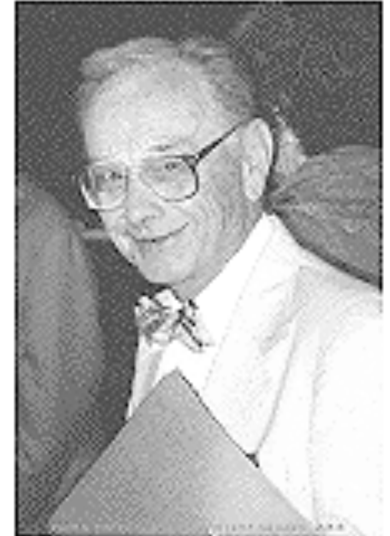
PSY 444

Story & Psychology

2023 (Revised)

Sarbin and the Emergence of Narrative Psychology

Personal Introductory Comments. I first met Ted Sarbin at the 1997 APA Convention in Chicago, IL. In the previous year I had read his book, ***Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*** (Sarbin, 1986), and had begun to organize the Narrative Psychology Internet & Resource Guide <www.narrativepsychology.com> online. Just before Ted went into give his talk at the Chicago meeting, I introduced myself and asked if I might take his picture. I recall he said, "Oh, you're that fellow who has the Internet page on narrative." He agreed to pose for the photo and the image on the right is the portrait I got that day. Subsequently I learned that Ted used email very regularly in order to keep up with his former students and friends who are spread throughout the country.



My second encounter with Ted came in the fall of 1998 when I was on my first sabbatical leave at Santa Clara University in California and asked Ted for the opportunity to interview him. The journal, *Teaching of Psychology*, had just inaugurated a new feature, "The Generalist's Corner," and was seeking in-depth interviews with influential psychologists to keep its readers abreast with innovations in the field. I thought that the discursive turn and the move toward narrative was an apropos topic for the feature and the editor agreed. So, I drove down to Carmel from Santa Clara one Saturday morning in October to meet with Ted. I brought with me a tape recorder and, for about two hours, he answered my questions. We ranged over both historical issues as well as his more recent work. Then we went to lunch. It took a while to get a transcript made of the interview and to edit the interview down to a length that the journal would accept. But, by the spring of 1999 the final copy was ready and appeared as Hevern (1999).

In subsequent years, I joined Ted annually at the APA convention where he usually had at least one paper to present (often more) and at his "Role Theorists' Dinner" -- a gathering of friends and like-minded academics who shared an evening of fine food and discussion and had been meeting for about a quarter-century. In May 2003, Ted accepted an invitation by Dr. Rita Charon, Director of the Program in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, to take part in the inaugural colloquium on narrative medicine along with about 175 other participants. I had decided to attend as soon as I learned of the event and was surprised to find Ted walking in on the first morning of the conference. He had flown in from California. (There we sit at Columbia in the photo above.)

Early in the summer of 2005, Ted was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer but was determined to go to Washington, DC and the APA convention in August to be present for the awarding of the first Theodore R. Sarbin Award by Division 24, Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology to Dr. Jefferson Singer (Connecticut College). The four days he was at the convention afforded him the opportunity to see his friends and colleagues a last time and to say goodbye. He returned to California and died on August 31, 2005. His memorial service was held in Monterey, CA on October 1, 2005 with about 100 of his friends and family in attendance. I flew out to be there and was quite moved by the experience.

While coming to know Ted, it became obvious that he has a wide set of friends throughout all the social sciences and many, many students to whom he remained a close support and advisor over many years. Though he had taken several very controversial stands on issues in clinical psychology, he was also an approachable and welcoming figure who enjoyed discussing multiple points of view. The notes I've assembled here are meant to introduce you to important aspects of his thinking as one of the central founders of the contemporary narrative perspective.

Although Jerome Bruner and Sarbin have different approaches to narrative, it is intriguing to note how they both were educated at about the same time, received their PhD's in 1941, entered the academic world similarly, and have had lengthy (even monumental) careers as teachers and thinkers. Both men moved from the setting of their original major academic appointment (UC Berkeley & Harvard, respectively) to pursue a "second" career, Ted at the brand-new UC Santa Cruz and Jerry in England at Oxford. Both appeared to retire for a while but wound up continuing with vigorous "third" career paths -- Ted through the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey and Jerry at New York University's Law School. Both published their latest books as they approached their 87th birthdays. By the way, due to his work on behalf of the Department of Defense, at the time of his death, Ted was the oldest American citizen holding a security clearance for work on “top secret” matters.

