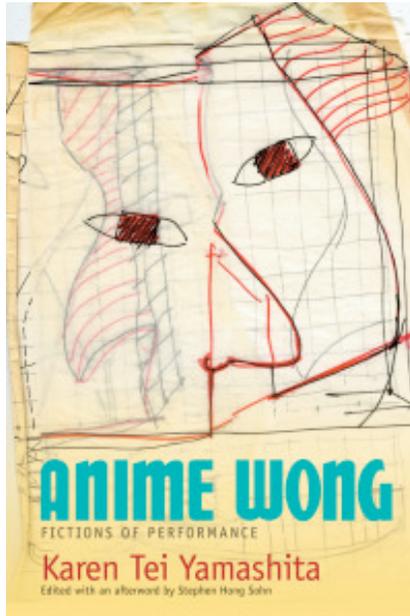


Possibilities Remain Vibrant Within Yamashita's 'Anime Wong'

By [Roxanne Ray](#)

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"Anime Wong: Fictions of Performance" by Karen Tei Yamashita • Courtesy image

Karen Tei Yamashita is a writer, performer, and educator whose work has focused on race, ethnicity, and gender. She has recently compiled numerous works over the course of her career into an anthology, entitled "[Anime Wong: Fictions of Performance](#)," documenting the texts of her past performances.

"'Anime Wong' is a collection of my past performances but also my thinking about Asian America and the way we are implicated in the future as global citizens and transnational subjects," Yamashita said.

Despite the global focus of Yamashita's topics, the presentation of her works was very localized, mainly in Southern California. "One of the performances in the book is 'Godzilla Comes to Little Tokyo,' which also had the title 'GilaRex.' That musical had a run in Seattle at the Northwest Asian American Theater," Yamashita said. "The other performances were all staged in Los Angeles."

Yet, Yamashita imagines that this West Coast locale is a gateway to the world. "I am writing from the Silicon Valley, home of Google, Apple, and Facebook," she said. "So I suspect that we are always somehow already involved in thinking about

the global, especially as it is framed by the cyber and digital.”

And the cyber and digital, she claimed, are ubiquitous. “Our lives are so involved and influenced by technology and science; how can anyone escape?” she asked. “Even a sort of luddite like me had to learn to use the computer and the software applications embedded in the systems that make it useful. I am forced to use e-mail and to use the writing system, Word, that makes my writing accessible to my publisher, but also to my students.”

These personal experiences influenced the writings and performances reflected in “Anime Wong.” “My concern had much to do with technology as it is associated with Asia, Asians, and Asian Americans,” she said. “The production and development of technology and the thinking systems that organize and utilize these products are deeply associated with Asia and Asians.”

But it was not just historical links between technology and Asia that concerned Yamashita: “What interested me is how that association has translated to an imagination of the future and how that future has been racialized as Asian or Oriental.”

She particularly wanted to explore how that racialization process affects actual people. “I am also thinking about what our global thinking via the cyber-net has to do with real people in real places, their languages, cultures, quality of life, and the terror of war,” she said.

Her perspective was augmented by time spent outside of the United States. “I also lived for a decade in Brazil, raised my family there in those years, and saw global changes geopolitically, environmentally, and multi-nationally from that perspective,” she said.

This experience helped Yamashita develop and infuse her work with “a planetary concern that connects and demonstrates our responsibility as global citizens and as only one of many living species that occupy the Earth.”

According to Yamashita, “Anime Wong” serves as the best, most organized documentation of her performance career. “There are old videotapes that are corroding as we speak,” she said. “Stephen Sohn, the editor of the book, had these tapes transferred to digital formats, but they are probably fuzzy and not necessarily viewable.”

This concern for documentation of performance is fairly recent. “In the day, we

rarely thought about recording our work except to create short show pieces to entice venues,” Yamashita said. “Within the book are some of the photographs, playbills, and graphic materials, and the larger part of the archived material will be housed at the McHenry Library in Special Collections at UC Santa Cruz. The book is itself the archival source for what were ephemeral performances.”

Currently, Yamashita’s career is focused on writing and teaching. “I don’t have any future plans for stage and media,” she said.

“The three new pieces within ‘Anime Wong’ in the last part of the book have never been produced,” she added, “and I have no intention of pursuing actual production. But, if staging the work is something someone is interested in, I’d say, be my guest, and please invite me to see what you do.”

The possibilities remain vibrant within the book: “I suppose you could say that I wrote this work as fictional performance.”