

Christine Mok

EAST WEST PLAYERS AND AFTER: ACTING AND ACTIVISM

“Where are all the Asian actors in mainstream New York theatre?” What began as a plaintive status update on Facebook launched a full-scale investigation by Asian American actors that culminated in a report titled “Ethnic Representation on New York City Stages” and the formation in the fall of 2011 of an advocacy group, the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC). AAPAC’s findings were disheartening. In the preceding five years, Asian Americans had received only 3 percent of all available roles in not-for-profit theatre and only 1.5 percent of all available roles on Broadway. The percentage of roles filled by African American and Latino actors, in contrast, had increased since 2009. According to the report, “Asian Americans were the only minority group to see their numbers go down from levels set five years ago.”¹ The data AAPAC compiled were both surprising in their concreteness and unsurprising in their bleakness. The Facebook query sparked an active digital conversation that touched a collective sense of discord just below the surface for many Asian American theatre artists, especially actors. Ralph Peña, artistic director of Ma-Yi Theatre Company, invited key Facebook commenters to hold a more formal conversation about access, embodiment, and Asian American representation. This group, many of whom were artists in midcareer, trained at top conservatories, and fostered in New York City’s vibrant Asian American theatre community, became the Steering Committee of AAPAC. The members of the Steering Committee channeled their frustration and anger into archive fever by researching and

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This piece began as a conference paper for the panel “50 Years of East West Players at Home and in the World,” presented at the annual conference of the Association for Asian American Studies in April 2015. I am grateful to my fellow presenters, Ju Yon Kim, Elizabeth Son, and Areum Jeong, and our chair and discussant, Josephine Lee, for feedback, fellowship, and fierceness.

documenting ethnic representation on Broadway and in sixteen of the largest not-for-profit theatres in New York City over a five-year period. In front of an audience of three hundred, members of AAPAC presented their findings at a roundtable at Fordham University on 13 February 2012 that included prominent artistic directors, agents, directors, casting directors, and producers and was moderated by David Henry Hwang. With the report in hand, AAPAC members roused the New York theatre community with a series of town hall-style meetings and urged theatrical production gatekeepers to do, if not better, then, something.²

The visual components of the invitation to the roundtable illustrated many of AAPAC's concerns. The central image depicts the bust of a figure shrouded in black clothing. The clothing could be *shinobi shōzoku*, the black uniform martial arts practitioners favor that is commonly seen on stereotypical ninjas, or *kuroko*, the black clothing *bunraku* puppeteers wear. These could also be the blacks of a backstage hand. No skin is visible. The figure's face is also covered in white bandages. Judging by the seams, the bandage has been wrapped around the mouth, nose, and eyes. Plastic black frames sit atop the mummified face and the phrase "TALK TO ME" is stamped on the bandage over where the mouth should be. The Asian American actor is blinded (perhaps color-blinded?) and rendered mute by some past unalterable event or harm. The figure of the Asian American actor can neither see nor be seen. However, even mummified, the Asian American actor's physical presence persists, demanding to be engaged with. *S/*he announces that Asian American performers in New York City are getting together to talk about the challenges they face and what they can do to change how they are seen. According to the 2010 census, the estimated number of residents of Asian descent in the United States was 17.3 million, or about 5.6 percent of the total population.³ According to the Pew Research Center, that number has increased to "a record 18.2 million in 2011, or 5.8% of the total U.S. population, up from less than 1% in 1965."⁴ In light of this increase, the question of where all the Asian actors in mainstream New York theatre are is not just a rhetorical one.

Since publicizing their report, AAPAC members have had their hands full. They spearheaded the response to casting controversies surrounding La Jolla Playhouse's adaptation of *The Nightingale* (2012) and the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *The Orphan Zhao* (2012). Both productions drew upon Chinese source materials but included Asian, Asian American, or Asian British actors in only a few roles, and these are often marginalized and even derogatory roles. In 2013, AAPAC released a public statement in opposition to the use of brownface in the Broadway production of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The group continues to release reports about diversity statistics. Although AAPAC's findings are and were disheartening, they confirm the lived experiences of Asian American artists. Asian Americans cannot find opportunities to engage in work on the stage. Or, more precisely, Asian Americans *still* cannot find opportunities to engage in work on the stage.