Sarbin: The Path to Role Theory[1] A high-school drop-out originally, Sarbin completed his BA in 2 years at The Ohio State University and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1936. A behaviorist as an undergraduate, Ted’s encounter with J. R. Kantor’s interbehavioral psychology (Mountjoy & Hansor, 1989) in the summer of 1936 not only led to a life-long friendship but began to erode Sarbin’s behaviorism as well. Ted also married a social worker, Anne Kochman, at that same time. After a one-year master’s at Case Western Reserve, Ted returned to Ohio State for the 1937-38 academic year to complete his doctoral coursework. That year he both learned hypnosis and, with his classmate, Joe Friedlander, began research on hypnotizability using Rorschach cards as stimuli with hypnotized subjects who were asked to think of themselves as different people (e.g., a female participant was asked under hypnosis to imagine that she was, in one session, Madame Curie and, in another session, Mae West; see, Friedlander & Sarbin, 1938). This work, Sarbin claims, “confirmed my belief that hypnosis was more than the mechanical expression of a mental disposition released through the verbal behavior of the

[1] These comments summarize autobiographical and biographical materials found in Hevern (1999, 2006), Sarbin (1994, 2005), and Scheibe (2006).

therapist…I found myself interpreting the actions of the subject as somehow similar to the performances of stage actors" (1994, p. 14).

For three years beginning in 1938, Sarbin worked at the University of Minnesota as a kind of student counselor while completing a dissertation on clinical versus actuarial prediction for Ohio State. At Minnesota, Sarbin heard the University of Wisconsin psychiatrist, Norman A. Cameron, present a talk about paranoid schizophrenic patients, to members of the Psi Chi chapter at UM (probably in 1940 or 1941). Cameron was a psychiatrist known for formulating the idea of "the paranoid pseudo-community" (1943). He held that even "asocial, disorganized schizophrenic patients [show in] their thinking and their talking ... evidence of habit organization which is consistent and idiomatic, and which recurs in recognizable patterns; but through a process of progressive desocialization these patterns have become so highly individualized that, to share in their conversation even partially, one must often master their asocial idiom (*metonymy*) and their formal incomplete logic (*asyndesis*). Personal language habits in these persons have gradually replaced the more social language habits" (Cameron, 1943, p. 34). For Cameron, individuals must learn a broad range of socially-validated roles and master the linguistic and behavioral components associated with these roles. Thus, "the paranoid person, because of poorly developed role-taking ability, which may have been derived from defective social learning in earlier life, faces his real or fancied slights and discriminations without adequate give-and-take in his communication with others and without competence in the social interpretation of motives and intentions" (Cameron, 1943, p. 36). Cameron's claim was striking: The root of the difficulty of such patients lay not in some Freudian conflict or medical disability, but in their ineptness in carrying out the roles demanded of them within their social worlds.[2] For Sarbin, hearing Cameron's theory of inept role-taking proved to be pivotal and led him to expand his study of the notion of role.

