

The Problem of Missing Persons: Methodological Notes on Japanese-Brazilian Identities

DANIEL T. LINGER

University of California, Santa Cruz

History and anthropology continue to edge closer to each other. Culture, the anthropologist's stock in trade, has become an indispensable component of historians' accounts. For their part, anthropologists increasingly emphasize cultural change. Attuned to cultural relativism, they have readily made the further leap into historical relativism. One might say that both disciplines are trying to free themselves from ethno- and tempocentrism.

I endorse this effort, but I have reservations about the widespread tendency to elide considerations of biography, consciousness, and personal agency from analyses of meaning. This erasure –the Problem of Missing Persons– afflicts both history and, less forgivably, my own discipline, anthropology. It is associated, I have argued (Linger 1994), with the near-dominance achieved by interpretive and post-interpretive (discursive) approaches to the study of meaning. Those approaches explicitly or, more often, implicitly equate public representations with subjectivities.

Advanced by luminaries such as Clifford Geertz, the interpretation of public representations (symbols, images, rituals, narratives, performances, and discourses) has become a privileged method of cultural analysis.¹

The appeal of the method, which treats such representations as texts, is evident. For anthropologists, it permits the inference of subjective patterns from readily observable, highly public material such as cockfights, naming practices, and shadow plays (Geertz 1973a). Moreover, interpretation provides a single method applicable to both past and present. The interpretation of cultures (Geertz 1973a) dovetails nicely with the archaeology

of knowledge (Foucault 1976 [1969]). An archaeology of knowledge promises that from symbolic detritus –surviving documents and artefacts– a historian can read cultural (or discursive) formations, the changing universes of meaning through which the dead have paraded.

But the dead were once alive. My own fieldwork over the last fifteen years has convinced me that public representations are hazardous guides to subjectivities, which I think of as, roughly speaking, cognitive and experiential flows. Another way to say this is: an account of meaning that fails to engage living people cannot reliably infer thoughts, feelings, or motivations. At best, an interpretive ethnography or history can sketch a representational environment –but people do radically different things with representations, and their meaning-making is partially hidden from view. To glimpse it, we need to employ, where possible, techniques other than textual interpretation. The technique I wish to highlight here, person-centered ethnography (LeVine 1982, Hollan 1997, Levy 1994, Linger in press b), exposes the slippage between representational environment and personal meaning-making and thus the indeterminacy inherent in any interpretive account.

This brief study sounds a note of caution about Missing-Persons approaches and suggests a partial (though sometimes unavailable) remedy for their limitations. First I outline some recent critiques of standard interpretive methods and describe the person-centered alternative. I next draw on my 1994-96 research in central Japan to examine how Oscar Ueda, a Japanese-Brazilian migrant to the city of Nagoya, refashions his national and ethnic identities in an unfamiliar social milieu.²

I end by discussing the implications of Oscar's self-making for anthropological and historical investigations of meaning.

Spiders or flies?

In a recent essay, the historian William H. Sewell, Jr. nicely summarizes his discipline's debt to Clifford Geertz:

History, like anthropology, specializes in the discovery and display of human variety, but in time rather than space. It reveals that even our own ancestors lived lives stunningly different from ours. Geertz's brand of anthropology, which attempts to plumb the cultural logic of exotic societies, was thus prealigned with an important form of historical sensibility (1999:38).

Sewell emphasizes that Geertz, anthropology's current "ambassador" to the intellectual world, provides an "epistemologically empowering" approach to practitioners of social history (1999:37-39). For if meaning is encoded in material symbols, then the worlds of the dead are accessible to historians, just

as contemporary Indonesian or Moroccan worlds, the subjects of Geertz's most famous exegeses, are accessible to anthropologists.

But are the worlds of contemporary Indonesians and Moroccans legible in their documents, artefacts, images, and performances? If not, interpretive anthropology's "epistemological guarantee" (Sewell 1999:39) is suspect. And indeed, despite Geertz's status as ambassador to the academy-at-large, the issue remains unsettled within anthropology itself. One of his own metaphors provides a route into the debate.

