FRACTURE AND RESISTANCE: LOOKING THROUGH THE ARCHIVE AT THE ANTI-ASIATIC RIOT OF 1907

by

ALDONA DZIEDZIEJKO

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ABSTRACT

At the old City Hall in Vancouver on September 7th, 1907 the Asiatic Exclusion League led a demonstration against the increasing influx of Japanese immigrants. In the aftermath of this race riot, along with witness interviews and assessments by civic officials and architects, photographs of damaged Japanese businesses played a significant role in the gathering and presentation of the evidence used in the preparation of claims for damages. An anonymous photographer captured every business façade with an attention to the damages and, in most cases, posed the claimants in the photographs.

Historians have offered linear accounts of the riot and Japanese presence in Vancouver, bringing to the fore the issues of diplomacy, ethnicity and heritage while ignoring the visual and spatial dimensions of this urban conflict. My project focuses on the spatial and visual implications for understanding the riot photographs. I will attempt to bring the riot photographs out of the silence of the archive by locating the mechanisms of interpretation that animate and destabilize the series, and, in so doing, to offer a “stereoscopic reading” of them. I define “stereoscopic reading” as a three-dimensional interpretation with a visual focus aimed at setting the photographs in motion against their static and secondary status as mere evidence. I will complicate the one-dimensional documentary status of the series with the aid of theorists who find their vocabulary in ethics, psychoanalysis and trauma remembrance.

Significantly, these photographs have the capacity to engage the nature of the social performance of space and its users. The visual strategies employed by the photographer suggest to the viewer that the proprietors in the photos are focal, and the damaged buildings serve as a backdrop to their performance of ownership and community, counter to the original forensic
purpose of the series. These photographs comprise a key element in the discussion of an encounter of agents during, and after, a violent event as well as the incorporation of this photographic representation into histories and archives over time in connection with social and ethical dimension of remembrance and responsibility.
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DEDICATION

There are a number of people without whom this thesis may not have been written. Most importantly, my parents: Anna Dziedziejko and Lech Dziedziejko. Additionally, the unending love and support of my friends and loved ones allowed me to persevere through the ebb and flow of my graduate program and daily life.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Japanese-Canadian Archives at the University of British Columbia house a series of photographs taken in the aftermath of the 1907 anti-Asiatic Riot in Vancouver. These photographs constituted evidence in the federal investigation into the losses of Japanese shop owners whose businesses sustained damages during the violent disturbance. The photographer’s assignment was to create photographs that would aid in recording and assessing the damages leading to the losses. In many of the photos, Japanese owners and their families pose in front of their damaged shops. However, in most cases the camera’s aperture maps their bodies onto their properties with portraiture-like decorum that puts into doubt the objectivity of this photographic record.

To date, the Vancouver riot photographs have not received scholarly attention even though they significantly generate meaning that resists their forensic function. These almost optimistically personalized images at first glance seem to contradict the labour-related disruption and violence that precipitated the photographic assignment.

Cultural critics Walter Benjamin, Ulrich Baer and Allan Sekula have argued that photographs in archives have the potential to generate multiple representations that disrupt the continuity of history and call into question their own objectivity as well as the construction of remembrance. In “The Body in the Archive” Allan Sekula warns against the politically dormant “mute testimony” of police photos and photojournalism and proposes a more radical

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consideration of their ambiguous forms as “polyphonic testimony”\(^2\) which uncovers photographs as never safe, always contingent and inevitably embedded in archival imperatives. Thus the circumstances under which the 1907 riot photographs were produced, the sitters that they depict, and the ways in which they were archived may constitute ambivalent and contradictory articulations of the Japanese civic subject in relation to various forms of violence.

In the aftermath of the 1907 riot photographs of damaged Japanese businesses played a role in the gathering and presentation of the evidence to investigate the claims and to recommend financial settlement for the losses. The Vancouver’s resident consul to Japan, Kishiro Morikawa, along with the visiting Foreign Office representative Kikiyiro Ishii, facilitated the investigative process.\(^3\) Two days after the riot Morikawa, along with Ishii, retained an appraiser and prepared to undertake an initial inspection of the damages.\(^4\) Morikawa had likely commissioned the photos, or encouraged their creation, with the intention of making them available to the architect and city solicitor in order to expedite the damage claims preparations and strengthen the case.\(^5\)

The City of Vancouver officials had refused participation in preparing the claims, and thus declined liability for the damages. The City held the Dominion (Federal) Government responsible, reasoning that since the Government was in charge of immigration policy the matter

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\(^5\) Mackenzie King, in his Royal Report, thanks Morikawa for his “immediate steps to ascertain the extent of the damage done to the several properties of the Japanese residents in the city. The services of a competent architect were retained to ascertain the actual damage and estimate the consequent loss. The consulate also retained a solicitor to assist in the preparation and declaring of the several claims, and the information was duly placed before the Commission.” Mackenzie King, “The Report of W.L. Mackenzie King,” Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1908 (Sessional Paper No.74g.): 12.
belonged between Canada and Japan. Wilfrid Laurier, Liberal prime minister at the time nominated the deputy minister of labour William Lyon Mackenzie King to conduct this inquiry, to establish hearings, and to produce a statement in the form of a textual report. The report indicates each claimant’s proper name, the address of each damaged business, and the sum awarded for the losses. A week after the disturbance King and the Japanese Foreign Office in Tokyo with the aid of Ottawa’s Consul General traveled to the city in order to conduct this Royal Commission.

Following the riot in 1907, the Victoria Daily News and the Vancouver Daily Province used a set of photos, different from the riot series, which depicted the boarded up and barricaded storefronts in the Chinese quarter of Vancouver around Hastings and Columbia avenues. Significantly, in October of 1907 the key illustrated American magazine Harper’s Weekly, in a special feature on racial violence in Canada, reproduced two riot photographs that included sitters. Harper’s was widely known for its poignant and elaborate illustrations supplementing fiction and non-fiction prose published in its pages; and its increasing use of photography reflected a growing interest in images that provided authoritative documentation. This overall

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7 Mackenzie King, “The Report of W.L. Mackenzie King,” Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1908 (Sessional Paper No.74g.). King became the Prime Minister of Canada after the Liberal victory in 1921. The 1907 riot inquiry was a milestone in King’s diplomatic career: Theodore Roosevelt sought King’s advice on the Anglo-American entente on Japanese immigration. In this key period of 1907-1909 King articulated a Liberal vision of “white” Canada that was based on vested economical interests and determined and systematic diplomatic tactics of exclusion. As John Price writes, King’s vision “and the policies adopted in this era were foundational in the consolidation of the Canadian state and in the articulation of an autonomous Canadian foreign policy within the British Empire […] and at the same time sketched out a new role for Canada as a bridge towards an international Anglo-American alliance that was also race-based. John Price, “‘Orienting the Empire’: MacKenzie King and the Aftermath of the 1907 Race Riots,” BC Studies no. 156/157 (Winter/Spring 2007/08): 53.
8 Price, “‘Orienting the Empire,’” 60.
trend among North American magazines followed a decreased appeal of imaginative evocation and a move towards historical accuracy embodied by photographic realism.\textsuperscript{10}

The original riot images rest in the Public Records Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo and were taken there by Ishii in 1907.\textsuperscript{11} In 1977 the Tokyo Ministry of Public Affairs donated the copies to the compilers of the Japanese-Canadian Collection at University of British Columbia in what could be seen as an act of remembrance and retrospective confirmation of civic responsibility.\textsuperscript{12} In recent years, the University’s Special Collections Division has published this extensive photograph collection online, thus making the images widely available. Since these photographs became available they have been disseminated in various textual sources. In September 2007, they were used as corroboration of local racial unrest in several commemorative projects, which included news stories and a video project, aimed at historical redress.

Each image in the available sequence depicts a face of a building, the skins of the upper stories whitewashed from a strong natural light source, and the shops below as dark recesses punctured by shattered glass. It is meaningful that the photos are not depictions of outright violence during the rebellion; nor are they all the matter-of-fact close-ups of damaged windows typical of forensic photography’s concern with accuracy. These images call for a particular type of witnessing which draws attention to their complexity and ambiguity as representations of

\textsuperscript{10} The following quote appears in an effort to attract advertising: “Its illustrations present history with an unquestioned accuracy of photographs.” Anonymous, \textit{Harper’s Weekly Advertiser} (October 5, 1907): page number unknown.

\textsuperscript{11} Gonnami Tsuneharu, “Re: Japanese Canadian photograph collection, riots of 1907.” Message to Aldona Dziedziejko. Date: 22 February 2010. E-mail. “These are all photo copies, not the original photos, which have been preserved by the Public Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo.” Tsuneharu is the former University of British Columbia Asian Library librarian instrumental to the establishment of the Japanese-Canadian Collection.

\textsuperscript{12} Gonnami Tsuneharu, “Re: Japanese Canadian photograph collection, riots of 1907.” Message to Aldona Dziedziejko. Date: 22 February 2010. E-mail. “These old pictures were given to me as a personal gift by Mr. Kunihiro Haraguchi, Tokyo, who is an official of the Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”
violence. Ulrich Baer, who has dealt extensively with photographs of trauma and violence, calls for viewer ethics that are helpful in this regard:

Such experiences and such images, cannot simply be seen or understood; they require a different response: the must be witnessed … [these] photographs can make us viewers responsible for the first time for a past moment that has been blasted out of time.\(^{13}\)

Baer argues that it is photos that conspicuously avoid any obvious and totalizing depictions of violence that make the most effective case for trauma photography because they encourage a reading that is effective in considering the unknown -- in other words, constituting an ethical reading because it is open-ended. This language, which is not without its challenges, echoes throughout my study in relation to these photographs, bringing into dialogue theorists who are concerned with ethical viewing.

Walter Benjamin introduced many of the concepts that Baer takes up. In his writings about historical time, memory, and photography, Benjamin proposed that in addition to a mundane and democratic concreteness, photography possesses an elusive, haunting, and spectral power that prevents photographic images from being easily absorbed into historical narratives.\(^{14}\)

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, in turn, examined in depth such an endurance of the unknown or irrational element that registers the affective capacities in the subject who looks at images (or, more precisely one who looks at another being). Levinas illuminates the mechanism of images’ phenomenological demand on the viewer and questions how this phenomenon bears on ethics. His writings on the ambiguity, exteriority, infinity and the totalizing and rational categories that deny the Other (the one looked at) his/her difference and possibility for action are

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\(^{14}\) The following are Benjamin’s notable essays on the topic of history and photography. In these works Benjamin reorients history “as photography” meaning that both are fragmentary and thus also linked to memory and the archive: Walter Benjamin “A Short History of Photography” in *One Way Street*, (London: New Left Books: 1979 [1931b]); “Unpacking my Library” and “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape: 1970 [1936b]).
here explored through Judith Butler, who brings Levinas’ ideas on relational ethics into her extended meditation on the phenomenology of violence in the essay “Precarious Life.”

This thesis also considers the notion of the archive as an unstable repository of the past, which is allegorically linked to the functioning of both memory and photography by Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Several recent essays, such as Tim Schlak’s “Framing Photographs, Denying Archives: the Difficulty of Focusing on Archival Photographs,” and Joan Schwartz’s “Records of Simple Truth and Precision: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” both highlight the archive’s metaphoric kinship with memory and photography. These, among several other studies, recall Sigmund Freud’s “Screen Memories,” a classic thesis on memory’s fragmentary nature, by asking: what remains of the past and how are trapped image fragments set in motion? In the riot photographs, the damaged buildings and their owners who are calmly posed in the foreground not only question the representation of ownership, but also photography’s relationship with the past and the ways in which the medium can both offer and deny access to a violent past. Screen memories, a form of active amnesia, are a compromise between repressed elements and a defense against them. My reading of select riot photographs intends to bring together these ideas and make conjectures for a phenomenological and ethical reading of photographs and archival work.