In 1965, a group of actors in Los Angeles, frustrated by limited opportunities and dismayed by the degrading depictions of Asians and Asian Americans onstage and onscreen, came together to found a theatre company and create a home to foster and showcase their skill and talent. From its humble beginnings in a church

basement, East West Players (EWP) has become the nation's foremost Asian American theatre company. It has become a model for Asian American theatre by fostering the careers of countless Asian American theatre makers and creating an enduring legacy of Asian American playwrighting. For pioneers of Asian American theatre like EWP, the representation—even the act of presentation—of Asian America was a political statement that they had to take into their own hands. Nearly two generations later, the Asian American actors who founded AAPAC follow in East West Players' footsteps by defining the grounds on which questions of embodiment, access, and representation for Asian American artists can be answered. If the problems faced by Asian American theatre makers today are not exactly the same as before, the similarities echo as a prompt, a barely forgotten line (of inquiry) inviting a response to the plea to "TALK TO ME." Because crises of representation punctuate Asian American theatre history,⁵ I present these events, the founding of EWP and AAPAC, as paired affective and political moments to examine the complex matrix of action and agency that animates the labor(ing) Asian American actor, whose body has borne and continues to bear the weight of representation.

TYPECAST

The model of activism at EWP created new narratives of belonging and re-defined skill and talent that shaped Asian American subject formation, both parallel to and in conjunction with the Asian American movement. During the 1960s and 1970s, a politics of coalition shaped "Asian American" into a racial category. Many Asian Americans were involved in antiwar activism, student protests that demanded curricular diversity, and the feminist, Black Power, and New Left movements. The sense of being "*in* American culture, but not *of* it"⁶ prompted Asian Americans to define—and often create—a culture that they were both *in* and *of*. Using cultural production, Asian American writers, artists, and activists experimented with representation as a means of articulating aesthetic and political identities. Representation is the very stuff of theatre, so a battle of cultural production was waged on the American stage as anxieties about and questions regarding slippages between real and racist, or Asian American and stereotype, collided with the materiality of the actor. Historically, the authenticating impulse has been a fundamental part of the politics and form of Asian American theatre. The presentation of Asian Americans was a form of activism, in opposition, for example, to the long-standing tradition of white actors performing ethnic Asian roles in yellowface.⁷ Asian American theatre makers rejected the fake performances, rooted in stereotypes, that had been proliferating onstage in their name and became intensely invested in forms of embodiment that foregrounded the Asian American actor.

When scholars mark the inception of Asian American theatre in 1965, they are citing the official beginning of EWP.⁸ The place of EWP in American theatre is cemented in both history and the present. It is now the longest-running professional theatre of color in the United States and the largest theatrical producing organization of work by and about Asian Americans. EWP was integral to the flourishing of Asian American playwrighting,⁹ in great part because it sought a new repertoire.

The founders of EWP and the other early Asian American theatre companies (EWP's inception triggered a wave of new theatre companies)¹⁰ created the shape, purpose, and goals of Asian American theatre.

While the establishment of EWP was concurrent with the Asian American, feminist, and antiwar movements, the actors' initial impetus for the company stemmed from a more personal politics. The founding company members, James Hong, Beulah Quo, June Kim (aka June Kyoko Lu), Pat Li, Guy Lee, Soon-Tek Oh, Yet Lock, Rae Creevey, and Mako [Iwamatsu], found common ground primarily as actors who were trying to find roles that stretched beyond the stereotypical orientalist death throes they were being cast to perform in Hollywood; at the time, they were not seeking a panethnic Asian American identity. "Finally, in 1965," Mako, the first artistic director of EWP, recounted in an interview with Karen Shimakawa, "we said . . . 'We gotta do things of our *own choice*. We can't wait for someone to say, 'Hey, you gotta do something'—we can't wait for that,' so . . . we started East West Players."¹¹