With a nod to Max Weber, Geertz once declared that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (1973b:5). The striking image became famous. But the work that it generated seemed to privilege suspension over spinning. As the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere later noted: "This seems an unexceptionable statement, yet in reading Geertz I see webs everywhere but never the spider at work" (1990:285).

For culture, argued Geertz, consists of systems of symbols. In its focus on such systems, his work has suggested to many that people are flies rather than spiders –that they are caught "in culture." The ethnographer's main task is therefore to trace, through the writing practice Geertz called "thick description," the sticky web of representations in which the flies are trapped. The unfortunate flies, like the invisible spiders, become incidental to the cultural account.

Anthropological criticism of the symbolic approach has grown to a drumbeat in the past decade or so, though it has antecedents stretching back almost to the beginning of the century (Sapir 1917). From various angles, the critics (e.g., Wallace 1961, Schwartz 1978, D'Andrade 1984, Cohen 1994, Linger 1994, Parish 1996, Sperber 1996, Cohen and Rapport 1996, Rapport 1997, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Sökefeld 1999) make a similar point –that public symbols, rituals, narratives, discourses, and performances are, in Roy D'Andrade's words, "too elliptical" (1984:105) to serve as reliable guides to meanings. In short, people's subjectivities cannot be treated as mere imprints of public representations on minds (Strauss 1992, Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Person-centered ethnography aims to catch the spiders at work –or, shedding the bug metaphors, to treat human beings as meaning-makers in their own right. Because meaning is always somebody's, the immediate object of person-centered ethnography is what Theodore Schwartz has called *idioverses* (1978) –ever-changing individual worlds of meaning. Person-centered approaches thereby recover the missing persons, moving human beings to the center of cultural accounts. The shift in perspective recasts presumed cultural uniformity as a jumble of oddly shaped chunks and splinters of subjectivities.

Person-centered research

Person-centered ethnography permits a fieldworker to learn how people go about making sense of the world into which they have been cast. Usually conducted through face-to-face interviews, such research reveals that people affirm, transform, negate, and manipulate the public representations that are the objects of conventional symbolic analyses. In exploring idioverses, I favor flexible interviews over predesigned question-and-answer sessions. Informal, open-ended conversations encourage people to explore their personal networks of thought and feeling.

Of course, conversation is no substitute for ESP. Drawing inferences about thoughts and feelings from what people say is a hazardous enterprise, for even "private," face-to-face talk is, in a restricted sense, public. Narrative conventions and interpersonal considerations certainly shape such talk (Bruner 1988, Hollan 1997). Yet the substance of a particular conversation is not reducible to rules, any more than the substance of an utterance is reducible to syntax. Moreover, because person-centered conversations take place in what is for most informants a novel interpersonal context, they offer rare opportunities for people to speak their minds.

Most everyday conversations are occasions for sociability, verbal sparring, exchanges of opinions, displays of distinction, joking, and so on. So are, at times, person-centered interviews, but the main objective—the co-exploration of an idioverse by anthropologist and informant—is extraordinary. I try to foster an atmosphere in which my conversational partner can be heard by me, hear herself, and respond to her own words. This is unusual conversational practice and, when successful, yields unusually rich material.

Because rapport is essential, I prefer interviewing those with whom I have already established a comfortable relationship. I seek to put the person at ease, to assure her that her point of view is valued. I encourage her to think things through and to speak with candor. I try to ask questions that are pertinent, responsive to issues she herself raises. My efforts to elicit frankness, to avoid imposing my own perspective, and to listen carefully sometimes fail, but often I gain some insight into another's concerns and ways of thinking. People also appreciate the chance to reflect out loud and to be taken seriously. I used to be surprised when informants thanked me for talking with them, but no more.

In underscoring the advantages of person-centered ethnography, I do not mean to discard Missing-Persons approaches, which are always valuable and sometimes irreplaceable. The representational environment, past or present, here or there, deserves close attention. And where persons are missing, one must employ Missing-Persons methods: without a time machine one can

hardly interview residents of ancient Athens. But such analytic expediency, however unavoidable, does not carry an epistemological guarantee.

My aim here is simply to put Missing-Persons approaches in their place. They invite us to situate ourselves, with our own particular biographical, emotional, and conceptual baggage, among unfamiliar representations, and to make sense of them. The technique resembles, at worst, a projective test. At best, practiced by a sensitive, informed observer adept at leaps of imagination, it can undoubtedly yield insightful and provocative speculations about the propositions with which others are bombarded.

