This year’s annual UC Berkeley–Stanford English Graduate Conference aims to constellate the often unread or unspoken conditions of our interpretive practices. In light of renewed critical attention to reader positionality and orientation in recent decades, we invite participants to consider the preconditions and assumptions involved in our engagements with the objects of our interpretation. What are the terms of such unwritten readerly contracts? What are the fine-print consequences of such aesthetic commitments? Extending our purview beyond strictly “literary” concerns, what insights do these readerly contracts offer into other, often coercive, “real world” agreements? How do these considerations intersect with questions of consent broadly construed? What are we obliged to agree to as witnesses and spectators? What exploitative practices of production do we consent to as consumers, literary and otherwise? And moreover, how does the literary serve to mediate or arbitrate these interpersonal, interpretative, or phenomenological negotiations? To what extent can the literary intervene in the enforcement of social and perceptual contracts? To what extent can it reinforce them, or perhaps exceed them? What role can be ascribed to conditionality in literary practice more generally? And most simply: what evidently important texts go outright overlooked, unread, or unacknowledged?

Such questions invite further consideration of the way in which our own subject positions are negotiated. What do we inherit as readers by merit of our historical situatedness? How do terms and discourses determine the conditions of our possible identities? By what means are these identities validated or invalidated, enforced, reinforced, or unenforced? What does it mean for identity to be a thing documented, undocumented, incompletely documented? What light does the state’s use of documentation as a means for constructing legal, national, and surveilled subjects shine on our literary practices?

In the hope that an expansive constellation will prove to be the most illuminating, we encourage prospective participants from across the humanities to apply.

Topics may include (but are certainly not limited to):
- Banned books, banned/stigmatized readings
- The illicit and the explicit
- Copyright and intellectual property
• Surface reading
• Personhood and publics
• Panopticism, punishment, and control
• Affect and the law
• Legal fictions
• Margins and marginalia
• Borders and transgressions
• Biopolitics and reproductive labor
• Global literary marketplace

Note: Applicants must be current graduate students at a university in California.

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short biographical description by April 10th, 2019.

Abstracts, as well as any questions, should be sent to conference organizers at berkeleystanfordconference2019@gmail.com