The riot photographs, if considered solely in terms of surface appearance -- that is, as a visual record merely reinforcing King’s textual record -- seem to present a particular and totalizing vision of the sitters’ victimhood. A more careful interpretation would posit the families

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as ambivalent participators in the values of North American ownership. The human figures -- the owners, or their kin, present in the images -- demand a different kind of attention despite the overbearing tall building facades against which they pose, and challenge the static notions of ownership and casualty. Indeed, the images, considered as remembrance seem to reinforce both the virtues of ownership (thus participation in dominant society) and the anxieties and consequences of visibility under the threat of unrest.

The photographer’s use of a deep focus setting on the camera, equally rendering the background, middle ground and foreground, encourages the reciprocal interplay of human figures and the building façades, blurring the line between the sitters and their settings. Contrary to its name, the technique of deep focus actually flattens all objects present in the frame resulting in the viewer being encouraged to, at once, take it all in. Sustained attention to the contents these images, however, reveals that despite this flattening, the human presence in the images powerfully brings into relief the relationship of these immigrants to the spaces they visibly occupy and own as well as how the photographic act can enunciate civic participation. Taking into account the travel of these photographs through diplomatic channels can reveal how civic participation functioned through these images in the media in 1907 and how the photographs generate remembrance now.

According to the aforementioned investigations into the archive, particularly those of Derrida and Schwartz, the fantasies that are associated with the idea of the archive are those of access and control. Explained further, these fantasies provide the capability to connect directly with the past (following the assumption that one can access reality through critical appraisal of sources), and the ability to collect all relevant documents from the past at a single location. *Archive Fever* also informs key studies such as Carolyn Steedman’s *Dust: The Archive and
Cultural History, and Paul Werner and Marta Voss’ “Toward a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction,” who consider the poetics of the archive in phenomenological and ethical terms in order to avoid seeing archival materials as documents of undisputed truth. All these studies make clear that the archive has been traditionally considered a medium for representing an unquestioned idea of the past and can thus constitute a particular form of a totalizing framing device. Looking through the archive at Vancouver’s Anti-Asiatic Riot with the aid of these photographs provides a method of questioning that reveals a mediated representation of this violent event.

This study is divided into three chapters, each one dealing with a particular set of conceptual framing devices and how they bear on the reading of select photographs. The first chapter, in its introduction of the event and its history, considers space and spatial relationships vis-à-vis their representation in the photographs. It identifies the anti-Asiatic riot’s locale and its users’ close and profitable association with it in a way that reformulates the notion of place (or community). “Place,” in these photographs, appears at first glance as a static concept or an enclosure with a clear inside and outside, rather than a nexus for unstable processes with multiple identities and uneven as well as constantly shifting power relations in Vancouver at the turn of the century. Despite this flattening, the photographs have the ability to point to the importance and dynamism of the workers’ bodies in the dispute, through their claims to ownership threatening to overwhelm Vancouver’s sites of labour and commerce.

The second chapter attempts to theorize the medium of photography by addressing the contemporary viewer of the riot images and the ethics of the vision (gaze) while arguing that photographic representation is inherently unstable as it is closely linked to trauma remembrance.

This chapter also asks questions about how certain visual elements perform in the photos, at once resisting and confirming the typologies (owner, race) lent authority by this forensic assignment in defense of social relations based on private property. So questioned, the photos become sites of the crises of the modern Japanese imperial subject in Canada, a matter of contemporary diplomatic debates.

The third and final chapter continues the discussion of ethical viewing and dissects in depth the act of archival work and appropriation of images. It considers examples of contemporary uses of some of the images by media organizations, and local artist Karin Lee’s multimedia piece “Shattered.” My analysis takes into account the articulations of vulnerability and the consequent transfers of agency (oscillating between the categories of “honorific” and “repressive”) that these projects suggest. I weigh the effectiveness of each representation in terms of access and denial to the past, taking into account sentient modes of viewing and the aporia of the archive in psychoanalytic terms. My analysis here brings into relief the parallels between the violent act of destruction and the violent gap between the paradoxical impulses to both save and destroy, associated with archival and historical work. In close agreement with Sekula, Bear, Butler and others, I conclude by laying out the implications for the phenomenological and ethical study of the riot series as urban images with an uneasy relationship to violence. Reading the riot series as trauma photography aims to dislocate the monolithic understanding of photographic realism.
The literary critic and theorist Eduardo Cadava recently identified the difficulty of writing about photography that involves extracting history from photographic images: “If the photograph evokes a moment of crisis and destruction, then, part of what is placed in crisis is the finitude of the context within which we might read it [...].”

Cadava aims to show that the singular event that any given photographic image appears to capture is unrecoverable in its entirety, that it cannot be pinned down, it is always multidimensional and open-ended. The context is in crisis because it is infinite and resistant to the constructions by historians: the photographic image is always in tension with reality and should not be read as a summative document. The attempts of the historian to grasp and build up the history within a photographic image is frustrated by the meaning becoming slippery. That is what Cadava means by titling his essay “Image in Ruins.” Cadava (among others) disputes here the mechanical indifference of the optical image and its ability to document events without hierarchy. Cadava categorizes the fluctuating relations present in a photographic act following Walter Benjamin’s thesis on historical thinking: “It is because history breaks down into images there can be no photographic image, no force of arrestment, which does not tell us of the relation between images and history, photography and memory, and space and violence.

If the photograph, or, as I would like to conceptualize the riot series, each three-dimensional photographic act offers a space for the unique situation of co-presence. Writing about space, the Marxist geographer Doreen Massey offers a compatible formulation for its

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understanding: “Instead […] of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.” Her formulation furnishes a way to read and investigate the meaning of the riot series. The riot photographs, both as a series and as individual images, offer a unique glimpse of highly dynamic effects of the encounter between the camera, the photographer, the photographed subject and the spectator. Rather than analyzing the riot photographs for visual efficacy as forensic parallels to King’s report (although we cannot easily discount their initial purpose to lend the claimants credulity and authority); their analysis as photographic acts across time and space can offer valuable insight against the static notion of victimhood and redress.

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Histories of Japanese presence in Canada tend to focus on the internment of Japanese citizens in the early 1940s in the context of the Second World War. However, the unrest in 1907 demonstrates that the striving for the separation and removal of the Japanese reached as far back as the turn of the century when immigration reached its apogee and most immigrants began to establish a presence. The important existing survey histories of Japanese immigration and presence in Canada, Ken Adachi’s *Enemy that Never Was* and Patricia Roy’s *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* and *Contradictory Impulses: Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century* offer standard socio-

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historical accounts of the riot bringing to the fore the issues of diplomacy, ethnicity and heritage by identifying the key events and individuals in provincial politics. These studies only begin to sketch out the diplomatic ambivalence with which Canadians and Japanese regarded each other that becomes apparent from the riot photographs and the circumstances of their creation. The visual and spatial dimensions of the Vancouver race riot are missing from these histories offered by Adachi and Roy. Roy mentions briefly the role of images during a large influx of Japanese immigrants in the Summer of 1907 on board of the ship Kumeric: “Vancouver newspapers had usually confined ships arriving with Japanese immigrants to the shipping pages; the arrival of the Kumeric merited headlines and, unusual for the time, photographs.” These images show flowing legions of poorly clothed Japanese males gathered at the main deck, exiting the ship and drifting into uncontrollable, and anonymous, masses. By rendering these immigrants as a river of nameless and indifferent labour force the photographs offered striking visual cues to all classes of Vancouver readers at the time. Undoubtedly, these images were instrumental in stirring up strong waves of anti-Asian, “white Canada,” sentiment and requests in the media for the creation of a stringent immigration policy. Roy thus provides a significant and vital detail: photographic images in the local media had started, this early, to become instrumental in negotiating Japanese visibility. Consequently, the existence of the riot photographs in the archive and their

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23 Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 188. On June 26, 1907, the Kumeric arrived with 1,177 Japanese labourers on board.

biographies point to valuable aspects of civic negotiations about Japanese subjects overlooked by scholars.

I would like to demonstrate how Massey’s rethinking of geographical place as the nexus of mobility and instability could generate a reading that would allow the historian to investigate the spatial aspect of conflict and aid us further in setting these riot images in motion. At first glance Massey’s project seems at odds with Ulrich Baer’s whose project, which follows psychoanalytic trauma theories, could be easily misunderstood for striving to consider single photographic images in isolation. Yet, their projects can be reconciled in significant ways through their common goal of arguing against analytic tactics and representations that produce stable meanings. Even though Massey does not write about photography, her project deals with representation of space that is consequential to my study of these photographs created as consequence of an urban conflict. We are to acknowledge the influence of constantly shifting power relations determining an urban experience, personalized on many complex levels in these photographs.

In these riot photographs, even though they constitute the background, the buildings take on the valuable status of owned spaces, victims of destruction. The Caucasian rioters wished to destroy the icons of prosperity and security that these Japanese businesses embodied at the time of transition in the Powell Street area. The buildings bore the brunt of the rioters iconoclastic action because they represented icons of prosperity and security for the Japanese. Japanese families (Chinese as well) commissioned family portraits in front of their new homes and businesses that became a standard in pre-war portraiture. The rioters my have felt that they did

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not have access to this prosperity: but, whatever the actual degree of this threat, it can be said for
certain that the visible nature of this prosperity embodied by the storefronts, often exhibiting
foreign business names, deserved erasure from sight.

I would like to begin my analysis of the riot photographs with the description of the
circumstances of this violent riot. I then follow with the discussion of how the riot photographs
articulated notions of ownership and race in terms that allowed that Japanese proprietors to both
comply with the formal conventions regarding public appearance and to resist dominant
xenophobic attitudes about ethnicity.

At the old City Hall in Vancouver on September 7th, 1907, the Asiatic Exclusion League
led a demonstration against the increasing influx of Japanese immigrants. The clash, followed by
a riot, staged a messy confrontation: a collision of Caucasian and Asian bodies, glass storefronts,
and harmful sentiments. The crowd moved east from the Old City Hall towards the Chinese and
Japanese-dense areas in the heart of Vancouver Downtown Eastside, smashing windows along
Powell Street. In the aftermath of this race riot, along with witness interviews and assessments
by civic officials and architects, photographs of damaged Japanese businesses played a
significant role in the gathering and presentation of the evidence used in the preparation of
claims for damages, or what were deemed to be “the losses.”

26 The “Report of W.L. Mackenzie King, C.M.G., Commissioner, Appointed to Investigate into the losses Sustained
by the Japanese Population of Vancouver, B.C. on the Occasion of the Riots in That City in September, 1907” stated
that “Each claim was accompanied by a statutory declaration setting forth particulars in regard to the amount, and in
the case of actual damages, photographs showing the damage done to the premises of the several claimants were
also put in.” Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1908. (Sessional Paper No.74g.): 11. As mentioned in the introduction, these
were most likely prepared by Morikawa, Vancouver’s Japanese Consul, and taken back to Japan by Ishii, the
The events of September 7, 1907, began as an inaugural parade and mass meeting of Vancouver's Asiatic Exclusion League organized to protest continued immigration from China, Japan, and Korea. The Asiatic Exclusion League, comprised of city councilors and the Mayor, directed their demonstration specifically at Lieutenant Governor Dunsmuir’s hesitation to pass the Immigration Act that would authorize the exclusion of Asian populations from the entire country. On its way east towards Main Street and the City Hall, the parade gathered a mob of working-class Caucasian onlookers. The crowd took drastic measures to express their grievances against Chinese and Japanese migrant workers. These Asian strike-breakers accepted low wages and dangerous conditions during this time of recession and worker strikes. More importantly the key issue was Canada’s immigration policies and not any particular racist or xenophobic anxieties. Local workers and minor politicians directed their unrest at the federal government in order to push the Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier to adopt stringent immigration regulations.

Following heated speeches delivered by the League, the mob burned Governor Dunsmuir’s effigy and someone threw a rock at a nearby shop window. The demonstration then escalated into a full-fledged riot involving a large street crowd that aimed its forces towards the destruction of the storefronts of Chinese and Japanese business-owners. Most of the damages occurred along the area known as Powell Grounds, an important multicultural centre of industrializing Vancouver at the turn of the twentieth century.