But nothing can substitute for verbal give-and-take with those who inhabit an alien representational environment.³

Oral explorations of life histories, thoughts, and sentiments provide checks on interpretive conjecture and shed light on the personal meaning-making and subjective diversity missed by analyses of public symbols. A successful person-centered interview creates a space where the interviewee can verbalize and hammer out her understandings of the world and herself, bringing to life the generative dialectic between public representations and personal experience.

From Brazil to Japan

My most recent research deals with the national and ethnic sentiments of Brazilians living in Japan. Since the early 1980s, many scholars have argued that nations and ethnicities are "imagined communities," artificial entities propagated through invented traditions and mythohistorical narratives.⁴

If we take nations to be representational environments, the insight is valid and productive. But a virtual identity is not a lived identity: the link between national representations and national sentiments necessarily passes through human lives.

That link was the focus of the conversations I held between 1994 and 1996 with Japanese-Brazilians living in Aichi prefecture. Among my interviewees was Oscar Ueda, a Brazilian of Japanese descent who migrated to Japan in 1993 and currently resides in Nagoya, the capital of Aichi prefecture.

Before moving to Oscar's reflections, let me sketch the broad context of his journey from Brazil to Japan. Over the last decade Japanese-Brazilians, mainly the children (*nisseis*) and grandchildren (*sanseis*) of immigrants to Brazil, have flooded into Japan.⁵

This so-called "return migration" (Oka 1994) was triggered initially by a labor shortage in Japan that coincided with hard times in Brazil.

Through the boom years of the 1980s, small and middle-sized Japanese factories found it difficult to recruit unskilled labor. Younger Japanese

increasingly shunned menial, relatively low-paying jobs. Accordingly, some firms began to hire illegal workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other less affluent regions of Asia. This practice partially alleviated the labor shortage, but produced (in the view of many Japanese citizens and, especially, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party) a new, acute social problem: the entry of foreigners considered to be alien and unassimilable.⁶

In 1990 the Japanese government responded with a law permitting foreign nationals of Japanese descent (*nikkeis*), supposedly preadapted to Japanese language and customs, to live and work in Japan. The result was a huge influx of Latin Americans, most of whom came from Brazil. Brazil has the largest nikkei population in the world (about 1.5 million) and was at the time suffering a severe economic crisis. Although generally well-educated and prosperous by Brazilian standards, Japanese-Brazilians could earn many times their Brazilian incomes by taking jobs in Japanese factories. At first, most of the migrants were men, but increasingly women and families, including minor children, also settled in Japan.

In the mid-'90s, Brazilian migrants, scattered throughout Japan, numbered about 200,000. More resided in Aichi prefecture, my fieldsite, than anywhere else in the country. In Aichi, Brazilians work in a range of occupations, but mostly as unskilled laborers in the auto-parts plants that supply the great manufacturers. As time has passed, some have begun to engage in petty trade, and a few college-educated, bilingual Brazilians, such as Oscar Ueda, have been hired by local governments as counselors and teachers serving the growing Brazilian population.

During my stay, I visited those places where Brazilians had a marked presence: ethnic restaurants and bars, apartment complexes, public offices, factories, and schools. I read Portuguese-language newspapers published in Japan and collected posters and leaflets aimed at and produced by migrants. I surveyed Japanese and Brazilian national representations: laws, narratives, treatises, popular formulations. But my most productive technique was person-centered interviewing, for I was interested primarily in how the migrants reconceived themselves while living in Japan. My interview with Oscar Ueda therefore focused on questions of ethnicity and nationality, eliciting from him wide-ranging reflections on Brazil, Japan, and a host of moral and philosophical issues entangled with his sense of self.

Oscar Ueda

At the time of my conversation with Oscar Ueda, I had known him and his partner, Márcia Komatsu, for over a year. Unlike most *nikkeis* in Japan, Oscar and Márcia hold white-collar jobs. Graduates of the University of São

Paulo, Brazil's most prestigious university, both work for the Aichi prefectural government as bilingual advisers to foreign workers. I often visited them at their respective offices to tap their expertise and exchange observations, and I developed a cordial relationship with each of them.