While EWP would become a catalyst for the development of Asian American theatre, the company was initially created as a way to foster and showcase the company members' acting talent for Hollywood producers. The founders were invested in representation as a means of combating discrimination. In an interview with Esther Kim Lee, Mako explained the strategy behind EWP: "Casting directors see you only as 'Oriental.' The more 'Oriental' things you know the more jobs you'll get." Lee places this objective within a continuum of acting and activism: "The actors rejected stereotypical images of 'orientals,' but at the same time, they projected a new version of Asianness that was packaged as intercultural and artistic."¹² While Mako seemed to offer a simple solution for the casting woes of his generation of actors, he overlooked the (il)logic of casting that Brian Herrera cogently terms the "mythos of casting" that "cloaks within mystery the historical practices—by turns material, creative and proprietary—that guide how an actor's labor is (and is not) valued as a commodity."¹³ "Oriental," like the actor's labor and the Asian American actor's body, is a commodity, but for which market? How, and for whom, EWP would expand on "Oriental" or redefine the terms of possibility for their artistic careers was up for debate, and the founding members disagreed fiercely during the early years of the company. The early decisions that they made about the physical space for rehearsal and performance, those with whom they would collaborate, and the repertoire of the company indelibly shaped the meaning of Asian America onstage.

Although Asian American theatre makers embraced the impulse to authenticate, to erase stereotypes and racism with depictions of real Asian Americans, the move to replace one with the other was not so easy. It is, as Josephine Lee writes, "dangerous to assume that 'Asian America' can be fully expressed through a particular body of work."¹⁴ That an Asian American actor asked the initial question "Where are all the Asian actors in mainstream New York theatre?" is important, because the query is one of recognition and orientation. The question was not asked because there is a dearth of Asian (American) performers; any number of artists and writers are eagerly waiting in the wings. Instead, the unnamed Asian American actor asks because s/he sees only racial dissonance walking the boards

of mainstream theatre. Asian Americans as performing bodies operate in contradiction. Their labor is highly visible, marked as theatrical; Asian Americans are extraordinary in their authenticity. At the same time, their bodies and national identity are invisible. They are perpetual foreigners, unable to be comfortably integrated, inauthentic imposters whose citizenship is dubious, whether perceived as having foreign allegiance to enemy states or as anchor babies perverting birthright citizenship. Asians in the United States have historically been presented as indeterminate and often undesirable subjects in relation to the nation-state. Their very hypervisibility, along with the burden that is the invisible knapsack of whiteness, informs—or, to be more statistically accurate, precludes—the casting of Asian American actors in roles that might otherwise not presume a specific racial identification. As David Palumbo-Liu writes, “The occasional absence of ‘Asian American’ from racial categories in America reflects the undecidability of the term. Asian/American¹⁵ resides *in transit*, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of *both* a ‘minority’ identity and a ‘majority’ identity. This constant transitivity evinces precisely the malleability and resistance of ‘America’ with regard to racial reformation.”¹⁶ Palumbo-Liu’s intervention, graphically depicted in the solidus, highlights the unsettled nature of Asian American racialization, foregrounding the contested border between Asian and American. Constructions of minority, majority, Asia, America, inherently unstable and multiple in their definitions, coalesce in the figure of the Asian American (actor).

In similar fashion to the multiple sites and identities that the Asian American (actor’s) body bears, Karen Shimakawa traces twin “(and sometimes bitterly conflicting)”¹⁷ impulses in the missions of Asian American theatre: “a desire ‘to tell our stories’—to create and perform roles that would reflect the heretofore buried or erased histories and experiences of Asian Americans as American—and another to fill traditionally white roles with Asian American actors.”¹⁸ Both desires are evident in the early repertoire of EWP, which included classical pieces from both the Asian and the European canons. However, when executive director Soon-Tek Oh officially resigned from the company, EWP followed Mako’s vision, which melded the desire to “tell our stories” with the desire to highlight talent (and the personal politics that accompanied that practice).¹⁹ With each grant, workshop, and production, EWP shaped the form and function of Asian American theatre. It developed Asian American actors and playwrights, used acting workshops instead of showcase performances, held playwriting contests (the first Asian American playwriting contest was conducted under the auspices of EWP in 1968), and began playwrights-in-residence programs. All of these practices helped usher in the first wave of Asian American playwrights, introducing and supporting a repertoire of Asian American playwriting that persists today.²⁰