The following month Laurier, acting on the advice of the Japanese, appointed a commission to lead an investigation into the material losses sustained by the Japanese

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27 Michael Barnholden, “The Lessons of the Anti-Asiatic Riot.” Beaver 87 No 4 (Aug/Sep2007): 14-15. Furthermore: “Mayor Alexander Bethune and several city councillors, all founding members of the AEL, volunteered the use of the city hall, located halfway between Chinatown and Japantown. Religious leaders offered to speak, businesses contributed signs reading "For a White Canada," and a Major E. Browne stepped forward to lead the parade from the Cambie Street Grounds, north to Hastings Street, and then east to Westminster (now Main Street), after which speeches were to be delivered on the main floor of city hall.”
population. The Deputy Minister of Labour W. L. Mackenzie conducted the enquiry and authored the Commission Report on Japanese losses. The last page of the report identifies all businesses by address, the name of the owner, and the monetary amount of compensation claimed by the owner and the amount actually collected.

To assemble visual evidence for the appraiser and architect an anonymous photographer captured each damaged business and, in most cases, posed the claimants in each photo. King’s report identifies each proprietor by full name in the first column of the list. There is good reason to suspect that the sitters present are the owners and their families. Some of the photographs feature lone buildings, some single owners, while a few feature children, and several include entire or incomplete families. The impact of the photographs does not lie in the accuracy of identification in the report but in the suggestion to the viewer that the Japanese community took the opportunity to present themselves as owners, rather than victims of a race riot (a status that is implied by King’s report and the nature of the assignment). The visual strategies employed by the photographer suggest to the viewer that the proprietors in the photos are focal even though the damaged buildings also serve as the key props for their display of ownership and community. The inclusion of the owners who disrupt the focus on the damaged property seems to run counter to the original forensic purpose of the series- that of providing indexical mapping integral to King’s report. The inclusion of the sitters was not necessary for successful remuneration because about one-third of the photographs in the series feature only the damaged buildings identified in the report.

Whether it was the photographer or the Japanese consuls Ishii and Morikawa who encouraged this inclusion, or the owners themselves who chose to appear in the photographs, this act of visual identification of several owners listed in King’s report prompts the spectator to
consider the human dimension of quantifying property damage (each property by its definition belongs to someone). Do the owners appear to challenge or placate King and his aides by personalizing the images? Are their stances meant to express pride in order to mitigate the physical threat of the riot, or to draw attention to its violence? The owners all facing the viewer in the images effectively humanize the demand for remuneration. This prompts us to probe deeper and ask: who, at the time, was the intended audience for the photographs? The immediate answer is that they were meant for King with his commissioners’ aides, as well as the readers of the press in which some of the photos appeared in 1907. It was also possible that if Ishii was present during the assignment and let it be known that he would take the originals to Japan, the sitters and the photographer could also imagine a Japanese audience. This audience would be similar to the one in Canada, comprised of government officials and readers of the press, with one possible addition to the equation: extended family members. Thereby, the owners’ demand reaches beyond monetary compensation; the use of photography in this instance expressed a desire for a document of assertive participation in civic economy and with it a demand for responsibility in the form of protection from civic officials. (I will consider the temporal variations in audience, by including archivists as well as the present viewer and the effect of each type of viewer has on the agency in the photographs in the second and, especially, third chapter of this study.)

Such an act of visibility takes on special meaning during a time when North America viewed the Japanese as a threat because these immigrants chose, as owners, to participate in the boosterist liberal economy of the early twentieth century. Seen as a contrast to obedient and predictable Chinese labourers, who seemed to prefer transience, the Japanese presented an equal match for the Caucasian North American citizens seeking establishment in burgeoning local real
An American newspaper stated in 1905 that “the Chinese are faithful labourers and do not buy land. The Japanese are unfaithful and do buy land.” Thus the Japanese chose an unpredictable mode of participation in (or, rather, beyond) organized labour that resisted dominant attitudes in Vancouver, and most of North America. In the minds of Caucasian North Americans property ownership and management was reserved for themselves.

The photographs operate on a deeper visual level. The series should be regarded as a form of representation that allowed the Japanese to appear simultaneously as familiar and as “other.” The Japanese proprietors in the photos successfully unite the conflicting states of victimhood and triumph over difficult racial circumstances. As victims seeking redress after the race riot they appear as the racialised other; and, by following dominant Caucasian modes of displays of ownership they appear as successful owners who transcended the violent Vancouver riot. One of the striking photographs from the riot series provides a good example of such an exhibition of ambivalence.

Figure 1 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 461 Powell Street, $1.”

Credit: University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Research Collection [JCPC 36.012].

Its title in the archive is “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 461 Powell Street, $1,” and the damaged shop belongs to Eijiro Morino according to the list in King’s report. In this photograph a grouping of two adults, one Japanese and the other Caucasian, and two children pose in front of a door to a shoe cobbler and barbershop. They stand facing the photographer with the formal stiffness reserved for the Edwardian-era camera’s slow shutter speed. The two older males stand propped up: one holds a cane, and the other rests his hands on the young boy’s
shoulders. The other child sits on the stoop. The rolled-up awning, drawn high above them, appears like a stage curtain exposing the building’s vast false façade. The building towers over the family and dominates this scene; nevertheless, the dark entrance to the building draws the eye to where the group stands against this entrance and next to the shattered storefront.

The archive identifies the address of each property and the monetary value of its damage but does not name the owner. In the photograph, the sign painted on the glass store façade, damaged during the riot, appears in different stages of illegibility and erasure. The breakage in the window perforates the text “Haircuts” and “Shaves,” thus interrupting the legibility of the shop’s sign and obfuscating its purpose. The sign in this image reveals similar functioning of the destroyed storefronts across the riot series. The incomplete text of the signage in this image, and others in the series, functions as the intermediary that destabilizes the accompanying archival captions. The owners, unnamed in the archival caption, present in the photograph and named in King’s report, ask to be seen and thus reconfigure the framework that seeks to erase and destabilize them.

The brick wall of the building adjacent to the shop holds a fashionable Boston Peg-Top cigarette ad (that recurs in other images of the riot series) which situates the scene temporally and racially: the ad features a male almost identical to that of the mustached Caucasian man who holds the Japanese boy’s shoulders with a gesture of authority. Besides calling into question the relation of the Caucasian male to this Japanese family, the make in the ad embodies the Caucasian ideal of the fashionable modern male. Moreover, in this image the ad model and the analogous Caucasian family patriarch normalize a similarly dressed Japanese owner, photographed with his sons, attempting to render him less threatening and thus legitimizing the family’s plight for the Caucasian viewers (the inclusion of children in particular seems like a
ploy to chastise the rioters and their motivations). Yet, the Japanese male would also embody to the Caucasian readers of the press the threat of otherness by displaying these familiar modes of image-conscious ownership. He is a merchant; thus, he is well established within the economy, something that a Japanese viewer would appreciate. Moreover, apparent in this particular photograph, his family seems to constitute a majority over the lone Caucasian man whose only lineage in the photograph is the admired but ephemeral Peg-Top man.

In another photograph from the series, a man, presumably the owner of a business at 201 Powell Street, was captured with one hand in his pocket, the other holding a cigarette mid-gesture. Fig. 2

**Figure 2** “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 201 Powell Street, $241.”

Framed from above with a heavy awning, the damaged building was photographed from its side and front. The side of the shop is papered with the same Peg-Top poster advertisements in three
variations suggesting that this is a dry-goods store that sold tobacco and other every-day luxuries. In this image, the owner, situated in direct line with the row of posters, gazes directly at the photographer, and emerges as independent and unflinching. In this photograph, more so than in other similar ones from this series, the owner becomes the Caucasian Peg-Top gentleman’s Japanese doppelgänger participating in the economic and cultural reciprocity which this photo constructs. In the lower right corner a Caucasian child in a sailor outfit of the day hides behind a lamppost and stares at the camera, out of breath, his mouth slightly agape with curiosity. The composition suggests that this was a photo hastily taken or chosen to appear that way, with the boy, who, impelled by childish snooping around the photo session, snuck into the frame at the last minute. However, it is possible to consider the white child’s presence in the foreground as an attempt to mitigate the compellingly cosmopolitan presence of the Japanese owner who stands next to the fully visible sign of his business that bears his name: “K. Okada.” The owner may appear as the modern Peg-Top man, but, at the same time, these textual and visual elements lock him within the system of exchange that also renders him dependant on his set of tenuous circumstances.

These two photographs, and others in the series, point to how exteriorization of Japanese foreignness and its attempted erasure functioned at the time. This implied sense of sight and visibility was one of the key senses forcefully driving the negotiation of immigrant identity. At the same time, this identity negotiation depended on what was interiorized. Towards the later nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth, Japan had begun to emerge as a modern nation through the rise of imperialism and the beginning of industrialization. The Meiji government of Japan was involved in an intense economic competition with other industrialized powers and harboured ambitions to match the economy of the West. Specifically, Japan looked
to Britain as a model of business-based economy to set itself apart from other Asian nations. In order to accomplish this, foreign British workers were hired to train the Japanese in Western business and educational methods. Japan also sent its brightest students to study these methods abroad. Key to this process of nation-building was an intensified diplomatic image-consciousness which extended to Japanese emigrants to North America. For example, a Japanese labour immigrant to the United States in 1906 received an official notice from the governor of his prefecture proscribing acceptable behaviours in a foreign country to make sure the “subject” did not leave a shameful impression.\(^{29}\) Aware of the North American race and class-based categories of exclusion directed towards the influx of Asian “coolies” (transient labourers), “Meiji leaders were particularly concerned that Japanese immigrants not create an impression that might undermine Japan’s status as a modern and civilized nation equal to those of Europe and North America,” writes Andrea Geiger in her analysis of the complex and reflexive responses of the Meiji government to North American labour politics. Among several directives, the governors instructed Japanese emigrants to “control yourself and avoid the temptation to neglect your work or to gamble, drink, etc., working hard and saving your money should be your main concerns […] and, be careful about your health and maintain your physical well-being.”\(^{30}\) As is evident in the quotation, Meiji diplomats saw labour emigrants as a threat to Japan’s image as a modern, civilized, nation. The Meiji worried about how these emigrants were perceived by their host countries.

The 1902 national census indicated that the Chinese and Japanese immigrants constituted over 10% of the national population (with the majority of the Japanese living in BC) and


\(^{30}\) Geiger, “Negotiating the Boundaries of Race and Class,” 37.
presented a visible, therefore distinct, group.\textsuperscript{31} John Berger asserts that “the burgeoning Oriental population represented a long-term threat to the White character of the province.”\textsuperscript{32} It is not surprising that the Japanese wished to further set themselves apart from other Asian immigrants in order to negotiate both the stringent expectations of their own leaders and acute discrimination in their host countries. This negotiation, as Anne Dore suggests, did not necessarily involve blind acceptance of North American standards, but a careful cooption of traits and behaviours that also ensured the survival of their own identities.\textsuperscript{33}

Even though it may appear that the first generation Japanese Canadians accepted the implied superiority of White Canadians, a closer examination suggests that they were not interested in pursuit of \textit{interiorization} (full inclusion in mainstream Canadian society) and did not accept the inferior status assigned to them. Their belief in the superiority of the Japanese spirit (\textit{yamotodomashii}) made their \textit{exteriorization} from White society not only acceptable but also necessary to the preservation of their culture and ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{34} The traits that the Japanese valued, and that the Meiji encouraged, were: respect for authority, highly structured family and community life, and dedication to hard work and frugality. Cultivating these traits was not a process of subordination but a reproduction of ethnic identities, which the host country perceived as threatening because it suggested assimilation for strictly economic purposes.