Márcia, 30, a *sansei*, is an all-purpose counselor and mediator. Her job requires a thorough knowledge of Japanese employment practices and the country's medical, educational, and legal systems. Oscar, 31, a *nissei*, specializes in labor issues, dealing with disputes and workers' rights. "Because I love Márcia," Oscar explains, he followed her to Japan in 1993. They have lived in Nagoya since, though they have every intention of returning to Brazil in the near future.

Oscar and Márcia invited me in late October 1995 to meet them for a conversation at the Sabbath, a cavernous yellow-and-green "Brazilian restaurant" located in central Nagoya.⁷

In the Sabbath, samba booms from loudspeakers and soccer players run and leap on video screens. The house specialty is churrasco, enormous quantities of barbecued meats. For reasons of brevity, I focus here on Oscar's comments, which I have edited into the following narrative.⁸



If you ask, what's Brazil, Brazil is... I'm Brazil. Pelé, the soccer player, he's Brazil, the destitute person up there in the northeastern backlands is Brazilian. Japan is a very homogeneous society, and Brazil is a very heterogeneous society.

Brazil is something more emotional. Here [in Japan], you live in a more rational way, rational but more mechanical. Brazil doesn't have any logic. It's not one plus one equals two. One plus one might be two, it might be three, it might be one, it might be four. Why? Because everybody thinks differently. I think this way but Márcia thinks that way. But no one gets mad on account of that. You just know how to live with differences.

If you tell a joke to a Japanese, he doesn't get it. If it's a Brazilian, he breaks out laughing. The Japanese doesn't understand because he's so used to thinking logically, because one plus one is always two for him.



In Brazil, *nikkeis* are seen as Japanese. Often even they think they're Japanese, except that when they come to Japan, they discover they're not Japanese. So he has a moment in which he teeters, he doesn't know [who he is].

I think the first [problem here] is a communication barrier. Along with that, discrimination. He's not regarded as a Japanese descendant here, he's more branded as a guy who comes from the Third World, so he's inferior. It's very rare that a Japanese firm will give a Brazilian the chance to get a specialized job. Even if the Brazilian is a thousand times better than a Japanese, he's never going to get that chance. Why, because he came from the Third World. Japanese consider themselves inferior to Europeans and Americans. But a Brazilian will never be superior to a Japanese, in the eyes of Japanese society. And that's how a Brazilian discovers that the barrier doesn't depend just on his competence, he brings the barrier with him in his identity as a Third-Worlder. I like to do massage and acupuncture. But there's a barrier. I went around to a lot of clinics [seeking a job]... I said the word "Brazilian" and boom!



I speak Japanese fluently. I have an accent, but if I try, often they don't realize I'm a foreigner. But I make sure they see that I'm a foreigner, that I'm not the same as them, that they can't treat me, make demands on me that they'd make on a Japanese, because I haven't grown up in this society. So I make a point of always saying my name. OSCAR, right, it's not a Japanese name, I'm Oscar.⁹

The first job I had here was moving merchandise, big things in the supermarket, heavy manual labor. Even there I suffered discrimination. They push you into the dirtiest work, cleaning out the garbage. And they don't pay any attention to [Brazilians], either. So your [educational] level has little importance, because the first thing that's seen is your nationality.



Each person has their own philosophy, what's life for you. For me it's not just a question of material things. Of course, everyone wants to have a base of material comfort. But if you think the most you can achieve is to be able to buy a Mercedes Benz, a better apartment, it'll always be the same life. And for me there's no challenge in this, this isn't living. Living has to have something more, some other interior motivation, some growth.

I feel that here in Japan I became much more materialist than I was in Brazil, I've gotten much more into a crisis of loneliness, of... sadness with myself. Sometimes at night I... I do massage too, Saturday nights I come home alone, after massaging a bunch of Japanese people. And the sadness is

really heavy, because something is missing... I don't have a life, I'm just repeating things... What's missing is to be at peace with what's inside you.