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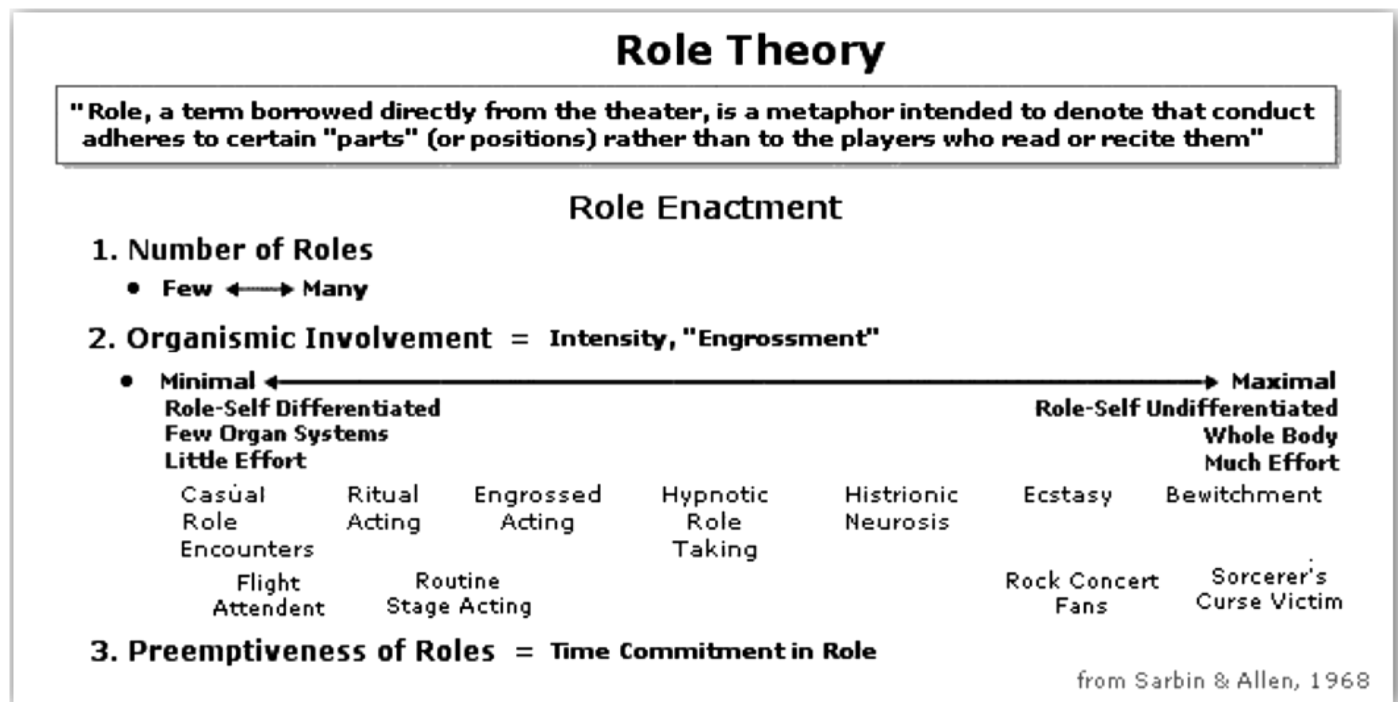
[2] The thesis of this lecture appeared about two years later in a seminal article: Cameron, N. (1943). The paranoid pseudo-community. *American Journal of Sociology, 49*(1), 32-38. Cameron reiterated and extended his analysis of the relation of role and psychopathology in subsequent publications including (a) Cameron, N. *The psychology of behavior disorders: A biosocial interpretation*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin; (b) Cameron, N. (1950). Role concepts in behavior pathology. *American Journal of Sociology, 55*(5), 464-467; and (c) Cameron, N., & Magaret, A. (1951). Pseudo-community and delusion. *Behavior pathology* (Ch. 13). Boston: Houghton Mifflin. In the later 1950s, Cameron turned to psychoanalysis which had then reached an ascendancy in American psychiatry and reformulated his original thesis substantially considering his psychoanalytic frame (see, Cameron, N. (1959). The paranoid pseudo-community revisited. *American Journal of Sociology, 65*(1), 52-58.). Details of Cameron's professional life can be found in several short obituaries including (a) Leowald, H. W. (1976). Norman A. Cameron, M.D.–1896-1975. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 45*, 614-617 and (b) Crowley, R. M. (1979). A memorial: Norman Alexander Cameron, Ph.D. M.D*. Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, 7*(3), 469-471.

In 1941, Ted received a Social Science Research Council postdoctoral fellowship which he pursued for two years at the University of Chicago. There he was associated with Ernest Burgess, the well-regarded urban sociologist, who had years earlier collaborated with his colleague, Robert Park, to foster the "Chicago School" approach to social psychological research. Ted notes that the influence of the late George Herbert Mead and his ideas regarding the social construction of the self continued to be felt in the department (Hevern, 1999). Ted worked closely with psychiatrists and others at various mental health facilities in the Chicago area. His clinical experiences with patients and their therapists -- both as observer and as therapist himself -- gave Ted a broad familiarity with psychopathology and treatment approaches. He had already written and thought about clinical hypnosis before his move to Chicago and served as a hypnotherapist with patients in some clinical settings. He soon linked the notion of role taking and the behavior of hypnotized subjects, the subject of a colloquium paper he offered to members of the Department of Psychology at the Institute for Psychoanalysis (e.g., see Sarbin, 1950). Further, he had previously encountered the work of Jacob Moreno and psychodrama and seen how well this treatment modality--with role taking at its



center--might also help patients work through their problems or issues (see Sarbin, 1943 and 1945 for examples of his earliest approach to role theory as well his own use of psychodrama).