\textsuperscript{32} Thomas R. Berger, “The Banished Canadians,” 95.
\textsuperscript{34} Dore, “Transnational Communities: Japanese Canadians of the Fraser Valley, 1904-1942,” 37 – 38.
Japanese participation in dominant culture and economy were perceived with anxiety. An example of such an unfavorable perception appears in the September 9, 1907 issue of the *Daily Province* in a cartoon titled “the shadow on the wall.”

Figure 3 “The Shadow on the Wall.”

The cartoon accompanies a front-page article that focuses on the Japanese consulate’s reactions to the riot. The cartoonist depicts a Caucasian couple with two children, a toddler and an infant held by the mother, huddled on a stoop of their family home, looking anxiously at a looming dark shadow projected on the vast slatted wall of their property. The text “Japanese coolie labour” is written on the encroaching dark figure. The riot photographs, on the other hand, aim to

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provide the inverse of this ethnically reductive typology. The photographer, whether aware or not, has reversed the roles and placed the Japanese families at the doors of their properties, and, in several instances included markers implying the encroaching Caucasian “threat” such as the cigarette ads on the walls of the shops, and the Caucasian officials posing in several of the photos. In addition to their use as evidence for compensation the photographs can be considered as suggesting a defiance of victimhood.

Another image I would like to focus on, one that I will also return to later, is one such instance of role reversal and resistance to limiting categories. Fig.4

**Figure 4** “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 130 Powell Street, $139” – cropped.

This photograph has become iconic through its repeated use, first by *Harper’s Weekly* in October of 1907 in a feature titled “White Canada,” and by current scholars examining the 1907 riot and by current commentators in the media. This gathering consists of a Caucasian policeman in a conversation with a civic official or a journalist who holds a notebook, the Japanese business-owner’s wife in the doorway of her family’s business facing the camera, plus a Sikh man partially obscured by an unidentified individual excluded from the frame by cropping. The
immense window is completely fractured rendering all writing invisible in the jagged recesses and allowing the viewer complete access to the store interior. The only legible word: “Provisions,” painted on glass, is located in the image’s area of emphasis. In this photo, as in the previous one, the building becomes porous – vulnerable to erasure, and a casualty in the photograph, pervious to the gaze of the viewer.

The families and their edifices perform in similar ways across the series, suggesting uneasy ambiguity in ethnic relations, and signaling the fluctuating degrees of agency on the part of the Japanese owners and on the part of the vulnerable spaces with which King’s report identifies them, and in the company of which they were captured. The thirty existing photographs tend to fall into two visual categories: images of lone buildings and images of buildings with either single owners, or families posed in front of them. There are also two significant instances where children are posed holding measuring tools (a string and a ruler) for the purpose of establishing proportion to determine the extent of the damages to storefronts. The children’s presence has a double rhetorical impact: it lends the photographs the necessary pathos to sway public opinion against indifference to racial violence by appealing to their emotions (and ethics). Lone damaged buildings also perform the embodiment of crisis but it is clear that the photographs that include the sitters are more effective in that regard (and hence why they appear in the press).

But in every case where there appear human sitters agency and empowerment is granted to human bodies precisely because they are posed vis a vis the damaged buildings. The building facades’ own important presence and demand animates, and is animated by, the presence and gestures of the sitters. Taken together, these key elements – the façades and the sitters work inextricably to create this effect of co-presence. The photographs would lose their rhetorical
power had they pictured either just the damaged buildings or just the claimants extracted from their properties. These sitters manifest strength and pride as they pose against their affluent stores in the aftermath of a violent event that sought to erase their presence.

The nuances of appearance were closely tied to the modern negotiation of race and imperial subjecthood during a time when both Japan and Canada--rapidly industrializing nations at the turn of the century--were most concerned about identification with modernity and progress. Hence, it is quite appropriate to assign to the store facades and the sitters the tasks of agents that effectively act out the embodiment of crisis and its abatement respectively. The presence of the owners, their demand for recognition, participation and permanence mitigate the state of crisis that the porous damaged facades embody. The personal accounts of early Japanese immigrants show a close identification of security and permanence with property ownership. The immigrant families themselves and local Caucasian citizens viewed their participation in ownership in different ways. The Japanese who wished to establish families here looked to existing norms and wished to participate in them: “I was astounded that white people could build such great houses, and thought, since I’m a man too, I should be able to build a house like that […] at a time not many Japanese people were building their own houses…” At the same time, Caucasian observers seemed to have a different picture of Japanese immigrants: “…white people would ask me…are you building a hotel? […] as soon as a Japanese makes money he goes back to Japan, you’re all parasites.” 36 A home was a sign of permanence, whereas, a hotel, a sign of transience – doubly so, because such hotels were used to house wood mill labourers. The Caucasian merchant class saw these Japanese transient workers and the hotel and store owners who provided hubs for the movements of these laborers as locked in an uneasy relationship with

their host country. This relationship hinged on owning property in Vancouver while also remaining economically and culturally attached to Japan. The riot photographs attempt to resist these common and simplistic sentiments because they do not present an image of Vancouver’s Japanese who owned such hotels and stores as parasites. The riot series draws attention to the Japanese owners as participants in a sphere of economic relations within which their claims can be heard, acknowledged and visualized in a certain ways.

At this time in Vancouver, the most salient opportunities for economic participation existed through property ownership. The city was deemed a key port and was slated for becoming the largest city in the dominion with substantial buildings going up and multiple transcontinental trains crossing through. Styled as the “land of opportunity” the city was rapidly growing and its media hoped to attract investors and new residents. Vancouver’s Powell Grounds, among other areas in British Columbia, like Steveston, were particularly suitable for the movement of people at the turn-of-the-century. The Powell Street area is unique for its identification with the Japanese Canadians who were its majority ethnic group the 1890s to 1942, when the government of Canada ordered them to move at least 100 miles inland. Japanese immigrants were drawn there by the availability of jobs at the nearby Hastings Mill, which has been called “the foundation of ‘Little Tokyo.’” As Japanese immigration peaked around the turn-of-the-century the Powell Street area established its identity which in turn dictated and solidified development along the 200 through to 400 blocks of Powell. Most of the commercial buildings embraced the common style of the time- “boomtown” vernacular wood-frame

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construction with false fronts: a typical impulse in early civic development for streetscapes of stature.\(^{39}\)

The form of these “boomtown” buildings offer associations with early entrepreneurship along the Powell and Cordova strips that together with Oppenheimer Park enclose Japantown. The Powell/ Cordova strips record the enthusiasm of the transition of the area from a residential enclave associated with the Hastings Mill, to a growing commercial centre packed with mixed-use buildings that catered to the complete needs of the local population. Powell Street/Japantown is the historical home for non-whites settled by Japanese ‘pioneers’ who co-inhabited the land with First Nations and other immigrants. Together they developed a commercial and working neighbourhood characterized by small, often family-owned, businesses. Japantown was a thriving community where ethnic and cultural groups co-existed in one neighbourhood. It functioned as a locus for connecting with one’s own culture, outside the dominant society.\(^{40}\)

The photographs, part of the investigative process encouraged by Ishii and Morikawa, managed to perform within this complex moment in the area’s activity marked by both ethnic integration and instability within this contained but effervescent geographical area that served as the social centre of community life. The false facades function as dynamic stage sets enabling the performance of the sitters disallowing for any access to stable histories. The destroyed shop signs, as visual interruptions, also add to the effect of mutability, collapsing the...
ontological categories between photographs as documents and urban spaces as the static receptors of history. Indeed Cadava reminds us that photographs closely related to violence tell us more powerfully about the difficulty in examining photographic images which in the end only offer shattered and fragmentary access to history (and its central question: “what really happened?”). Even though the photographs started out as images of corroboration (immediate markers of identification for King’s report) as portrait images, considered alongside other representations of Vancouver’s racialized spaces and their users, these images point to how localities simultaneously structured and were structured by social relations, thus always in the process of formulating “places.” Thus the possibility of bringing geographical thinking, such as the one that Massey proposes, to bear on the study of these photographs offers consequences for uncovering in the click of the cameraman’s shutter both surveyor’s impulses and the imaging of social relations that thwart them.

In the next chapter, I will continue this discussion by conceiving the series as images of remembrance, and explore their connection with a violent and unresolved event thus casting the riot series in multiple roles that resist easy categorization. I will complicate the one-dimensional documentary status of the riot series with the aid of theorists who find their vocabulary in ethics, psychoanalysis and trauma remembrance. Conceived figuratively such a “stereoscopic” reading avoids the possibility of becoming complicitous with the violence in producing a totalizing view that places the Japanese immigrants in racialized categories. Stereoscopy, a display technique (also known at the turn of the century as stereography) aims to convey spatial depth through the juxtaposition of several slightly different images. I define my figurative “stereoscopic reading” as a three-dimensional interpretation, an adaptation of Sekula’s “polyphony” and continue to set the riot photographs in motion against their static and secondary status as mute evidence.
CHAPTER TWO

Resistance: Exteriority, Sight and the Remembrance of Social Rapture

As the previous chapter showed, the presence of the Japanese claimants counteracted the popular sentiment in 1907 that sought their absence through the various ways of erasure of Japanese immigrants and the signs of their visibility. I have pointed out so far that the riot photographs present a different sort of evidence: they display degrees of agency granted to the sitters in the ways they were engaged photographically and the ways in which they engaged the act of photography. Nonetheless, the photos have also fulfilled their aim as visual corroboration in the trial and as a reminder of civic responsibility when Japanese consulate deposited copies in the archive during the redress movement in 1970s. The key ingredient that sets these photos apart from indifferent documentation of property damage is the alert presence of the sitters. In most of these photographs there is an ineffective attempt to diminish the aspect of social drama for the purposes of forensics: the lens focus on the buildings that fill out the background at a wide angle. Subverting this diminishment of humanization, in each photo a detail emerges that impels these images to transcend their status as indifferent forensic photographs. Together, the people in the photographs, along with the shattered facades and signage, such as store names, poster advertisements and painted signs, work in ways that cast the viewer in the role of witness in order to arouse indignation toward racial tension and violence.

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Let us return to a photograph titled “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 201 Powell Street, $241” which provides a salient example concerning the notions of witness and agency. The side window in the foreground is destroyed beyond recognition and the only
shop sign lettering remaining is “Japa […]” (previously announcing that the store carried Japanese consumer goods). King’s report identifies the owner as Okada Kumataro. The front window next to which the owner poses bears his name: “K. Okada.” In the lower right corner a Caucasian child in a sailor outfit of the day hides behind a lamppost and stares at the camera, out of breath, his mouth slightly agape with curiosity. The owner appears diminutive next to the building and the child in the foreground. The placement of the owner, Okada, next to his name on his store window, and the skewed sense of scale encourages the viewer to perform as the eye of conscience recognizing the human aspect of ownership and arousing sympathy for the immigrant but never veering towards sentimentality.

The side of the shop is papered with poster advertisements for cigars and cigarettes. The ads for Peg-Top cigarettes in this photograph, present in at least two other riot images as well, and discussed in the previous chapter, characterize the ideal type—a flattened vision of a white consumer. So framed by the ads, the smoking Japanese owner is involved in ambivalent mirroring—both outside and inside the static model of the modern consumer. He is also portrayed, in terms that mitigate his victimhood, as an active participant in the value system of consumerism and ownership, as an analogue to the Peg-Top man, but at the same time “other,” a visible minority. King’s report and the archive place the owner in less ambiguous categories: the claimants, negotiating damage compensation are necessarily placed in the categories as “owners” and “victims.” It is in the photos, then, that these categories are malleable; they at times dissolve (which I will discuss in this chapter), and are at times solidified (as I hope to show in the next chapter) depending on what type of witnessing is required by them.

Following the investigators’ instructions to document the damage, it remains somewhat of a mystery why the photographer included the families affected by the damages and whether it
was the photographer’s idea in the first place. Based on the timeline of events announced by local media, immediately after the riot, the consuls Ishii and Morikawa, along with police officers, were the first to inspect the local Japanese shops and speak to their owners.\textsuperscript{41} It is possible that they sought the accompaniment of a photographer and consequently played a part in the creation of these photos, mobilizing the series as an act of negotiating restitution and remembrance.