The material side [of life] is important, but what's missing is the spiritual side. One day I was watching a Japanese television program about people who receive spirits, and others who remove the spirits. The Japanese TV manipulated the program to label those who worked with the spirits charlatans. Here things are very well thought out, but only in the logical aspect. This excess of logic takes away a little of what it is to be human, human beings aren't just a matter of logic. In some ways they're inexplicable.

[This is] a repressive society. It's different in Brazil. [There] human relations are not repressive. You can think your own way and you can do things your own way. If you go out into the street in a T shirt nobody thinks about it. Here in Japan, if I go to work in a T shirt where everyone else works in a suit, they're just going to stand there looking at me.

It's a very directed society. Japan still hasn't learned to live with differences. And now that it's starting to live with differences, that's provoking a certain internal crisis. They're afraid of anything different. They've never dealt with differences.



I'm a *gaijin* ["foreigner" in Japanese, often a derogatory term], and I make no effort to hide it. [The word *gaijin*] doesn't bother me, except there's a pejorative sense. *Gaijin* in the sense of manual worker, Third-Worlder. There are *gaijin* and *gaijin-san* [respectful suffix], who are white Europeans. One is a model to be followed, the other is a model never to be followed.

Being among *nikkeis*, speaking Portuguese, if you sit down next to a Japanese, the Japanese moves away. I don't know if it's fear of *nikkeis*, but it's like you were an alien [using the English word], an ET, an extra-terrestrial.

[Márcia and I could] naturalize ourselves as Japanese, but... [Márcia (drily): That's not what we want (laughs).] Right. Let's keep on being Third-Worlders from Brazil.



I don't want to just look at Japan with prejudiced eyes, because there are some very good things I've learned here, for example, shiatsu, acupuncture, I've improved my Japanese, I've become a more methodical worker. It's a good thing, sometimes, that aspect of discipline. We can't just mention the negative things, because there's a positive side. Security, it's a safe country.

Purchasing power, quality, if you want to buy French champagne, you can buy it as easily as buying chewing gum, anywhere.

But life isn't just that. For example, we've got enough to buy a car, but we don't. We go around by bicycle, and by public transport. We chose to do so.

We went [on vacation] to the Maldives, to do some diving. If you tell a Japanese that, he thinks it's absurd, he's got ten times as much money as we do, but he'll never go there.

Sometimes I think Japanese people are very sad. They're mired in unhappiness, they preach unhappiness, that's life. The society has such a beautiful history, a beautiful culture, and today, the slogan of society is, Let's preach unhappiness. You go on a trip, and return with your face in smiles, people should feel happy to be around that good energy, but no way, they put you down because you missed all those long days of [work].

Personalized nationalities

Oscar and Márcia's choice of the Sabbath Restaurant for our meeting was hardly capricious. Suspended between their Brazilian upbringing and their Japanese blood, both have clearly come to identify more strongly with the former. Oscar has traveled a winding road, from "Japanese" in Brazil, through a moment of uncertainty, to "Brazilian" in Japan.¹⁰

He will someday return to Brazil, where his identity will probably take yet another turn. Hence the first point I would make is that identities are mutable: they can, perhaps typically do, change as people respond to changing circumstances and opportunities. Had Oscar never left Brazil, he would not have followed the identity path (Linger, in press a) that he describes here.

Moreover, Oscar personalizes the meanings of the identity tags "Japanese" and "Brazilian," which for him have become antithetical. Those personal meanings are linked, but not reducible, to well-known public representations of Japanese blood relatedness and Brazilian ethnic mixing. For Oscar, the opposition between Japan and Brazil has come to hinge most importantly on a set of loosely related, value-laden contrasts –logic vs. irrationality, materialism vs. spirituality, reason vs. sentiment, uniformity vs. diversity, sadness vs. happiness. These oppositions seem motivated by his personal experiences of discrimination in Japan and his appreciation of nonrational phenomena and human unpredictability.

Oscar describes with some bitterness the discrimination he encountered in the supermarket, in job searches, and in daily life. His appearance and linguistic skills permit him to pass as a Japanese, but only if he hides his Brazilian origins, which stigmatize him as a Third-World foreigner. To gain

acceptance, he must keep a secret. Oscar deems this price too high. He deplors what he sees as Japanese First-World arrogance, stereotyping, and insistence on uniformity. He contrasts this purported Japanese prejudice with the tolerance he attributes to Brazil—"I'm Brazil... Pelé, the soccer player, he's Brazil, the destitute person up there in the northeastern backlands is Brazilian."¹¹

In the end, Oscar chooses to flaunt his secret—he is a *gaijin*, he is OSCAR.