By the early 1950s, Ted had moved West, remarried Genevieve Allen after a divorce from his first wife, and joined the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley. There he elaborated his understanding of role taking into a more comprehensive social psychological theory and published it as a major chapter on "Role Theory" in the 1st edition of Lindzey's influential ***Handbook of Social Psychology*** (Sarbin, 1954). Along with Vernon Allen, Sarbin updated his conceptions for the 2nd edition of the text in 1968 (see the comments further below on the influence of the sociologist Erving Goffman on this revised chapter). Sarbin argues that "role" is a metaphor derived from the theater and "intended to denote

that conduct adheres to certain 'parts' (or positions) rather than to the players who read or recite them" (Sarbin & Allen, 1968, p. 489)[3]. He rejects the notion that roles are necessarily played at a distance or as a kind of calculating simulation by a detached actor. Many roles by individuals are parallel to the experience of the violin virtuoso who becomes overwhelmingly engrossed (using a term of Goffman) or self-involved in a performance.

Role theory focuses upon the overt conduct of individuals and, thus, regards the behaviors of persons as inherently and overwhelmingly social. Sarbin argues that he is not proposing a type of stimulus-response psychology because he does not study individuals in any isolated sense (Sarbin & Allen, 1968). The primary object of consideration within role theory is **role enactment**. Individuals enact one or many roles and may be evaluated for how appropriate, proper, and convincing they carry out these roles. Ultimately, role theory rests upon a judgment of the adequacy of an actor's role performance and, thus, cannot strictly speaking be subsumed under the positivist's credo of pure "objectivity."

Three characteristics of role enactment engage Sarbin's general attention. The first asks ***how many*** roles an individual enacts within their life world. He notes that skilled role taking requires many different abilities and that multiple role enactments form a kind of repertoire. In simple fashion, individuals function more adequately in daily life if they have more options, i.e., roles, available to enact.

The second general quality of role enactment is the degree of ***organismic involvement*** by the actor, that is, how intense or engrossed is the individual inhabiting a particular role (Sarbin & Allen, 1968). Sarbin proposes that this quality extends along a dimension from minimal to maximal involvement. At the minimal pole of the dimension, there is a strong degree of separation between the role and the individual's self. Further, there are few bodily systems engaged in the role and the individual expends very little effort to play the role. In contrast, a maximal level of involvement results in very little distinction between self and the role, a great deal of effort in playing the role, and potentially an activation of all the bodily systems of the actor. Organismic involvement can be further specified across at least seven levels from the "casual role encounters" of flight attendents on airplanes to the dramatic, even fatal reactions of individuals put under curse by a sorcerer in traditional cultures. High levels of organismic involvement seem to echo some of the concepts advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) in his theory of "Flow," the deep engagement of individuals in certain activities which seem to eradicate a sense of ego, e.g., improvisational jazz music.

The final note Sarbin applies to role enactment is called the ***preemptiveness*** of roles, i.e., how much time must or does an individual devote to a specific role. Some roles are so extensive (e.g., mother, father) that they may be considered universally preemptive. Others such as doctor or police officer may contain specific, though wide time boundaries, which may readily be trespassed if an emergency confronts the holder of that role. For example, many police officers in the United States are required to carry their service revolvers when they are not

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[3] Sarbin & Allen (1968) specifically cite the work of Constantin Stanislavski, the great Russian theorist of acting, and his influential text, *An Actor Prepares* (Stanislavski, 1938). Hevern (2006) describes the impact of Stanislavki and his theories about acting and learning in the United States during the 1920s through the 1940s.

on duty and many physicians carry a small equipment bag in their cars.