How ultimately can we understand this set of turn-of-the-century photographs now? Stylistically, the photographs belong to a genre of sharp-focus realism that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, had started to steadily gain popularity over Pictorialism, the artistic photography movement, in North America. Photographing urban subjects allowed the practitioners of this new form of photojournalism and social reform photography to employ and cultivate their favored elements of chance and “alert presence in the real world.”\textsuperscript{42} Special importance was given to urban location and the photographer’s presence on the scene (usually and preferably where they lived and worked).\textsuperscript{43} The riot photographs, however, defy the categories of court document and photojournalistic social reform photography by retaining elements key to both of those forms of image-making. Taking into consideration the particular photographic act and the event that precipitated it a more fertile approach to reading these photographs is to locate them in the cultural production of representing remembrance, as well as

\textsuperscript{41} “Kikiyiro Iskii (sic) saw his countrymen mobbed,” \textit{The Daily Province} (Monday, September 9):1.
\textsuperscript{43} Garner, \textit{Disappearing Witness}, 4. Starting in the last decade of the nineteenth century modernity was usually constructed photographically in urban locales; this was partially due to new possibilities offered by advances in portable camera technologies and partially because modern progress meant urbanity and consumerism and interest in the visibility of various social classes. The nature of the photographer’s presence as witness in the modern world in turn dictated, self-consciously, a different sort of witnessing required of its viewers. This new form of witnessing called for being alert to extraordinary, singular experiences and surprise in order to achieve an effect of being rooted in the real world and real time. Some early examples of this approach: Arnold Genthe’s Chinatown streets in San Francisco in the 1890s; Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine’s workers and children roaming the streets, 1890-1910; and Eugene Atget’s Paris scenes 1905-1910.
weighing their somatic effect as images created in the aftermath of violence. Indeed, this mirrors Roland Barthes’ project in *Camera Lucida*. In the book Barthes develops the dual notions of studium and punctum: *studium* points to the wider cultural interpretation of a photograph, whereas *punctum* points to the highly subjective, single startling and remarkable detail which establishes a direct and personal relationship between the viewer with the object or person within the photograph.\(^{44}\)

The interplay of the *studium* and *punctum* allows us an awareness of the paradoxical nature of photographs: how they seem to offer proximity to historical events as well as emphasize their remoteness. The historian’s desire to manage, to ascribe meaning, to maintain the illusion of order; to pull the photographs closer to *what was then* is continually being frustrated by their resistance through the *punctum*—*what is now*. This type of awareness looks for elements that resist erasure by substitution (the responsibility of letting the Other retain his/her difference). Similarly, the seemingly disparate theorists, Walter Benjamin, Slavoj Žižek, and Emmanuel Levinas each formulate critical and phenomenological notions that have at their center the eros of the gaze. In their projects, they question the look that continuously searches for a meaning that totalizes plurality. Aligning with these theorists against the erasure of difference, I will thus attempt to bring these riot photographs out of the silence of the archive by locating the mechanisms of interpretation that animate and destabilize the series, and in so doing, as mentioned in the previous chapter, to offer a “stereoscopic reading” of them.

The riot was a violent act driven by contradictory impulses: interest in human rights (albeit reserved for Caucasian labourers) and marked by ardent racism that had at its centre the ethnic visibility of Asian populations. In *Reading the Riot Act: a Brief History of Riots in*

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Vancouver, Michael Barnholden characterized riots as civil disobedience with a determinate aim – the ravage of private property to draw attention to the “placement of property rights ahead of human rights by the liberal democratic government.” In this case, those responsible for the labour movement in Vancouver, in the process of striking and unionizing, had seen Asian immigrants as halting their actions since the Japanese and Chinese had also been used successfully to break strikes. The capacity of these immigrants to accept arduous toil and sub-standard working and living conditions in order to cultivate private businesses in their community, was seen by the local labour movement as veiling their efforts to bargain for their human rights at work and aiding Dunsmuir’s government in the selfish pursuit of wealth.

This act of destruction of private property animates the relationship between bodies and buildings which is especially poignant in these photographs. The shattered windows establish a truncated temporality and spatiality forming a direct link that elevates the shattered business facades above and beyond the concerns of mere functionality. Within the violence enacted in a riot, Barnholden writes “...broken glass is a potent image signaling the breakdown of the barrier between public and private property.” Barnholden’s discussion of broken glass as the focal point in the breakdown of private/public during a clash suggests a possibility for viewing the cracks and gashes in the storefront façades in these photos as referencing the bodily injury that is an ever-present threat during a riot. These photographs, become sites of fracture: attending to

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46 I draw loosely on Elizabeth Grosz here, particularly her thesis regarding “spatial excess” in her essay “Embodied Utopias: The Time of Architecture,” where she is concerned with the relevance of architecture—beyond mere utility—as having a capacity that extends into the future and is therefore ethically responsible in addressing community needs. Grosz is suggesting that since, architecture has both iterative and projective powers, its agentive capacities should be taken into account and examined. I have bent her thesis to draw links between buildings and bodies in order to examine the degrees of agentive interplay in the Riot photographs. Elizabeth Grosz, “The Time of Architecture,” in *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis*. Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorach, Eds. (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).
these fissures in narrative aids the photographs in resisting their illustrative and supplementary status by forcing the viewer to look beyond the quantification of property damage in this dispute. The urgency of danger is gone but traces of it remain in the markers -- in this instance, broken windows, deep gashes obliterating the foreign name and the scattered debris.

The images are aqueous, and the image described at the beginning of this chapter, as do others, operates on many levels, beyond the predictability of the static and unyielding record in King’s report. The composition in this photograph suggests that it was a hastily taken or chosen to appear that way, with the boy, who, impelled by childish snooping around the photo session, snuck into the frame at the last minute. There is something of immediacy, or urgency in the photo, something that implies it is possible, for a second, to be transported into that scene and overhear the fallen glass and debris crunch beneath the claimant’s worker boots. It is clear that in this image (and others in the series) the photographer, the consuls and the owners created an effect that establishes commonality between the claimants and the intended (the commission and the readers of local media) as well as the unintended viewer of these images (the contemporary viewer). Such an empathetic relationship linking the viewer to a subject in a historical photographic image has several meanings and functions. The philosopher and political critic Slavoj Žižek calls this type of viewing the imaginative tracking of “the fascinating contours of the object of desire” — there is a jolt in the subversion of the viewer’s expectations with this brief connection to the past. Meaning, for Žižek is located in the moment of surprise in an encounter between the viewer and the viewed. The link between the viewer and the subjects in these photographs operates on the recognition of the owners’ and their stores’ vulnerability to not

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just the violence of racial tension but the violence of the gaze that seeks to make clear meaning in an ambiguous cultural object.

In his philosophical thesis on the border between Self and Other, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Emmanuel Levinas inquires into the phenomena of skin mediating the encounter between two entities. Skin functions in several ways and on several levels at the point of contact. On the level of bodies, the border or the skin, presupposes an inside and an outside. Questions can be asked of its permeability: would this border do away with the violence in the encounter with the stranger, or would it rather enforce and legitimate this violence? Additionally, if both Self and Other (the Other, emblematic of that which strange from Self) are permeable thus vulnerable, this exposure can create a form of community and thus collapse some of this separating border and its distinctions. This border is ambiguous in the photos.

In yet another photograph from this series a woman stands in front of her business at 336 Powell St., her arms akimbo, her hips pushed slightly forward and her back resting against the building. Fig. 6
Her body language—her proprietary stance suggest a charged mix of insolence and resignation. Her visible ease calls into question her attitude towards the photographer’s visit: it not only signals acceptance but a creative use of the situation to display pride of ownership or management of property. Despite the task of the photograph and its empirical validity, the human subject, identified in the report as Sonoda Otomatsu suggests a triumph over her status as victim.
In his reading of Lewis Hine’s photographs of American labourers in the first decade of the twentieth-century, Allan Sekula in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* argues that Hine’s photographs function as legal documents with a distinctly political and social reformist agenda.\(^{49}\) Hine "the sociologist" captures his human subjects—among them, a victimized child worker—and anchors his photographs with captions such as this: "Neil Gallagher, worked two years in breaker. Leg crushed between cars. Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. November 1909...” [in an] attempt to effect legislation.\(^{50}\) I agree with Sekula that in Hine’s case, even though at first reading the fifteen-year-old Neil Gallagher, humanized in the photograph with the aid of the caption, refuses his status as a victim. However, Sekula complicates this statement by adding that a deeper reading reveals that Gallagher is partially restored to the role of the victim through the connotation of “the dignity of the oppressed.”\(^{51}\)

I propose that the riot photographs function in reverse to the order described by Sekula because they articulate vulnerability in different terms. Firstly, the archival captions dehumanize the sitters because they do not name them, and instead focus on the buildings and their addresses. The owners’ presence establishes their strength and it is the stores and the signs that are visibly permeable and presented as victims. Sonoda Otomatsu refuses her dehumanization, despite the archival caption of the photograph as merely: “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907, 336 Powell Street: $10.50. The anonymous Vancouver photographer’s keen sociologist’s eye belied the utilitarian caption that had as its focus the damage to property. The photograph is effectively framed (or cropped); in the upper right the name of the business, a repetition of two words, one above the other, is cut off after the first three letters reading “Ped-...Ped-.”

\(^{50}\) Both quotations from Sekula, *Against the Grain*, 19.
\(^{51}\) Sekula, *Against the Grain*, 19.
indecipherability of the words and their foreign ring in this clipped version, in turn, underscores the foreignness of the woman. The vivid white of Otomatsu’s long chef’s apron illuminates her presence and detains the eye. She is the focal point of the visual arrangement and her body defies the traces of vandalism in the photograph. Two posters frame Otomatsu from above and the side. Fig.7

Figure 7 Image detail: “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 336 Powell Street, $10.50.”

Directly above Otomatsu’s head, hangs a “For Sale” sign which calls into question the status of her ownership and, as a result, destabilizes the purpose of the photograph as an undisputable visual record for King’s report. The sale is advertised by Yushin Co., a real estate company housed at 232 Westminster Avenue: also damaged in the riot according to King’s report (although no photographic record exists). To Otomatsu’s left, papered to the side of the shop is the recurring Peg Top Cigar advertisement.

By obliterating the shop signs the rioters enforced a narrative of erasure because as is common during riots, they aimed for glass- the most fragile and permeable part of the buildings,

52 Vancouver City Directory database, Library and Archives Canada (Accessed by author March 4, 2010).
and thus destabilized these beacons of Japanese upward mobility. These window signs, marks of ownership have been broken, opening up the interior violently. The posters however, contradict the vulnerability of broken glass and missing sign portions: they clothe the buildings, and reinforce the ideal of the modern citizen who participates in the community of ownership and North American commodities. The posters, then, to varying degrees, mark in competing ways, sites of authority, and privilege. The Peg Top Cigar Ads- as Caucasian privilege, and the “For sale by Yushin Company” sign as well as the “Sekine Boarding House” as site markers which assert the Japanese community and its participation in neoliberal capitalism.

I’m suggesting that the damaged building fronts, the gestures of the proprietors, their engagement with built form are all once bound up with history, the desire to display ownership and the resistance of being swallowed up in time and bounded by the limitations of the physical archive. The riot photographs register a shock, revealing a power beyond their original purpose. Walter Benjamin’s essay “A Small History of Photography” is instructive in this regard. Benjamin talks of the impulse to possess the objects in photographs, to bring them closer (and to strip them of their aura through reproduction).\(^53\) The historian’s desire – to manage, to ascribe meaning, to maintain the illusion of order, to pull the photographs closer to what was then is continually being frustrated by their resistance to what is now. The now implicates the historian and the desire of his gaze in a narrative that weaves the past into the present, pointing to the ethical consequences of the act of reading, and in the interplay between the reader, the image, fact and fiction.