Oscar aligns his personal values and proclivities with Brazil in yet other respects. He is drawn to material simplicity, traditional forms of healing, and ecstatic religious practices. He identifies these interests as consonant with what he sees as Brazil's spiritualism, warmth, and ethnic diversity; conversely, they are antagonistic to Japan's consumerism, coldness, and ethnic homogeneity.¹²

And for Oscar, one plus one do not always make two. The indeterminacy, which he sees as essentially Brazilian, underwrites laughter, freedom, enjoyment, differences, worthwhile philosophical pursuits. It validates his own lifestyle and moral choices.

Unquestionably, Oscar makes use of ideological public representations in fashioning his personalized identity.¹³ Japanese ethnic narratives emphasize blood relatedness: nowhere does Oscar deny his Japanese roots. Brazilian narratives emphasize diversity, spontaneity, and warmth, conspicuous themes in his commentary.¹⁴

Yet Oscar's identity path cannot be reduced to, or inferred from such narratives, for the sense he makes of them, and of himself, depends fundamentally on the twists and turns of his own lifecourse and the personal perspectives he has brought to them.

Other Japanese-Brazilians in Japan follow other identity paths. For them, Japaneseness and Brazilianness come to have meanings and evaluations that sometimes approximate, and sometimes diverge from, those described by Oscar. Here I cannot provide extensive evidence for this assertion, but consider the following excerpts from interviews with workers, students, and cultural brokers:

I feel Japanese. I don't have Brazilian characteristics. Brazilians are just black coffee. I don't like the Brazilian system. I'm more Oriental. Coming to Japan, a certain piece of clothing settled over me. A jacket that I was lacking, it completed me. (Moacir, *sansei*, a factory worker who hopes to gain Japanese citizenship)

There are times when it's preferable to be a Japanese descendant, there are times when you don't want to be a

Japanese descendant anymore. When you feel good, it doesn't matter. (César, *nissei*, a factory worker)

Now that I'm starting to go around with *nihonjin* [Japanese people], I'm leaving for Brazil, that's going to be a real drag for me... I don't really feel very good [about the Brazilian part of me]. I'd rather be more *nihonjin*... I'm going to miss this place a lot. If it was up to me, I'd never leave Japan. (Catarina, *sansei*, middle-school student, shortly before her departure from Japan)

I could live in Japan for good, but I'd rather live in Brazil, I think Brazil has... Ah, I'm BRAZILIAN, right. To be Brazilian is to be roguish, to be clever (laughs). [The Japanese] don't have it, that Brazilian thing, they don't have it (laughs). (Elisa, *sansei*, middle-school student)

I might be a *nikkei* Brazilian. I'll admit I'm that, but I'm not JAPANESE. (Rosa, *nissei* with dual citizenship, bilingual teacher)

Even I don't know how I feel (laughs). I think I'm really more Brazilian, there's nothing to be done about it, I spent most of my life in Brazil. I really admire the respect [Japanese people] have for other people. [But] for those of us accustomed to the freedom of Brazil, I think it's better there. (Eriko, *issei*—native-born Japanese— who grew up in Brazil, translator)

My blood is Japanese but my life experience, everything I know, everything I like, everything... It's Brazil. But because I also have my Japanese side, the good things about Japan I incorporated into myself. So if I look at the way I live, I have both. There's no way to separate them. (Naomi, *nissei* with dual citizenship, bilingual teacher)

Social science: one plus one might be three

Oscar, Márcia, and the other *nikkeis* I interviewed know about, understand, and more or less accept established public narratives about Japanese and Brazilian identity. By blood they are Japanese; by nationality, they are Brazilian; and each of them must negotiate the identity dilemma posed by ethnic blood relatedness vs. membership in a racially mixed, pluralist nation.

But each does so in a different way, and the specific outcome –a sense of nationality, and the meanings associated with it– emerges as each grapples with his or her particular circumstances. The subjectivities of those I knew certainly cannot be inferred from public representations.