The alliance between actors and writers and the importance of the generative acts across and between them are profound legacies of EWP. The tie between playwrights and actors that was forged in EWP’s formative years is an integral part of the (re)inventive practices that Mako supports in his construction of the “Oriental.” Contemporary Asian American playwrights extend this relation in “Asian or American,” a recent series published by *Breaking: (Character)*, the online theatre magazine of the playscript publishing company Samuel French. While she might

not “wake up thinking about all the Asian American things I’m going to do all day,” playwright Kimber Lee feels accountable: “Maybe because I started out as an actor and felt very deeply the lack of opportunities for Asian American performers, when I sit down to write I feel a responsibility to write roles for actors of color. . . . It is a joy to create a piece of work that can offer actors of color a chance to test the full range of their skill the way white actors have more often been able to do.”²¹

DOUBLE TAKE

Philip Kan Gotanda’s play *Yankee Dawg You Die* dramatizes both the generational differences and systemic similarities that define and trap two Asian American actors, Vincent and Bradley, whose consciences and careers smash and converge over the course of the play. The play was initially produced as a workshop at EWP in 1986 and premiered at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in 1988 and at Playwrights Horizons in 1989. However, EWP did not produce it until 2001, in the same season as a revival of Frank Chin’s *In the Year of the Dragon*. Gotanda titled the play after a game he and a friend had invented. After recalling old movies and stereotypical lines of “Hollywood Orientalese,” “we soon found ourselves locked in a raucous game of dueling stereotypes.”²² Each player would say the line “Yankee dog you die” with as much “Orientalese” as possible, “each continuing to challenge the other till our performances had reached grotesque proportions. In other words, our performances were now perfect for the portrayal of Asians in American movies.”²³ Gotanda’s play is at once a memory game, a duel, and an exercise in spectacle—one that signals a transformative practice like the one Mako proposes as a solution for Asian American actors’ “Orientalness.” While Gotanda and his friend sought to outdo the other in embodying a racist performance past, the play, according to Gotanda, “was to be my tribute to Asian American actors, the ones who had breathed so much life into my works and to whom I owed so much.”²⁴ The past tense of Gotanda’s dedication is curious, prompting a question of to what the play is in fact a tribute. Does Gotanda intend it as an homage to a history of the struggles with acting, cultural representation, and activism?

The play is structured episodically and includes enough metatheatrical elements to place *Yankee Dawg You Die* within a tradition of rehearsal plays. The scenes offer glimpses into a life both on and off the stage and screen (in the waiting areas outside audition rooms, at after parties, at postperformance watering holes, and in rehearsal rooms). Just as Vincent and Bradley jockey for power (they each claim to be “leading men”), they move across the points of what Ariel Watson names the “anxious triangle” of playwright, spectator, actor in meta-theatre.²⁵ Sometimes they are in control of a script, and sometimes they are mere spectators; often they are poised to achieve some objective that is dematerializing in front of their very eyes. As Vincent and Bradley fight to be the leading man in their double act, they are also negotiating with the “Orientalese” stereotypes that riddle stage and screen.

Influential readings by Josephine Lee and James Moy from the 1990s pair Gotanda’s play with David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* in arguments about

how the two works grapple with racial and gender stereotypes. While Moy argues that “both plays seem to be scathing indictments of the Western need to demean, stereotype, and psychologically control the Orient and its representations,”²⁶ he ultimately reads both plays’ surrogation of these representations as moments of self-destruction, triggered by the “trap of complicity.”²⁷ Lee’s reading considers the anxiety that stereotype reveals (in its very repetition)²⁸ and the ways the (Asian American) actor’s body and the (Asian American) spectator’s identification with stereotype might exceed its very limitations in reanimation: “Even though the role of the stereotype is familiar and detestable, the casting of the Asian body is enough to ensure a kind of welcome disruption, an illicit pleasure that sets up a key tension between stereotype and performer.”²⁹ Lee acknowledges pleasure, as well as the complicated identification that happens between (Asian) performer and stereotype. The key to a resistant reading of stereotype in the play is the performer’s body.