Benjamin wrote at length about the haunting quality of photographs. Turning to surrealist photography of Eugéne Atget, among others, Benjamin recognized the generative contradiction

in the medium: a democratic form of representation (because of its reproducibility) and at the same time, as an ultimately impenetrable object that denies easy access to history. He had in mind their stubborn insistence of refusing to be silenced, activating in the viewer a desire to know, to bridge this unsettling gap between the present and the past. The subject of the photograph once alive, and still present now, thus resurfaces to be spoken for, yet “will never consent to be wholly absorbed in art.” 54 What triggers this sort of interested and motivated looking? Žižek refers to this as the gaze distorted by desire, the gaze that zeroes in on the object with predatory clarity in order to release that which has been captured and hidden. This is in opposition to neutral or disinterested looking that does not reveal anything. Because the object is the embodiment of our desire (meaning, that it is produced and distorted by our desire) objective looking produces no meaning. 55 When we locate the object of interest, we bring it out of the shadows of objectivity into the light of subjectivity, triggering a whole chain of consequences built into the process of interpretation. Thus, according to these writers, looking at photographs subjectively is to seek to locate the ways in which they disrupt their documentary status, and to rightly mistrust their otherwise innocent appearance as history’s most reliable witness.

The riot photographs, as images of remembrance adhere to quite a different meaning outside of the positivistic purpose of forensics. Their close relation to violence and the creation by Ishii and his team of diplomatic links to Vancouver’s civic responsibility reveal a plurality of meanings. These meanings swirl around the human subjects in the photo and their negotiation of relationships to their properties based on visibility, beyond blind record of ownership. What accounts for the powerful interplay between the damaged properties and the human subjects in the visual formations in these photographs? It is perhaps related to how we, as viewers and

readers, identify with the human subjects and locate in them varying degrees of strength and vulnerability. In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, particularly in the chapters “Violence, Mourning, Politics” and “Precarious Life,” Judith Butler attempts to answer the query of how vulnerability is articulated. Butler formulates her project accordingly:

By insisting on a “common” corporeal vulnerability, I may seem to be positing a new basis for humanism. That might be true, but I am prone to consider this differently. A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen…if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject.⁵⁶

Butler discusses the ways in which human beings are fixed to one another, especially in the form of loss and vulnerability to violence: we can be injured and others can be injured as well. This human condition of interdependence is a constant reminder that “Loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all.”⁵⁷ We are locked in the reciprocal exchange that forms the basis for ethical connection. Can such a connection be linked to our relationship with visual culture, namely, photographs? Butler locates the moral tether that binds two entities in the Levinasian notion of the face: the encounter with the face … “not exclusively a human face…is a condition for humanization.”⁵⁸ The face may be a stand-in— separated by a series of displacements—for any object. The object becomes humanized by making a moral demand upon the subject. It is through this catachresis that the viewer of the photographic image becomes implicated within its visual directives. The representation of the face (not necessarily in its literal form) can also enact dehumanization or defacement through showing an objectionable subject that we are not asked to identify with. Butler explains such a viewing process: “we may find ourselves interpolated

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⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 141.
Butler’s theory of identification is useful for reading the riot photographs: In the version of violence presented in the riot photographs, the buildings embody victimhood -- instead of broken bodies we are faced with the fractured glass storefronts wounded by objects thrown with ferocity.

Extending Butler’s discussion, the intersections of the public and the private, autonomy and possession apply to our bodies as well as to that which is an extension of ourselves, that which exists beyond the containment of our bodies if it is the means to our livelihood or that which forges a link that animates the inanimate. Asian immigrants were a source of deep anxiety -- something to be passionately feared; that through their able-bodiedness and willingness to work hard for miniscule wages, they will displace the white labourer. In 1905, *The Victoria Colonist* published the following pretext for ousting Asian immigrants from British Columbia: “…because the Chinese, or the Japanese, through an evolutionary process which has been in progress for centuries now, as we find him, [is] a marvelous human machine, competent to perform the maximum of labour on the minimum of sustenance.”  

Here, the customary xenophobic rhetoric based on racial inferiority and weakness is inverted. The impact in the photographs exists in the contrast between the defiant and undamaged bodies of the Japanese claimants and the damaged buildings beside them. Perhaps it is the threat of bodily harm that compels one to reflect that there is but one short step from this scenario to the next, when possibly living bodies bear the brunt of victimization.

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59 *Ibid*, 143.

The riot itself was marked by ambiguity concerning bodily violence, whereas its spatial dimension produced consequences that are more apparent. Documentation reveals that several business-owners fought back, which resulted in the Caucasian perpetrators incurring most of the total injuries.\textsuperscript{61} Even though the unrest was the result of racial prejudice, the crowd was described by English media as more boisterous than violent and its main targets were solely the windows of businesses along the well-known commercial strip of Japantown. Japanese and Chinese-language newspapers, such as \textit{The Taiwan Daily News} had focused on the violent nature of the riot, reporting several deaths of Caucasian rioters when the Asian population, in jeopardy, fought back.\textsuperscript{62} However, apparently neither bodily harm nor looting were the primary aims of most of the rioters since at the onset of the unrest the Asian population was allowed to mingle freely with the crowd (before the violence of retribution got out of hand).\textsuperscript{63} The photographic series showing defiant owners positioned in the foreground of their properties with the fractured windows as the backdrop attests to property damage taking precedence over harm to human beings. Additionally, despite the centrality of the storefronts, the locus of the damage assessment in King’s report, the victimized buildings stand aside to reveal a persuasive social commentary that seems to want to convince the commission that these Japanese owners deserve civic protection in form of restitution. The individuals portrayed in the photographs successfully chose to participate in the modernization of Vancouver by embracing its real estate. At the same time, they conformed to their country’s directives of appearing modern as representatives of the Japanese nation, and by participating in the functioning of the local ethnic economy by providing services such as boarding houses for Japanese workers.

\textsuperscript{63} Sugimoto, \textit{Japanese Immigration}, 130-132.
Both in 1907 and now the owners’ assertive presence in the images functions to raise consciousness by lending credibility to their claims. More than that, however, based on what Levinas and Butler pointed out about vulnerability and its creation of commonality among human subjects and viewers, the type of vulnerability annunciated in the photographs lends the claimants a form of enduring dignity. This dignity does not stem from their portrayal as the victims of violence punished because they conformed to dominant forms of economic participation and affluence. (Although undoubtedly this superficial element was helpful in court for the Caucasian commission, and, as we will see in the next chapter, is also taken up by the riot’s commemorators in 2007). Instead, the claimants emerge as agents who refuse to be silenced because they challenge their contemporary viewer with their physical strength and difference that so bothered and threatened their detractors. Additionally, as a consequence of human presence in these images, we, as contemporary viewers are made acutely aware of the epistemic violence of meaning-creation when as historians and witnesses to the owners’ claims we interact with these photographs through the archive.
CHAPTER THREE

Fracture: Archival Refraction and Aporia

The riot images played a valuable role in the media and in court in 1907: they served to legitimize Japanese presence by prompting emphatic spectatorship. This type of witnessing was required of the contemporary viewer of those photographs in order to maintain, at least in appearances, harmonious relations between Canada (represented in this instance by Civic and Federal Officials) and Japan (represented by Japanese Consuls) with the aid of The Vancouver Sun and Harper's Weekly as mediators. The Japanese property owners in the photographs are significant because they represent Japan and Canada to varying degrees depending on the particular image. The common element in all images is the interplay of exteriorization and the interiorization of Japanese and Canadian characteristics: the owners embody the modern, cosmopolitan citizen, participating assertively in the local economy of ownership and management but at the same time unmistakably foreign because of their looks and country of origin.

The images present a space for the complex interplay of the foreign and familiar elements also powerfully enunciated by the storefronts captured in varying states of attempted erasure in the riot. It is pertinent to attend to these complexities when studying the riot images both as a series and as singular images that moved through different environments that constituted (and will continue to do so) specific framing devices. However--as much as arguing for the Japanese owners’ status as victims-- ascribing too much agency to these owners as victorious representatives of their community can also be dangerous because such a suggestion of heroism creates a sentimentalized reading that runs contrary to the complexity of the riot photographs. In
order to attend to this complexity, a question remains: can the riot photographs also be regarded as transgressive of the intended diplomatic relations? In 2007, the hundred-year anniversary of the riot prompted commemorations that included an academic conference, an artistic installation by Vancouver artist Karin Lee and media commentary. Looking at these recent appropriations of select riot images in these commemorative projects provides a way to address the question of transgression as well as to expand the notion of the archive, where historical images are found, as continually unfolding past its physical and temporal boundaries.

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Ulrich Baer’s explication of the ontology of trauma images, and other essays gathered in this study, make explicit connections between photographs and the archive through the common link to memory and its mechanisms of inscription. These two technologies, the photograph and the archive, claim to provide substitutes for remembrance. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jaques Derrida is interested in remembrance and the notion of archiving. Derrida is particularly concerned with the titular “fever” which is a kind of desire: “the desire to recover moments of inception: to find and possess all sorts of beginnings.” 64 In short- archiving, and working in the archives, adheres to a desire to connect with the past and to preserve it. Marlene Manoff’s investigation into the notion of the archive reveals the central role that such repositories play in the scholarly enterprise and its appropriation of historical records.65 As Manoff points out in her review of current interdisciplinary literature interested in the archive, Derrida argues that the control of memory is contingent on the control of the archive. Derrida

posits in his psychoanalytic formulation of the archive that the impulse to collect, record and interpret looks toward the future, but it can also incite amnesia through exclusion or omission.\footnote{Jacques Derrida Archive Fever, in “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines,” Marlene Manoff, Portal: Libraries and the Academy, vol. 4, no. 1 (2004): 11-12.}

Looking at the riot photographs, as an interpreter, the historian shapes history and memory by consuming the palatable elements, and in his role as the guardian of the present and the past, the historian hopes that the painful and the traumatic remains invisible. Looking at archival photographs, or rather looking at photographs through archives, is to act on the managerial fantasy of being in charge. The desire signals an attempt to see through the obstacles and to impose a narrative. The resultant mediation between what is and what we believe we know results in the epistemic violence present in the act of interpretation that aims to conceal the schism between what was then and what is now.

Importantly, as a framing device, the archive embodies the dualism of inside/outside, public/private: it is both an institutional space and an imaginative site, a conceptual space whose boundaries are fluid; and now digitized collections are threatening the order of enclosure. The archive “preserves and reserves, protects and patrols, regulates and represses” write Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner, yet the “history of the archive is on the other hand a history of loss…and fragments that have been only haphazardly and incompletely recollected.”\footnote{Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner, “Toward a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction,” Studies in the Literary Imagination 32.1 (Spring 1999): i-ii.} The contemporary archive has grown beyond its own institutional body: its role in the constitution of collective memory has become dispersed and distributed, reaching the private household. The archive in its larger sense, when it outgrows its physical limitations, can transgress the sheltering, definition, and protection of violent activities limited to a specific geographical location. That is how I first
encountered the riot photographs. The archive’s former containment of the images, its authority has become further diminished by public online access.

These writings on the archive posit that there is a certain amount of anxiety involved in encountering the fragments of history, the anxiety that then becomes a desire to paper over, to bridge these gaps. Thus framed by the online archive, the riot series makes visible the racialization of labour and the bodily inscription of various forms of violence while also frustrating a direct access to the past, only partially recoverable by consulting King’s report. So rather than reading the photographs for mapping ownership, the images, so focused on exteriority and visibility of the buildings and their owners, should be read for the connection between racist ideas and their violent expressions that focus on the body and its social dissemination.

The image that powerfully attests to this phenomenon figures most prominently in the avalanche of commemorative materials related to the riot; this photograph, discussed briefly in the previous chapter, depicts Masuya Ishimura’s business on 130 Powell Street. Fig. 4 and 5

Figure 5 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 130 Powell Street, $139” – entire (complete version).

Credit: William Lyon Mackenzie King, Library and Archives Canada [C-014118].
Most materials meant to generate publicity and interest in the riot feature this photograph that captures an impromptu assembly of various races and levels of citizenship. It is difficult to pinpoint a representation of Japanese ownership in this photograph. Three Caucasian officials are placed in the foreground: two are engaged in conversation with one of them turned away from the camera. In the background, a very young Japanese woman holding an infant, hides partially behind the door of her family’s shop and peers out at the camera. She smiles but also appears lost in the action around her. Sustained attention reveals that there is a Japanese male posing behind her, immersed in the shadow of the stoop and nearly invisible. These owners, in comparison to others described in this study, do not look like assured participants in the economy of ownership and it is pertinent to question the value in the reproducibility of this particular image. One reason this image has been so readily appropriated recently is that it is the only image that King had kept, in its original format, in his own files currently held at the Library and Archives Canada. The image, unique from others in the series, creates an ethically flawed understanding of the riot that differs considerably from what the set of images occasioned back in 1907.

The image’s initial appearance in its original non-cropped format, alongside another image from the series, was in the American illustrated magazine Harper’s Weekly special on the Vancouver Riot “White Canada: The slogan of Vancouver which cries revolt against the Anglo-Japanese alliance.” The photo caption reads “The Street Front of a Japanese Shop the Morning after the Riots.” The article focuses on pinpointing the responsibility for the unrest by gauging Japan’s attitudes towards the origins of racist groups in the United States: “They were hideous red glasses that Japan looked through when she turned her official gaze to San Francisco. But she

68 Library and Archives Canada. William Lyon Mackenzie King (Box: 1234, accession no. 1964-087, C-014118).
is going to pardon Vancouver.” 70 Civic responsibility seemed to have escaped Vancouver and this photograph mitigates any immediate sense of danger and loss. This particular image, more than others, functions to neutralize racism for North American audiences while showing Japanese assimilation as under control by placing Caucasian officials in the foreground and the young Japanese mother and her husband in the background.

The events of September 7, 1907 form a discomforting chapter in Canadian history, Canada being a country that today self-consciously presents an image of nurturing tranquility in ethnic relations. Canada has been styled, often in opposition to the United States, as having avoided extremes in ethnic relationships. This stems largely from the work of sociologists and historians who have suggested that Canada’s public violence “has been more, rather than less, closely related to the operations of the political system than has been the case in the United States,” and that although rare, “non-government collective violence has also frequently resulted in changes in both domestic and external policies…” 71 Such attitudes receive material form in photographic vignettes such as the grouping in front of Ishimura’s business.

September 7th, 2007 marked a hundred-year anniversary of the Anti-Asiatic Riot and the commemorative events in Vancouver, led in part by the organization Anniversaries ’07, included an academic conference held at Harbour Centre, a reconciliation dinner, a tour and a project by Vancouver’s video artist Karin Lee (to which I will return later). The photograph of Ishimura’s store was appropriated by Anniversaries ’07 for the reconciliation dinner invitation, as well as reproduced in the Vancouver Courier and the Georgia Straight newspaper articles that described

the nature of the commemorative projects.\textsuperscript{72} This photograph, as it appears in the commemorative projects, as well as in the University of British Columbia archives, was cropped from its much larger original that appears only in Harper’s Weekly and in King’s collection at the National Archives (visible online in the section titled “racial unrest”). This earlier, complete, version is the only image from this series housed at the Library and Archives Canada now part of Mackenzie King’s collection bequeathed by his family.\textsuperscript{73} This single existing riot photograph from the National Archives reveals a composition that includes a tall upper story of the damaged building whose two windows suffered minor damages as well. Additionally, in this unedited version, another Sikh male and a young Japanese boy appear in the lower right corner.

The cropped version, most commonly circulated in the recent sources, focuses on the vivid scene that takes place in front of the shop thus diminishing the forensic accuracy and purpose of the original. The prosaic upper story was excised from the image in order to focus on more salient elements which, as we have seen, do not include the owners nor the entirety of the actual damage. The cropping highlights the dramatic aspects in the image, most notably the spectacularly extensive shattered façade against which takes place the gathering of officials, owners and onlookers. The focus on the simultaneous spatial complexity and shallowness of the scene recalls a staged drama and the disconnect of the proscenium theatre and, paradoxically, creates a safe distance for the contemporary viewer of the image in these commemorative materials of 2007. The authors of these materials intend to redress the memory of the violent

\textsuperscript{72} Lisa Smedman, “Two-day conference examines city’s 1907 race riot,” Vancouver Courier (Friday, August 31, 2007): page unknown; and Pablo Carlito “Commemorating a race riot,” The Georgia Straight (Thursday, August 30, 2007): page unknown.

\textsuperscript{73} Library and Archives Canada. Box: 1234, accession no. 1964-087 NPC. “Damage to property of Japanese residents (Nishimura Masuya, Grocer, at 130 Powell Rd. S.) (Vancouver, B.C.),” http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/settlement/kids/021013-2141.3-e.html (accessed January 02, 2010). Additional information: “The series consists of photographs depicting aspects of the career of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Photographs were donated by William Lyon Mackenzie King or his estate and transferred directly from Laurier House. These photographs are not taken from textual records or other sources.” [Credit: William Lyon Mackenzie King / Library and Archives Canada / C-014118.]
event by: “including voices previously ignored or erased” and to ensure “collective responsibility and reconciliation.” The use of the single image seems contrary to the aim of redress: the photograph’s easy availability and its convenient aesthetic exaggeration constructs a simplistic and flawed representation of the riot and Japanese-Canadian relations.

The grouping in the photograph, in the original and in the cropped version, has the ability to exploit insincerely the fictitious echoes of ethnic harmony. The image encapsulates the crisis in the form of the shattered facade but it also envisions a long-term resolution to the momentary and fleeting conflict. The image captures different ethnic groups perpetually locked in an act of common exchange: perhaps animosity, but also the sharing of the same economic and civic space. The viewers’ dwelling on this reciprocity is a counterweight to the attempted erasure during the riot and prevents an acute awareness of the systematic exclusion of the Japanese from this province for most of the past century. The usage of images that diminish racial conflict demonstrate a desire for a reading of this sort of violence as an unhappy accident: a minor grievance voiced, perhaps too keenly, by an economically disadvantaged few, but nonetheless neutralized by widespread harmonious ethnic relations (arguably a reading for which King had shown preference by preserving this image). Such neutralizing uses of imagery for the purpose of commemorating traumatic events should be cautioned against, because it can, create an instance of mis-memory. To reiterate: the photograph, according to Baer, is structurally similar to trauma itself (an unknowable element that resists integration and resolution) and needs to be read as such in order to gain and produce an appropriate and ethical knowledge.

Baer proposes looking at images in a way that attends to their equivocality: images that avoid creating a narrative that prompts a nostalgic or sentimental resolution. Images that are used

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to evoke the obvious and the sensationalistic prompt an easy continuance between what is pictured and its traumatic inception. Hence, this iconic image, especially in its cropped form, accompanied by the commemorative texts becomes what Baer deems ineffective in creating an ethical memory. The focus on the (momentarily shared) civic space, the accidental multiculturalism in the image, as well as the deeply shattered store façade that gathered these ethnic groups together: all hint at a resolution. This resolution depends on assigning responsibility as the Anniversaries 2007 Consortium states:

> For too long Asian Canadian communities have had to take it upon themselves to try and right the wrongs of the past. It is time to ask those institutions that were responsible for wrongs to take on the responsibility of reviewing their history, drawing the lessons, and re-informing equity and anti-racism programs. For example, the Vancouver and District Labour Council has already committed to reviewing its past actions in relation to the Vancouver race riot, to identifying those who fought racism in the labour movement and to reviewing anti-racism programs. ⁷⁵

The image that the consortium chose to represent their ambitious agenda depicts the destruction as the occasion for the gathering of Caucasian, Japanese and Sikh citizens. However, the inclusion of the Caucasian officials dominating the foreground, taking charge of damage assessment, actually shifts the focus away from the Japanese owners’ contribution through unique modes of participation thereby reducing their agency.

Bear’s thesis along with the projects of Butler and Levinas bring into relief the underlying ideologies embedded in the gaze of the historian and thus lead one to focus on the ethics of looking and its connection to certain types of historical thinking. The riot photographs under discussion can be considered a dynamic photographic act that offers a particularly salient example of how a reading that strives to be open-ended can produce a meaning that is ethical in

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its consequences. Such a reading evades the typecasting of these sitters as either the victims of history or triumphant over their circumstances.

The riot photographs prompt attentive analysis of the subtle oscillations in agency between the actors and the framing devices that constitute representation of the event. Such a methodology affords an understanding of the photographs as a multivocal act that extends beyond the temporal and physical limits of the event itself. This requires being aware of the power dynamics of the institutions that house these images as well as the individuals that use them for the appropriation into their own projects (present author included). Attention to peripheral elements in these photos, such as the skin of the buildings, what it holds and what it denies, the destroyed shop signs, as well as the positioning, the gestures and clothes of the sitters and our reaction to them: all constitute a reading that challenges obvious or easy conclusions by reaching beyond conceiving the series as mere record or index.

There are limitations to Baer’s methodology in the case of these photographs even though he proposes a counter-Enlightenment reading. His conception is that photography parallels trauma by blocking “routine mental processes from converting an experience into memory, or forgetting…” because it “traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory” and thus documentary images that are conceived to claim witness, cannot actually give us access to this traumatic history. It is only the images that point to the crisis of referentiality, ones that refuse a narrative, that are closer to ethical representation. In his book, he specifically refers to the photographs made by the artist, Mikael Levin, of empty sites of the concentration camp locations where trauma occurred in the past. The trace of the actual trauma is gone- the access to the event has been denied, and thus more effectively embodies the experience as opposed to documentary photos including victims taken immediately after camp liberations.
The riot photographs indeed endeavor to capture the victims of the traumatic event for documentary purposes, for a specific type of bureaucratic and diplomatic witnessing. Reading these as art photographs, divorced from context and ignoring their history by considering them in complete isolation poses another problem of ethical representation. Baer’s overall project in his book is to stress historical contingency as opposed to historical or contextual reading that according to him, avoids the inevitable progression of cause and effect: teleology. Thus Baer actually attempts to set photographs in motion by showing that they are “radically open-ended.” I suggest that by teasing out these same qualities in the riot photographs by focusing on the details that resist their original purpose, make the images more ambiguous than when considered strictly vis a vis King’s report as embedded firmly in the bureaucratic process. Pointing out this dynamic ambiguity, while also attending to the circumstances that allowed them to be created, challenges a monolithic reading that absolves the reader of responsibility towards each of these images taken out of the archive. Additionally, static or monolithic reading of the images from the series (as either the triumph of the owners, or a forensic document of building damages) robs either the Japanese owners, or their dwellings, of agency that shifts in unstable ways across the series and through time. This allows for the sort of dynamic flow of time that Baer proposes: the interplay of past, present and the future. Benjamin and Levinas, furnish a methodology that allows to bring to the fore the details that resist reason, and that help to destabilize this series.

The 2007 commemorative events for the hundred-year anniversary of the Anti-Asiatic Riot also included a tour and a site-specific, interactive, multi-media installation by the artist Karin Lee. Inspired by her research in the archives and Chinese and Japanese newspaper records, Lee presented her installation by projecting both the archival footage and her filmed reenactment
of the 1907 riot. She situated the images in the three areas in which the riot took place: Chinatown, Japantown and the old City Hall (previously beside the Carnegie Library at Main and Hastings). The interactivity allowed the viewers to telephone a number from their cell phone and choose which interpretation they would like to hear, giving them a choice of hearing/seeing what version of history they were interested in. Thus, all three variants (the CBC version, a version in Chinese and another in Japanese) gave the viewers with cell phones the option to experience all three histories in one temporal and geographical location. The superimposition of the three projections served to compare and contrast what Lee saw as the stereotypes present in the Canadian Broadcast Corporation archival footage that she had located in the National Archives. The alternate, reenacted versions also served to offset the audio – resulting in the retelling of the story of a group of people under attack and how they chose to fight the rioters. Lee decided to spotlight the Asian resistance of the Caucasian mob.