Role Expectations

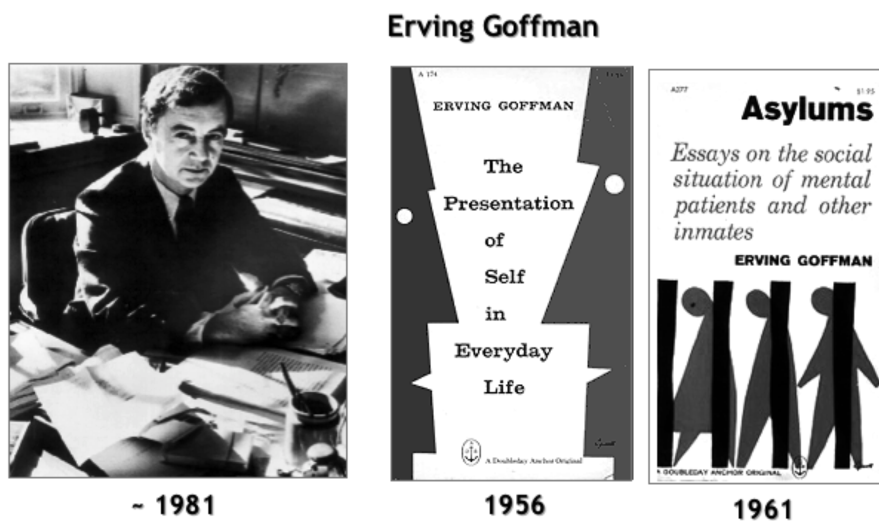
= rights & privileges, duties & obligations, of any occupant of a social position in relation to persons occupying other positions in the social structure

- Cognitions including beliefs, subjective probabilities, and knowledges
- General vs. specific role expectations
- Formal vs. informal role expectations
- Normative quality to role expectations = how appropriate is someone in fulfilling the expectations
- How clear are role expectations? Unclear/vague/ambiguous vs. Plain/unmistakable
- Agreement among social actors, e.g., Role holders and audiences may agree/diasagree

from Sarbin & Allen, 1968

When actors fulfill roles, they must confront issues about how to carry out those roles. This raises the central question of **role expectations** which Sarbin defines as "the rights & privileges, duties & obligations, of any occupant of a social position in relation to persons occupying other positions in the social structure" (Sarbin & Allen, 1968, p. 497). What, then, are these role expectations generically? They form the cognitive bridge between the overall social structure of society and the actual behavior of individuals playing their roles. They comprise a large set of beliefs, knowledge domains, subjective probability judgments, and other cognitive entities that detail the form and quality of how an actor ought to play a specific role. These elements encompass or fall along two overall continua: ***general*** versus ***specific*** expectations and ***formal*** versus ***informal*** expectations. Hence, a physician is generally expected to be concerned about the health of patients who come into the office, but also very specifically required to know how to perform a host of intricate diagnostic or therapeutic maneuvers, e.g., stitching cuts or probing for abdominal distention. Further, some aspects of a particular role may be stated in formal fashion, e.g., a teacher must instruct students, while other roles are much more informally established, e.g., the "class clown" or the "laid back" college student. Further considerations involving role expectations extend to the question of ***clarity*** or ***ambiguity*** in roles as well as the ***degree of consensus across multiple social actors*** about how a role should be enacted. In the midst of social or institutional change, it is not unusual for some roles to become vague or ambiguous. For example, what are the expectations of the roles of wife and mother or husband and father in "first world" technological society? Sometimes there are clear disagreements between social actors about what constitutes an adequate performance, e.g., students and teachers may disagree about what is an appropriate level of study or religious leaders and their congregations may disagree about how the ministry should be carried out in a particular congregation.

Sarbin and the Dramaturgy of Erving Goffman



By 1957 Sarbin had been promoted to full professor at UC Berkeley and assumed the chair of a small interdisciplinary Center for Social Science Theory (CSST; Sarbin, 1994). The following year the sociologist Erving Goffman joined both the sociology faculty at Berkeley as an assistant professor and soon became a member of the CSST with along with Sarbin, two economists, and, later, an anthropologist and another psychologist (Sarbin, 2005). As part of this Center, Sarbin relates that he and Goffman held intensive conversations with one another. According to Goffman's French biographer, Yves Winkin (1999), Sarbin was among the handful of influential senior faculty members from various universities across the United States who supported Goffman's problematic but ultimately successful application for rapid promotion and tenure at Berkeley in 1959. It is also evident that Goffman was quite aware of Sarbin's work itself even before Sarbin began to mention the sociologist in his own writing. Goffman cites Sarbin's 1950 article on role-taking and hypnotic behavior in *The Presentation of Self* (Goffman, 1956/1959, p. 72) as specific support for his own more general argument on behalf of the flexibility of individuals modeling various roles for which they had incomplete information.

