

acknowledgments

Acknowledgments are where authors usually perform gratitude, joy, and pride. In the spirit of the genre-bending this book performs, I fiercely insist on ambivalence, acknowledging joy, gratitude, *and* mourning.

This book “should have” been done by December 2015, but my life was abruptly interrupted by what doctors told me was the need to have open heart surgery for a leaky valve—a congenital issue that many women share. I was a “good candidate,” otherwise healthy, someone who watched her diet, exercised daily since grad school, didn’t smoke or drink. The surgery was a partial success; they repaired the valve. (Replacements must be redone every ten years, so the repair was a relief.) The surgeon also cut into my septum, the heart wall; I’ve received two different stories about why. Two years later I am at best two-thirds of my “presurgery” self. Violent fatigue and flagging energy/spirits are part of everyday life, even as the demands of academe are unrelenting. Most difficult for me: even my passion, theater, exacts a toll. Matinees are staged during my nonnegotiable afternoon downtime, and I cannot stay up for the typical 8–11 p.m. performance. If I muster extra energy to go, the pleasure comes at the cost of a few days of recovery. In the face of trauma and truncated pleasures, I feel valiant in having completed this book at all—particularly since the long-awaited reader comments and subsequent revisions coincided with both the school year and the transitioning of my mother to assisted living. I have dedicated my finite energy and lucidity to daily, short bursts of work. In the midst of an especially hectic semester, trudging through the demands of academe

and everyday life, I find that my pride and relief in finishing a book are laced with mourning and exhaustion. The end doesn't seem quite real.

In the contemporary United States, we are supposed to “think positive” and to “fight” our diseases. Emily Martin and Donna Haraway have analyzed the martial masculinity at play in these metaphors of combat in figurations of the immune system. But are those who die those who didn't fight adequately? Are we blaming them for a failure of will? Barbara Ehrenreich's book says it succinctly: *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking Ruined America*. If illness and surgery have taught me anything, it is the way we are disciplined into performing “happiness,” positivity, in ways that feed productivity for the institution and promote the subject's grandiosity/omnipotence. We are enjoined to split off pain, discouragement, loss. Splitting can take the form of projecting vulnerability onto the other: “poor you” allows “me” to feel all the stronger in the face of your “weakness.” (Bullying operates through the same dynamic.) Doctors authorize us too soon to return to work, to drive, thus risking accidents, injury, death. We disavow the possibility that minds and wills cannot always overcome bodily trauma easily—or, perhaps, ever. We sanitize death: the death rattle is real, y'all! We theorize “vulnerability” and “fragility.” How much harder it is to embrace those qualities in our everyday lives, for to do so would require us to confront mortality and finitude. Acknowledging pain, limitation, and “negative” emotions is not weakness; rather, it is an attempt to grapple squarely with the unavoidable realities that will, eventually, face us all. Vulnerability is our condition of existence. Perhaps my passion for theater emerges precisely from the ways that theater recognizes—indeed, prizes—emotion and vulnerability.

Flying in the face of manic, oppressive positivity and a capitalist, masculinist imperative to view vulnerability as personal weakness, my acknowledgments refuse to perform the conventional heroics of the Master Subject who has triumphantly completed a master work against great odds. I refuse to perform what Sara Ahmed calls “the duty of happiness” and thus risk dismissal as a (disabled) killjoy. Instead, I insist that we unsettle the Master Subject by recognizing limits, pain, trauma, loss, fear, rage, indeterminacy, and ambivalence as inevitable forces shaping our everyday lives. Just as inevitably, I hope that by the time this book is in readers' hands, I will have recovered more of vibrancy that approximates my presurgical self.

Our primary vulnerability and fragility spotlight our interconnectedness. Over the twenty or more years since I began this “work of creativity,” my

debts are innumerable and would constitute a list miles long. Apologies in advance for what are sure to be many omissions.

To the artists who feature in act 2—Anna Deavere Smith and David Henry Hwang—thank you for the inspiration of your art and for allowing me to participate in various capacities in your work of creativity.

Granting agencies and institutions enabled research and writing. The Getty Research Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities supported the year of research that formed the creative nucleus for this work. I also completed one play and the beginnings of *Seamless* that year. A quarter at the UC Irvine Humanities Research Institute further spurred the development of my ideas. Thanks to David Theo Goldberg and organizer Karen Shimakawa and seminar participants, including Rachel Lee and Deborah Wong. USC supported this endeavor through Faculty Research Awards, ASHSS grants, a Zumberge grant, and a Faculty Mentorship grant. The Social Science and Humanities deans, Andrew Lakoff and Sherry Velasco, generously provided subvention funds, and the Center for Visual Anthropology, codirected by Gary Seaman and Nancy Lutkehaus, funded the expenses of color plates and photo permissions. The support is deeply appreciated.

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Finally, to my parents—Roy Jisuke Kondo, who died in 2009 at the age of ninety, and Midori Kondo, who passed away this year at ninety-nine, *yoku ganbatte kuremashita*. Wish you could have seen this book. *Sabi-shiku narimashita*.