Lee strove to create three distinct interpretations of the riots. The first, standing for the canonical version, employed the CBC footage of the riot in the English language. The second version played in Chinese (in actuality, to preserve historical accuracy, a Toisan dialect that was used 100 years ago); and the third, in Japanese. The Japanese version also included present-day images appropriated from television advertisements of Japanese automobiles, and moving images of Vancouver neighbourhoods and the Lower Mainland filmed from a Japanese car. The commercial glorification of the slick, quick and efficient Japanese automobiles such as Toyota Yaris and Matrix suggests a ready social acceptance of Japanese products due to their market appeal. Lee aims to retell the story by focusing on the irony of present-day visibility and adoption of Japanese culture. The car commercials signal the turn towards the thrill of the clever

and technically superior Japanese product design, from past fears of the able-bodied, cunning and hard-working Japanese population.

Lee’s insertion of the events back into the circulatory system of cultural production and her reinterpretation of the events poses a problem. Despite Lee’s careful and poignant reconstruction, Shattered demonstrates a resolution that is too straightforward. Her project suggests utopian redemption and a false sense of security, dangerous because it establishes a unilinear and thus false historical consciousness. As Lee demonstrates the use of the archive can also perpetuate the spatial delineation of activity. While Lee’s project enriches our reading of the original photographs by revisiting the issue, it is also ineffective in teasing out the tensions between what was then and what is now by attempting to resolve this tension though showing that the Japanese population prevailed. Similar Powell Grounds restructuring initiatives such as the creation of an annual Powell Street Festival, and the recreation of the so-called “Japantown” as a centre for celebrating Japanese and Asian culture, are replete with the desire to amass cultural capital. These current initiatives signal a desire for the continuation of ethnic performance in this locale. The riot photographs as a series in the archive offer both a fissure in, and an affirmation of, this narrative. When used in projects connected to Anniversaries 07 in order to grant the Japanese complete agency, the still images draw attention, rather statically, to the performance of space and how its users (the Japanese sitters) define it, mark it and identify with it. However, when the riot photographs are conceptualized as flexible spaces for the dynamic encounter between the photographer, the sitters, the rioters and archival containers in which they are housed, they are allowed to retain an element of doubt. This aporia is rhetorically useful because it prompts continued and renewed investigation (amounting to cultural capital and
fundamentals of agency such as motivation, freedom and creativity) granting the photographs and their subjects extended lives as they pass through various framing devices.

Furthermore, the critic Roland Barthes provided us with the tools that were meant to draw attention to how photographs bespeak the desire to bring the viewer closer to the past while they make clear the ultimate inability to do so. This complexity of the photographic image renders the boundaries between historical objects and their viewer/reader imprecise and ambiguous thus encouraging analytical and conceptual possibilities. The historian’s desire to connect with the past is frustrated by the inability to resolve the painful case of Vancouver’s race riot. However, the awareness of the contradictory feelings of closeness and distance is itself confirmation of the enduring somatic effect of these photographs. When they are animated through our reading of them they are constantly resisting their indexical nature, their instrumentality.

This riot series is a case of the photographer mobilizing the medium’s conventions while highlighting the vibrancy and complexity of what was before him, which went well beyond the prosaic task of documenting evidence. The riot, its locale, its use and representation in the photos, in subsequent projects (such as Lee’s) and in this study reveal and reproduce the performative dimension of the Powell street area integral to the continuously shifting perceptions of its spatial dynamics as a cultural and social hub to compensate for its current status as economically disadvantaged.

The life of select photographs from the riot series, from the moment of their inception through to the commemorative materials in 2007 points to consistent efforts to diminish the multiplicities and paradoxes of the images. The photographs, enlisted to various ends, as corroboration of the riot, or at times simply framed as illustrations of ethnic unrest, and more
recently, in an effort to rephrase history—fall into easy categorizations. Even the categories of “owner,” “victim,” and “other” operated in contradictory ways in the fashioning of the Japanese imperial subject during the modernization of both Japan and Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Such fashioning relied on complex spatial social relations and certain currency of presence and visibility which the riot series seem to confirm when appropriated as forensic/documentary evidence, but also deny when read as images of remembrance. Pertinently, as images of remembrance, the images also make both implicit and explicit references to various forms of violence by reformulating the notions of vulnerability. These forms of violence do not just comprise corporeal violence, or violence towards the shop facades as icons of ownership, but also epistemic violence that results from the limiting racial categories constructed within various contexts, including the archive.

These images have endured archival proliferations and intricate travels: from Vancouver, following the civic unrest, to Tokyo; deposited in King’s archive at the National Library and Archives, then handed back to the Japanese-Canadian photograph collection in the University of British Columbia’s archive of provincial history, and then reproduced for the Japanese Canadian Museum and the City of Vancouver Archives. Hence, rather than comprising a linear historical narrative, this study aims to interrogate these photographs for their capacities to offer fragmentary and conflicting local histories with the aid of several of the more important critical investigations into the study of photographs and the various consequences and complications arising from their use in the archive. Sustained attention to the open-endedness of these images comprising an ethical reading, reveals the ways in which they invite the historian to not construct but to interact with the fractured histories related to this important and overlooked event in Vancouver’s history (now part of provincial and federal histories).
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

At the turn of the century, the uneasy diplomatic ties between Canada and Japan drew on new forms of conceptualizing and imaging of Japanese immigrants’ national subjecthood and civic participation. Simplistic racial stereotypes in the media masked the burgeoning fears of the Japanese who were unwilling to remain “coolie” labour and who aspired to set themselves up in business. The racial stereotypes that pictured Japanese as unassimilated cunning workers living in substandard conditions are subverted in the riot photographs featuring the owners and their families. More importantly these photographs confirm the real anxieties that surrounded the established Japanese immigrants who were perceived as dangerous because they demanded equal participation in the economy by investing in the present and future generations.

The anti-Asiatic Riot attracted international attention in the press on the subject of immigration and the critique of violence. The photographs became the riot’s primary and crucial representation as exemplified by the illustrated article in Harper’s Weekly, among others. These living and enduring images of remembrance were generated and sustained by the Japanese consuls who played a role in the photographs’ creation and in their deposition at the University archives, King who viewed them and who kept one of the key images, and the present-day archivists and riot commemorators. Traumatic memories and photographs are related in that they make evident the disjuncture between seeing and knowing and between the notion of truth and the subjective experience. The riot photographs provide a good example of such a crisis of referentiality in that as long as they remain in circulation the meaning of their contents will remain unstable. However, the owners in these photographs constitute an element that
powerfully links the images to the original event and prompts a consideration of the reciprocity of the gaze and the effects of the encounter with these images on the viewer. Their presence in the photographs requires of each viewer an ethical responsibility of recognition thus establishing a level of dignity for the owners that overpowers the impartiality of the photographic assignment. By asking how such ethical responsibility is enunciated in these images reveals that the meanings of victimhood and civic subjechthood are malleable and that photography played an important role in the negotiation of these notions in the early history of Vancouver.

The riotous disturbance, strategically critiqued in the press, did not lead to immediate and enduring reforms for, or against, immigration. At the onset, the City of Vancouver refused financial responsibility for the riot damages and looked to the Federal Government to compensate the claims. In order to honour its diplomatic responsibilities Canada was responsive to Japan’s rather modest and informal assurance to restrict immigration numbers to 400 annually. Eventually, immigration policies did become more stringent and watchful in ensuing elections, producing the Lemieux-Hayashi agreement, the adoption of continuous passage regulations, and further restriction on Chinese immigration with the implementation of a head-tax. Shortly after the riot, the Vancouver police assured the protection of Asian businesses by disallowing subsequent anti-Asiatic meetings to take place. Their swift police work and efficient post-riot arrests, however, was merely a face-saving restoration of civic pride, rather than a real acknowledgment of the Japanese as Canadian, or British, subjects.77 Indeed, anti-Japanese sentiment increased exponentially and reached its apogee during the Second World War.

Diplomacy provided a means of negotiating responsibility. As John Price writes: “The fact that migration and mobility rights were, in the case of non-British subjects, regulated

through treaties meant that Chinese and Japanese migrants could at times turn to diplomatic channels to appeal grievances […] to seek ‘alternate diplomatic representation.’”  

As this study demonstrates, it is possible to conceptualize the riot photographs as such an attempt to visually seek an “alternate diplomatic representation.” The anxiety about appearances functioned as a tool for modernizing the Japanese subject. As outlined in the previous chapter, the Meiji government wished to present an image of a non-feudal, modernized and powerful nation to the Western world. This image of a civilized nation rested on creating a modern and cosmopolitan citizen. The photographs formulate a retort to the Kumric photos, the racist cartoons, and the attempted erasure during the Anti-Asiatic riot. Moreover, they are now a ubiquitous presence nationally owing to archival digital technologies. In contrast, such participation was denied to the Chinese casualties of the riot. A year later King also investigated the losses to Chinese businesses, but only as an afterthought after the government debated its international image and decided on a more balanced approach. Still, no photographs were taken, and none have appeared in the archives so far. Some of the same commentaries on the riot in the local papers that displayed photographs of Japanese claimants published only a few images of boarded-up businesses from Chinatown with no signs of effort to personalize them.  

The riot images moved through time and different channels of communications resulting in the transmutation of agentic power. The initial encounter between the owners, the photographer, and the consuls Ishii and Morikawa generated images that visualized a setting for profuse socio-political texts and brought to the fore the diplomatic aspects of Japanese-Canadian relations. This significant thread was picked up by subsequent appropriators of the images, and at times -- demonstrated by the cropped single image in King’s archive and the iconic group

78 Price, “Orienting the Empire,” 56.  
79 For example see Anonymous, “Damage on Shanghai Alley,” and “Fangoun’s Wrecked Store,” The Vancouver Daily Province (September 9, 1907): cover page.
image -- intensified the focus on the people in the images. Through the archive the owners in the photographs tip the balance towards presence and civic participation and thus away from erasure and racial totalisation. The suggestion that the Japanese, as victims in the riot, achieved an ideal victory over a clearly defined oppressor, generates a closed-ended and sentimental understanding of the images associated with the anti-Asiatic riot.

These images are situated at the interstices of forensic documentation, social reform photography, and images of trauma remembrance. The photographer, clearly aware of the stylistic conventions of documentary, social-reform, and photography, subverted his assignment with his selective vision while at the same time ensuring that the images were effective in negotiating the claims. The photographer’s anonymity, along with Ishii, Morikawa, and King’s involvement in naming the owners in the report -- and of course the present author -- all ensure that the claimants, their livelihood shattered and erased in the riot, emerge as a powerful, multidimensional, and enduring presence. Historical photographs linked to conflict should be systematically analysed on a micro-level in, and outside of, the archives for their social and ethical implications; for, if diplomacy deals with managing relations, photographs and their travels are embedded in such management of appearances.
Figure 8 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 205 Powell Street, Japanese Boarding House Union, $42.80.”

Credit: University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Research Collection [JCPC 36.006].

Figure 9 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 431 Powell Street, $2.”

Credit: University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Research Collection [JCPC 36.011].
Figure 10 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 355 Powell Street, $19.25.”

Credit: University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Research Collection [JCPC 36.009].

Figure 11 “Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 - 151 East Cordova Street, $12.”

Credit: University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Research Collection [JCPC 36.025].


Archives


City of Vancouver Archives. Major Matthews Photostat series (PHO P307); Asiatic Exclusion League news clipping file (MS 13,200; M4367 and Riots M7984).
Library and Archives Canada. *William Lyon Mackenzie King* (Box: 1234, accession no. 1964-087, C-014118).