When Shimakawa and Tina Chen analyzed Gotanda’s play in the early 2000s, they both built on the ambivalence of stereotype to analyze the subversive potential for political action.³⁰ Chen situates the pleasure that Lee sees in the Asian actors’ embodiment of stereotype as a guilty one that, while problematic, does become a partial foundation for the coalitional frameworks that create and sustain Asian American identity. She ties the redeployment of stereotype in the play to the “performative nature of Asian American identity, which in some ways must always be performed into existence through acts of impersonation.”³¹ Shimakawa also complicates any easy parsing of good and bad representation. By attending to the ways that stereotypes are desirable and profitable commodities that can transform consumers (the audience) and producers (the actors), Shimakawa draws attention to strategies in the play where the abject, stereotypic, racist roles may be “exploited, deliberately and insubordinately mimed” to “undermine their abilities to signify effectively.”³²

These scholars provide powerful readings of Gotanda’s use of stereotype in the play. Still, the pleasure, ambivalence, and anxiety around stereotypes, as well as many of the stereotypes themselves, remain in contemporary representations of Asian Americans. The inciting incidents of EWP and AAPAC provide a temporal crossroads at which to (re-)encounter *Yankee Dawg You Die* through what Joseph Roach names an Orphic poetics for performers and performance theorists. Roach notes that every performance is located at such a junction:

Choosing the right moment to look back and the right moment to look forward is the crux of any successful performance, which must combine invention with memory: invention without memory is irresponsible; memory without invention is deadly (Moten).³³

Instead of the rising and falling of Freytag’s triangle or a simplification of then and now (and how such a then might affect the here and now), Roach offers another kind of dramatic structure. While Orpheus may lose Eurydice by looking back too soon, Gotanda’s characters are object lessons in Roach’s irresponsible and deadly dyad. Bradley is younger, an emerging artist who trained at the

American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco. His emerging career was fostered in the Asian American film and theatre community. Vincent is in the twilight of a career built on performances as “waiters, Viet Cong killers, chimpanzees, drug dealers, hookers.”³⁴ Although both actors work to distinguish themselves from each other (whether in choosing to drink wine or club soda or in identifying as “oriental” or Asian American), it is difficult for them to untangle a web of disdain and admiration. While Bradley might know the lines that earned Vincent his Academy Award nomination for playing Peter O’Toole’s faithful dying sidekick Saki and he might take pleasure in the orientalist fantasy of Charley Chop Suey, he sees in Vincent the very problem that Asian American theatre is the solution for. In one of the best-known speeches in the play, Vincent reminds Bradley that the history of Asian American performers did not begin in the 1960s:

VINCENT: You wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for all the crap we had to put up with. We built something. We built the mountain, as small as it may be, that you stand on so proudly looking down at me. Sure, it’s a mountain of Charley Chop Sueys and slipper-toting geishas. But it is also filled with forgotten moments of extraordinary wonder, artistic achievement. . . . Dead dreams, broken backs, and long forgotten beauty. I swear, sometimes when I’m taking my curtain call I can see this shadowy figure out of the corner of my eye taking the most glorious, dignified bow. Who remembers? *Who* appreciates?³⁵

Vincent seeks an audience who will remember and appreciate those who have preceded him (“Who . . . *Who?*”), and he tells Bradley that attention must be paid. What Gotanda seems to suggest is that Bradley ultimately misinterprets theatre history. In his desire to excise—or exorcise—Vincent and the performers of the Forbidden City and the Chop Suey Circuit, Bradley condemns himself to repeat Vincent’s “Hollywood Orientalese.”

Of the many conversational tropes that yoke the two generations of actors in *Yankee Dawg You Die*, one is a shtick about *not* remembering: “I’m an angel. *No memory.*” Bradley and Vincent might say that they do not remember, but certain memories run deep. The play opens and closes with the same monologue, a text for Sergeant Soto, one of Vincent’s Oriental villain parts, a character who is guarding American prisoners. While the speech remains the same, immortalized on (a fictive) screen, Gotanda scripts a repetition with a difference. After eight scenes of duets and duels, Vincent asks Bradley, “Remember this?” and as Moto, he repeats his lines, until finally, dropping the “Orientalese” accent, he asks: “What is wrong with you? What the hell is wrong with you? I graduated from the University of California here in Los Angeles. I was born and raised in the San Joaquin Valley and spent my entire life growing up in California. Why can’t you hear what I’m saying? Why can’t you see me as I really am?”³⁶ This time Bradley is ready for Vincent’s questions, and while he does not provide any answers, the play ends on a moment of recognition.

On the occasion of its EWP’s fiftieth anniversary, it is clear that the legacy of actors and activism is alive and well. At the same time, the circumstances around the birth of AAPAC mark, at one end of a spectrum, a failure, and at another point

in the continuum, a hiccup in the narrative of “progress.” Where are all the Asian American actors? How do artists take activist stances against problems with representation? Why can’t you hear what I am saying? Why can’t you see me as I really am? *How* do we remember? Each of these questions may signal a crisis in representation, but together they gesture toward a crossroads of invention and memory, a conversation (“TALK TO ME”) that seeks to encompass the complex and contradictory designation of an identity rooted in difference and scripted by history. For the past fifty years, EWP has taught us to see, know, and feel that identity onstage and has challenged us to look both forward and back.

ENDNOTES

1. Asian American Performers Action Coalition, “Ethnic Representation on New York City Stages: 2006/07–2010/11 Seasons,” February 2012, 7–9, quote on 7, www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/ethnic_representation_nyc.pdf, accessed 8 February 2016.

2. I received valuable insight into the events that led to the formation of AAPAC, the process by which the group come into being, and the nuts and bolts of the organization in a phone interview with Steering Committee member Peter Kim, 20 April 2015.

3. Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010,” 2010 Census Briefs, March 2011, www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf, accessed 8 February 2015.

4. “The Rise of Asian Americans,” Pew Research Center, 19 June 2012 [updated 4 April 2013], www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/#fn-12979-3, accessed 8 February 2016.

5. AAPAC also has a forebear in the organization Oriental Actors of America, which was formed in 1968 to protest yellowface practices. For more, see the subsection “Oriental Actors of America, New York City,” in Esther Kim Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–36. Another moment in Asian American theatrical history that defined discourse on race and representation is the protest surrounding the casting and Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*. See Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 107–38; Esther Kim Lee, 177–99; Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 57–76; and David A. Schlossman, *Actors and Activists: Politics, Performance, and Exchange among Social Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137–206. Yutian Wong also provides a provocative return to the musical and the protests related to it in her chapter “Pedagogy of the Scantly Clad: Studying *Miss Saigon* in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 180–216.

6. William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 45, italics in original.

7. For more on the history of yellowface performance see Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s–1920s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

8. Josephine Lee, Yuko Kurahashi, Esther Kim Lee, Dorinne Kondo, and Karen Shimakawa have been instrumental in charting the history and theory of Asian American theatre and performance.

9. EWP held the first Asian American playwriting contest in 1968. EWP’s 1969 production of their first prizewinning play—Henry Woon’s *Now You See, Now You Don’t*—marked several firsts in the theatre company’s history and in theatre history. As Esther Kim Lee notes, “The play was the first EWP production to address issues unique to Asian Americans, and it is considered the first Asian American play to receive staging.” Esther Kim Lee, 46.