An anthropologist or historian working in the present can explore the slippage between representations and subjectivities through person-centered ethnography, which reinserts missing persons into accounts of meaning. But those who work in the past, without the benefit of living interlocutors, have a more daunting task. It is entirely reasonable to infer a cultural formation (a representational environment) from symbolic debris –but we should remain aware that that environment is no one's subjectivity. Historical actors built perceptions and motivations with and against that environment; they were not simply its products.

The enterprise known as psychohistory, which seeks to bring psychological perspectives to historical studies, rests on this very proposition (Lifton 1974). Among the most famous works in the genre are the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's biographies of Luther (1962 [1958]) and Gandhi (1969). Erikson's works exemplify what Robert Jay Lifton calls "the great man in history" model of psychohistory (1974:27), focusing on "the great man's monumental struggles at the border of religion and politics, with his simultaneous effort to remake himself and his world" (p. 29). But as Lifton goes on to say,

The great man tends to be inaccessible, at least to direct interview, or if accessible not yet great... This does not mean that the psychohistorian cannot say useful things on the basis of careful observations from a distance. But when he is centuries removed from the individual he wishes to study in depth, problems of historical reconstruction are inevitable (p. 29).

How much more difficult it is to reconstruct the subjectivities of those lesser humans who, though they likewise struggled to make tolerable lives within the world into which they were born, left no rich records for later scholars to peruse. The implications of my argument are, I am afraid, inconvenient for those seeking a precise science of subjectivity. Meaning-making is a far more complicated business than most social scientists would like to think. Its analysis requires not only attention to representations, but attention to persons, which enmeshes us in all sorts of difficulties. Sometimes the people are dead; sometimes they are inaccessible; usually they leave only fragmentary records of their lives; when available they are contentious, ambivalent, and hard to comprehend. Their points of view diverge, and change. Why does Oscar Ueda make himself as he does? Our understandings of mind,

consciousness, and reflexivity remain too limited to provide a definitive answer.

But unless one sees explanation as the exclusive goal of social science, this conclusion should not be discouraging. It is as important to demarcate zones of uncertainty as to fashion bold explanatory conjectures. There is much we do not and perhaps cannot know, and I suspect we will never resolve whether human affairs are determinate or not. Given this circumstance, as Oscar suggests, a dose of unpredictability may be a good thing for theories of human beings.

NOTES

1. What counts as a public representation is not entirely clear: different scholars have different approaches, and the list I present here is suggestive rather than exhaustive. In this study I seek to make a basic distinction between tangible communicative forms (i.e., public representations) and mental phenomena (ideas, feelings, experiences, and so on).
2. I conducted ethnographic research in Japan during the summer of 1994 and from July 1995 to July 1996. The names of all interviewees mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.
3. As Douglas Hollan notes (1997:26), "The great advantage that a person-centered ethnographer has over an archaeologist or a primatologist [or, I would add, a historian - DTL] is that we can ask our subjects about their experience, not simply infer it from their artifacts or behavior." An indication of this advantage is that, in my experience, person-centered interviewing always yields surprises, revealing perspectives I could not imagine in advance.
4. See, especially, Anderson (1991 [1983]) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), works that inspired a host of anthropological and historical studies.
5. I use the Brazilianized spellings and inflections of Japanese words assimilated into Portuguese.
6. See Oka (1994), Yamanaka (1996), and Kawamura (1999) for general discussions of Japan's response to a shortage of unskilled labor during this period.
7. See Linger (1997) for an ethnographic sketch of one such Nagoya restaurant.
8. The passages are edited from the transcript of the taped interview, which lasted about one hour. Oscar, more talkative than Márcia on this occasion, dominated the conversation.
9. Like most *nisseis*, Oscar also has a Japanese given name –but he does not use it.
10. He describes the trajectory in the third person, but in light of this and other conversations I had with him, I believe he is also talking about himself. Many, though not all, *nikkeis* I spoke with reported a similar trajectory. See also Tsuda (1999).
11. But note that he also observes that Japanese-Brazilians "are seen as Japanese" and "even they think they're Japanese" in Brazil –suggesting that Brazilian tolerance has its limits.
12. Another ambiguity in his account: some of the traditional forms of healing Oscar regards as spiritual or nonrational (shiatsu, acupuncture) he actually learned in Japan.
13. See Linger (in press b) for an extensive discussion of the relation between national narratives and self-experience.
14. On Japanese blood relatedness, see, for example, Yamanaka's (1996) discussion of Japanese law. See Befu (1993) and Yoshino (1992) on *Nihonjinron*, the controversial nationalist literature that highlights supposed Japanese uniqueness. Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves* (1956 [1933]), a celebration of miscegenation, has the status of a Brazilian national myth. For more on Japanese and Brazilian national narratives, see Linger (in press b).

