants will themselves be unable to appreciate why they had become so upset. Little wonder, then, that during the disorganization phase, the family will live the current reality as in a dream, and the domestic routine which can now only be dreamt of will be seen as what is real. (Goffman, 1971, p. 382)

As we look back on the pandemic and the Capitol assault, Goffman’s paired concepts of havoc and containment and associated concepts such as performance, territories of the self, the body as sheath, the interaction order, and frames are useful for reflecting on the events and help us to move from a dream-like spectacle to analysis. They offer a conceptual framework for discussing and understanding the phenomena that emerged in response to the spread of the virus and the unusual features of the Trump presidency.

For both of these examples, the weak regulatory order in the media and public opinion gave space to havoc, including deliberate efforts to provoke and prolong it.

The pandemic generated havoc; but *efforts to contain the havoc* within an emergent regulatory regime of public health measures were countered by new instances of havoc and contention. The *generation of havoc and the attempts to contain it involved a constant play of performance, interaction, and multiple contending frames of interpretation*. Teams worked frantically to contain havoc within the borders of scientific knowledge and medical advice—or to expand it with fake news, rumors, and polemical appeals to “freedom.” The contending teams operated in a complicated *dramaturgical space*, in front-stage public settings, semi-public social media such as Twitter and Facebook, and more shadowy back-stage Internet venues and trolling sites.

Goffman’s interest in the body—a startling topic during the disembodied sociological theorizing of his era—now proves to be indispensable for understanding the social phenomena of the pandemic. Central flash points of havoc and containment during the pandemic, such as social distancing and masks, are brilliantly illuminated by Goffman’s concepts of *territories of the self* and *the body as sheath*.

In the assault on the Capitol, a different constellation of havoc and containment emerged, centered on the havoc-provoking activities of an individual and his “minionized” team and enlarged by disorder in law-enforcement containment efforts.

These key examples underline the power of Goffman’s conceptual framework to make sense of new historical contexts.

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