10. Frank Chin, whose *Chickencoop Chinaman* later won the playwriting competition hosted by East West Players in 1971, founded the Asian American Theatre Workshop (which became the Asian American Theatre Company) in San Francisco in 1973. The next year the Theatrical Ensemble of Asians (TEA, later known as the Asian Exclusion Act and then finally as Northwest Asian American Theatre) was created in Seattle. In 1977, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre was founded in New York City. Companies proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s across the United States: the Angel Island Theatre Company and the Silk Road Theatre Project (now Silk Road Rising) were established in Chicago, Theater Mu (now Mu Performing Arts) was founded in Minneapolis–St. Paul, and Pom Siab Hmoob Theatre (formerly the Hmong Theatre Project; (now Center for Hmong Arts and Talent) was founded in 1990 in Minneapolis. Ma-Yi began as a Filipino company in New York City in 1989 but has since embraced a more panethnic production model and has been influential producing and cultivating new work through its Writer’s Lab. The National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO), which was also founded in 1989 in New York (by Richard Eng and Mia Katigbak), produces classical works with Asian and Asian American casts. Although Peter Kim, the member of the AAPAC Steering Committee I interviewed while researching this piece, is primarily an actor, he is also the associate producer of NAATCO. For a look at both open and closed companies, see the directory on Asian American Theatre Revue, a Web site founded and edited by veteran theatre producer Roger Tang, www.aatrevue.com.

11. Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 58–9, italics in original.

12. Esther Kim Lee, 45.

13. Brian Eugenio Herrera, “The Best Actor for the Role, or the Mythos of Casting in American Popular Performance,” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 27.2 (2015): 1–11, at 1. <http://jadjournal.org/2015/04/24/the-best-actor-for-the-role-or-the-mythos-of-casting-in-american-popular-performance/>.

14. Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997): 8.

15. Several scholars have advocated and adopted Palumbo-Liu’s use of the solidus between “Asian” and “American.” See David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Sean Metzger, “At the Vanishing Point: Theater and Asian/American Critique,” *American Quarterly* 63.2 (2011): 277–300.

16. Palumbo-Liu, 5, italics in original.

17. Karen Shimakawa, “(Re)Viewing an Asian American Diaspora: Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, and the Northwest Asian Theatre,” in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, ed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 41–56, at 42.

18. *Ibid.*

19. For more on the inner workings and dynamics of East West Players’ first five years, see Esther Kim Lee, 43–53; Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 58–9; Yuko Kurahashi, *Asian American Culture on Stage: The History of the East West Players* (New York: Garland, 1999), 21–44.

20. In *A History of Asian American Theatre*, Esther Kim Lee tracks the first, second, and third waves of Asian American playwriting. Several play anthologies have embraced this periodicity. See Chay Yew, ed., *Version 3.0: Contemporary Asian American Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2011).

21. Kimber Lee, “How Does the Label ‘Asian American’ Impact Your Work as a Playwright?” *Breaking: (Character)*, 16 June 2015, accessed 16 June 2015, www.samuelefrench.com/breakingcharacter/?p=3080.

22. Philip Kan Gotanda, “Introduction,” in *New American Plays 1*, ed. Peter Filichia (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), 79–80, quote at 80.

23. *Ibid.*, 80.

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24. Ibid.
25. Ariel Watson, "The Anxious Triangle: Modern Metatheatres of the Playwright, Actor, and Spectator" (Ph.D. diss., Dept. of English, Yale University, 2008).
26. James Moy, "David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yankee Dawg You Die*: Repositioning Chinese-American Marginality on the American Stage," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 84.
27. Ibid., 86.
28. Homi Bhabha notes this anxiety when he states that "the stereotype . . . is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated"; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.
29. Josephine Lee, 101.
30. For Shimakawa, "[abjection as figured in *Yankee Dawg You Die*] does not suggest that Asian American men can or should opt to portray themselves only as something other than abject; it does, however, offer possibly constructive strategy whereby such abject roles may be profitably exploited, deliberately and subordinately mimed in ways that may ultimately undermine their abilities to signify effectively"; Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 120. For Chen, "by first acknowledging how stereotype helps to form identity and then re-staging stereotype using its own performative repertoire of exaggeration and grotesqueness, *Yankee Dawg You Die* argues for the possibility of out-posing the poses of stereotype"; Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 76.
31. Chen, 81.
32. Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 120.
33. Joseph Roach, "Performance: The Blunders of Orpheus," *PMLA* 125.4 (2010): 1078–86, at 1082–3. Roach is drawing on Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
34. Philip Kan Gotanda, "*Fish Head Soup*" and *Other Plays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 100.
35. Ibid., 98–9, italics in original.
36. Ibid., 126–7, italics in original.