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict
 1991 (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Befu, Harumi
 1993 "Nationalism and Nihonjinron." In *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*. Harumi Befu, ed. pp. 107-135. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Press.
- Bruner, Edward
 1988 "The opening up of anthropology." In *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*. Edward M. Bruner, ed. pp 1-16. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Cohen, Anthony P.
 1994 *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, Anthony P. and Nigel Rapport, eds.
 1995 *Questions of Consciousness*. London: Routledge.
- D'Andrade, Roy
 1984 "Cultural meaning systems." In *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine, eds. pp. 88-119. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, Erik H.
 1962 (1958) *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton.
 1969 *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton.
- Foucault, Michel
 1976 (1969) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. N.Y.: Harper Colophon Books.
- Freyre, Gilberto
 1956 (1933) *The Masters and the Slaves*. Samuel Putnam, trans. N.Y.: Knopf.
- Geertz, Clifford
 1973a *The Interpretation of Cultures*. N.Y.: Basic Books.
 1973b "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. pp. 3-30. N.Y.: Basic Books.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds.
 1983 *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hollan, Douglas
 1997 "The relevance of person-centered ethnography to cross-cultural psychiatry." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 34(2):219-234.
- Kawamura, Lili
 1999 *Para onde vão os brasileiros? Imigrantes brasileiros no Japão*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.
- LeVine, Robert A.
 1982 *Culture, Behavior, and Personality: An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Psychosocial Adaptation*. 2nd. edition. N.Y.: Aldine.
- Lifton, Robert J.
 1974 "On psychohistory." In *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. Robert Jay Lifton (with Eric Olson), eds. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster.
- Linger, Daniel T.
 1994 "Has culture theory lost its minds?" *Ethos* 22(3):284-315.
 1997 "Brazil Displaced: Restaurante 51 in Nagoya, Japan." *Horizontes Antropológicos* (Porto Alegre, Brazil) 5:181-203.
 (in press a) "The identity path of Eduardo Mori." In *History in Person: Enduring Struggles and the Practice of Identity*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

- (in press b) *No One Home: Brazilian Selves Remade in Japan*. Manuscript.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath
1990 *The Work of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oka, Takashi
1994 *Prying Open the Door: Foreign Workers in Japan*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Parish, Steven M.
1996 *Hierarchy and Its Discontents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rapport, Nigel
1997 *Transcendent Individual: Towards a Literary and Liberal Anthropology*. London: Routledge.
- Sapir, Edward
1917 "Do we need a 'superorganic'?" *American Anthropologist* 19:441-447.
- Schwartz, Theodore
1978 "Where is the culture? Personality as the distributive locus of culture." In *The Making of Psychological Anthropology*. George D. Spindler, ed. pp. 419-441. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sökefeld, Martin
1999 "Debating self, identity, and culture in anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 40(4):417-447.
- Sperber, Dan
1996 *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Strauss, Claudia
1992 *Models and motives*. In *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Roy D'Andrade and Claudia Strauss, eds. pp. 1-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, Claudia and Naomi Quinn
1997 *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsuda, Takeyuki
1999 "Transnational migration and the nationalization of ethnic identity among Japanese Brazilian return migrants." *Ethos* 27(2):145-179.
- Wallace, Anthony F. C.
1961 *Culture and Personality*. N.Y.: Random House.
- Yamanaka, Keiko
1996 "Return migration of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan: The Nikkeijin as ethnic minority and political construct." *Diaspora* 5(1):65-97.
- Yoshino, Kōsaku
1992 *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge.