

# The Hundreds

Lauren Berlant &  
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Kathleen Stewart

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## Preludic

We are lucky to have collaborators: never taking creative labor for granted, we give unbounded gratitude to Andrew Causey, Susan Lep-selter, Fred Moten, and Stephen Muecke, who responded to our request to index the book with shrewd and thoughtful creativity. Indexing is the first interpretation of a book's body. So, rather than presuming the standard taxonomic form—which is its own achievement—we gave the task over to writers whose take on things always surprises us, in part because their style of critical thought generates power in twists of voice and craft. We included blank pages at the end of the book for your own experiments in indexing. We did a little more formal playing in the section “Some Things We Thought With.”

Gratitude also for reading, editing, and assembling to Carmen Merport, Ken Wissoker, and the anonymous Duke University Press readers. There were audiences at the University of Chicago, the WTF Affect conference, and the many places where we read solo: thanks for considering the experiment with us. Appreciation to those who gave extensive feedback (for LB, Claudia Rankine, David Simon, Jerry Passannante, Ian Horswill, Keston Sutherland, Carmen Merport; for KS, Jason Pine, Susan Harding, Donna Haraway, Lesley Stern, Ann Cvetkovich, Derek McCormack, Craig Campbell, Joey Russo).

The Austin Public Feelings group was where it all began. It is usual in Public Feelings writing workshops to work with five hundred words on a scene, thing, or situation. Sometimes participants write from a prompt in real time, and others they prepare, but each always reads aloud, the others listening compositionally. In 2012 in Austin, Circe Sturm told us about a one-hundred-word poetics exercise that she'd learned from the estimable Emily Bernard in the context of the “100-Word Collective.” Circe took it to ethnographic writing. We brought it to the concept of the new ordinary we'd been developing, and *The Hundreds* project took off. The process has changed our writing, and much else.

The constraint of the book is that our poems (makings) are exercises in following out the impact of things (words, thoughts, people, objects, ideas, worlds) in hundred-word units or units of hundred multiples. Honoring the contingency of the experiment, there is no introduction up

front but distributed commentary throughout the book, plus reflection in many spots about how the writing attempts to get at a scene or process a hook. We don't want to say much in advance about what kind of event of reading or encounter the book can become. We tried not to provide even this preliminary.

A hundred words isn't a lot. We made individual hundreds, series of hundreds, and very long hundreds but held to the exact. Some separate pieces became joined and reframed, and the theoretical reflections were shaped as hundreds and folded into the analytic, observational, and transferential ways we move. We wrote through the edit. Every edit set off a cascade of word falls, Rubik's Cubes, tropes, infrastructures, genres, rhymes and off-rhymes, tonal flips and half-steps this way and that. But if the number "hundred" had weather effects it was also tricky: every word-processing program has its own way of determining what a word is before the count goes down. "Word count" might as well be the hastily written notes of a conversation recalled a few hours later. We did the best we could to attain consistency within the constraint of one-hundred-word multiples. If you count more or fewer, you're not coming onto an Easter Egg or a secret door leading to a world for the special people or prisoners but just seeing what the counters we used said we had. (600)

# I. The Hundreds

## First Things

Every day a friend across the ocean wakes up to suicidal thoughts. Another friend takes a drink to eat clean and another eats a candy bar in bed before washing the sheets, doing laundry naked to ensure soft sleeps. Another friend chants before going out to her analogy lab. Another hires retired people to walk her dogs so that she can get to her trainer. Others, desperate, rush harsh. Many people's kids climb in. Many pets assert the dominion of their drives. There's stretching and the taking of medicine. There's accounting and anxious text checking. There's scanning for bossy emails and preconceptions. Lists get made. For some, there is breakfast. Once spring rolls around there is running before the heat and catching the first shift sitting outside the punk bakery to smoke, drink coffee, and "break each other's balls" before work does what work does. I asked them about this phrase once and sparked a debate about whether it is properly "break" or "bust." Whatever, Professor, they laughed, yanking your chain, busting your balls, don't take it so serious!

Some people sleep in. Other people wake at the sun. Some people walk into the house and see only the order in it. Some people serve other people. Some use the quiet time to do the best things quiet time allows. Some people waste it, which is not the opposite of using it well. When I was little I had a task: to make coffee for the adults, measuring out the Maxwell House, setting the breakfast table. Then I'd leave for school and my early teachers would let me into the teachers' lounge. A little troll doll kid overhearing Allende, Planned Parenthood, and MLK. A confused and sunny face taking in the voices and the concept of concepts, before the day.

(DAVIS 2010; EIGEN 2004; HEJINIAN [1980] 2002; JACOBUS 1995; PEREC [1974] 2008)