If I return to the 1968 version of Sarbin's analysis of role theory, Goffman's influence is notable in both general and specific ways. Most broadly, exposure to Goffman's ideas on dramaturgy prompted Sarbin to advocate directly and comprehensively for the utility of the dramaturgical metaphor for his theorizing in two complementary ways. First, on the opening page of his 1968 chapter, Sarbin explains that he will be using "the role metaphor…[which] caries implications, drawn in this case from the theater" (p. 488) and points to the historical origins of the word "role" from the parchment actors used to help in playing their parts on stage. "Thus, the metaphorical continuity is from real life to drama, and from drama to a psychological theory about people enacting real-life dramas" (p. 489). Rather than locate role as primarily a distinctive cultural unit intimately linked to a society's array of given positions, Sarbin's thinking coalesces around a much more dynamic and creative focus related to the intricacies of dramatic production. In this move, the dramaturgical metaphor, which he took from Goffman, serves as a capacious and penetrating conceptual tool that organizes many of Sarbin's observations of human behavior. In the autobiographical essay composed by Sarbin (2005) just before his death, he describes how his discussions with Goffman at Berkeley represented "a turning point in my identity narrative…his dramaturgical approach to interactional conduct influenced me to enlarge my conception of role. Roles need not be stereotypes. Persons create and modulate roles in response to changing contexts" (p. 21).

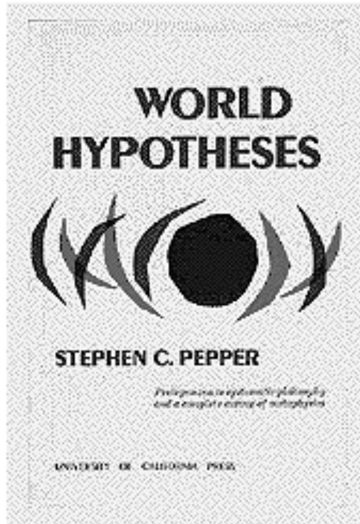
Secondly, according to Sarbin in 1968, insight into how roles are learned can be facilitated by "invoking a fresh and unusual approach that is being employed increasingly for social-psychological analysis: the dramaturgical model" (p. 547). He then points to the range of observations in *The Presentation of Self* as an important resource related to understanding how roles may be acquired. Insofar as actors prepare for roles and can learn how to become characters in a drama, their efforts suggest ways in which individuals from a very young age develop role competencies (Sarbin & Allen, 1968, p. 548). The imaginary play of children and the ways parents and others guide child development parallel important means by which actors prepare their roles under the direction of acting coaches.[i]

Notice that Sarbin like Goffman tries to avoid casting the *metaphor* of drama as identical with *reality*. As a thoroughly Jamesian pragmatist, Sarbin found the dramaturgical metaphor to offer singularly helpful insights into understanding human conduct but stopped short of equating the stage with reality. Many aspects of human life were like the theater, but life is not theater *per se*. At the conclusion of *The Presentation of Self*, Goffman (1959) echoes similar sentiments (see, especially, pp. 254-255.).

As Sarbin's 1968 summary of role theory unfolds, Goffman's further influence can be seen in other specific ways. The chapter refers to four works by Goffman (three books and an article [Goffman (1956, 1959, 1961a, 1961b]) and cites him seven times--the most numerous for any scholar other than Sarbin himself. For example, addressing the centrality of the audience for role theory, Sarbin summarizes key themes from the *PSEL* and concludes, "Goffman showed convincingly the extent to which our social behavior is 'staged' to produce the desired impression on others, and the subtle and continuous interaction that occurs between a role performer and his face-to-face audience" (p. 529). Placed near the beginning of his review of the function of the audience, Sarbin appears to credit Goffman for alerting him to a topic missing from his earlier survey. Further, Sarbin cites Goffman's (1961a) *Asylums* which documented "instances of extreme change in role, such as acquiring the role of mental patient" (Sarbin & Allen, 1968, p. 550) as well as the ways in which "inmates in total institutions, such as prisons and mental hospitals, are processed in such a way that their social identities are reflection of placement in the nonperson position" (p. 553). Goffman's research stemming mainly from his work at the St. Elizabeth psychiatric hospital in Washington, DC is deployed here to substantiate the complexity of role phenomena. Additionally, it contains echoes of Sarbin's own experiences more than two decades earlier as a clinician at two state mental hospitals in Illinois in the early 1940s (Hevern, 2006; Sarbin, 1943, 1945). For both scientists, exposure to the intimacies of a mental hospital complex led them away from reifying behavioral disorders into internal disease states and toward socially situated role-based explanations for observable patient symptoms. Finally, let me note that so pervasive was Goffman's influence on Sarbin that, in 2003 when asked to write about a social science work which has had lasting impact on psychology, Ted noted, "without hesitation I thought of the writings of Erving Goffman, especially his first major work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*" (p. 125).

Throughout Sarbin's long career, he returned again and again to a role theorist's understanding of psychology and human behavior with deep resonances with the work of Erving Goffman. Narrative later joins this dramaturgical sensitivity as Ted

elaborates the ways in which context in all its aspects must be weighed to explain how and why individuals undertake particular roles. His decision to move in this direction is a direct reflection of his underlying conception of how the world needs to be understood. So, let's turn to that conception now.



Stephen Pepper (1891-1972) & "World Hypotheses"

Sarbin makes clear that one of the key influences in his formulation of narrative psychology was encountering Stephen C. Pepper's (1942) volume, ***World Hypotheses***, and its description of "contextualism" as a root metaphor in philosophy. Since he is not well known outside a limited academic community in philosophy and aesthetical theory, we might ask: who was Pepper and what did his theory of the "world hypotheses" say? Pepper was born in 1891 in New Jersey to a wealthy family with old New England connections. His father was a painter and, for a while in Stephen's early years, the family lived in Paris. They returned to the United States just before 1900 and Pepper completed his education in Massachusetts schools. He obtained his undergraduate degree at Harvard in 1913 and completed an M.A. (1914) and Ph.D. (1916) in philosophy there as well. After brief military service, Pepper traveled to the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) in 1919. Despite multiple visiting appointments and lectureships at other schools over the next forty years, UCB would serve as his principal academic home until his retirement in 1958. While remaining a member of the philosophy department at UCB (becoming a full professor in 1930), he received an appointment in the art department in 1938 to serve as its chair. He held that position until the early 1950s.

Pepper had begun his philosophical career committed to "mechanistic naturalism" (Hahn, 2002), a stance which informed his early work in aesthetics. However, Pepper experienced a profound change of mind following an intensive conversation in the summer of 1924 with George Herbert Mead at the University of Chicago where he was teaching in the summer session. Mead persuaded Pepper that he was mistaken in his understanding of the nature of pragmatism and its theoretical supports. Subsequently, Pepper began to explore the contours of the pragmatist viewpoint that he dubbed "contexualism." In an unpublished book he wrote in 1938 ("Philosophy of Criticism"), Pepper came to understand that criticism in aesthetics and otherwise derived from set of prior criteria which grew out of what he called a fundamental "world hypothesis". The center of any such world hypothesis was a "root metaphor." As Hahn (2002) defines it, a world hypothesis, then, is "an integrated exploratory or interpretive account of the order and meaning of the full range of things, events, or happenings and their values or significance."

In Pepper's understanding, each major school of philosophy has at its heart one of five fundamental orientations or ways of understanding the world. Thus, for Plato and Aristotle, there is a concern for how well objects, thoughts, and other realities correspond in the way they assume form or shape--how similar are each reality to the others? (***Formism***) For Descartes, Locke, and Hume, the world must be

approached as if it functions as a great big machine (***Mechanism***). The ostensibly "historical" approach of Hegel who describes the unfolding of the world in terms of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, employs the metaphor of an integrated organism at its base (***Organicism***). By 1961 Pepper had added ***Selectivism*** as a world hypothesis: by this he focused upon the purposive acts of entities which choose or select out prized goals or objectives (Pepper, 1967). But it was his world hypothesis of ***Contexualism*** which directly influenced Sarbin. According to Pepper (1942), the contextualist root metaphor casts an understanding of the world as a function of examining historical events as they occur.

World Hypothesis in philosophy	(Pepper, 1942, 1967)	Root Metaphor in psychology	
Formism	Plato, Aristotle	Similarities of Form	Big-5 Personality Theory Faculty Psychology
Mechanism	Descartes, Locke, Hume	Machine	Behaviorism Psychoanalysis
Organicism	Hegel	Integrated Organism	Humanistic Psychology Family Systems Theory
Contextualism	James, Dewey, Mead, Peirce, Bergson	Historical Events	Narrative Psychology
Selectivism	Whitehead	Purposive Acts as a Selection System	Tolman's Behaviorism

The figure on the right above notes that each of the root metaphors in Pepper's scheme can be associated with some theoretical approach in psychology. Hence, the 19th century's forms of *Faculty Psycholog*y and the late 20th century's "Big-5" dimensional theory of personality might both be conceived as employing *Formism* as a root metaphor. Similarly, both Freud's internal dynamical system (psychoanalysis) and Skinner's external reward/punishment calculus (operant behaviorism) seem to be grounded in *Mechanism*. The individualistic theories of the humanistic school (Rogers, Perls) and the more systems-based theories of family therapists reflect a metaphorical basis in *Organicism*. While Pepper came to Selectivism late in his career, he explicitly made reference to the form of psychological behaviorism advocated by his friend and Berkeley colleague, E. C. Tolman ("purposive behaviorism"). And, as we have already noted, narrative psychology shares a common metaphor with *Contexualism*.

Sarbin and Narrative Psychology. Where did Sarbin encounter Pepper and his philosophical system? As he discussed in his interview with me, "the first year I was at Santa Cruz, which was 1969-1970, Stephen Pepper came for one quarter to teach. He had already retired at Berkeley. My collaborator, Jim Mancuso, was also there on sabbatical. The two of them shared the same office. Jim and I had a lot of conversations with him. He was a delightful man. We read his book and Jim and I discovered that we had been contextualists all the time without knowing it. We were like Monsieur Jourdain, the ambitious merchant in Molière's play, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who discovered he had been speaking prose his whole life" (Hevern, 1999). It is intriguing how Pepper directly and Sarbin indirectly were both influenced by G. H. Mead. As Sarbin reflected upon what Pepper was saying, he began to recognize that narrative production that he had examined in varying dramaturgical senses was itself grounded in the contextualist metaphor advanced by Pepper. He gave a paper in 1975 to the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation that was considering the work of George Kelly and his Personal Construct Theory. At the symposium, Ted spoke on "Contextualism: A World View for Modern

Psychology" (Sarbin, 1977) and "made the case that the search for causes of conduct, central to the mechanistic doctrine, had not been successful. To approach the complexity of human conduct, the psychologist had to case a wider net and make sense of persons' actions through discovering how they emplot their lives. Although I used mainly dramaturgical metaphors, my treatment of emplotment brought out the need to focus on narrative as a necessary conception in contexualist thought" (Sarbin, 1994, p. 29).

Continuing reflection on the role of narrative came during his stay at the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan University in 1979. There he encountered several humanist scholars like Stephen Crites and Louis Mink who sharpened his appreciation of the centrality of narrative. It seems that Ted found in narrative -- with its requirement that the acts of individuals be understood within a fundamentally social landscape -- a bridge between his advocacy of role theory and the function of historical context as a key to the meaning of behavior. Soon after, he articulated what he calls the ***narratory principle*** which simply states that "we live in a story-shaped world" (Sarbin, 1994, p. 7). Rather than adopt the cognitive dualism of Jerome Bruner, Sarbin believes that, for people, narrative functions at an ontological level: every aspect of our mental and social lives -- from our dreams and nightmares through the rituals of work, family, and worship, to the experience of life as a daily tumble of events -- is fashioned with a narrative form. Narrative, Sarbin holds, is the grounding or the primary social ecology for the lives we live (Hevern, 1999). By extension, the narratory principle involves both plot and action: in the former, humans are driven to employ narrative structures as how disparate events are linked together and, in the latter, the actual behaviors of individuals make sense within the intentional, goal-directed context of a story. Sarbin points out that every story has a moral dimension, a deontological quality, which permits hearers to weigh the motives of the characters as well as giving meaning to the action(s) detailed within that story.

As he came to recognize the fundamental importance of narrative, Ted contacted a range of social scientists who contributed chapters to his 1986 volume, ***Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct***. The essays gathered in that text approach narrative as a fundamental theoretical perspective in the social sciences, a matter of developmental competence, a strategy by which individuals emplot their lives, and a set of hermeneutic or analytic methods employed within various clinical schools and settings. Thus, he concludes that "story making, storytelling, and story comprehension are fundamental conceptions for a revived psychology...narrative is a viable alternative to the positivist paradigm" (Sarbin, 1986, p. vii). A long biographical "sketch" of the life of Ted Sarbin as well as a selection of his later scholarly papers recently appeared in Scheibe & Barrett (2017).

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