

# Berkeley-Stanford Conference 2016

## (Non)Sense

“Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense.”  
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Conference Date: April 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

Keynote Speaker: Kristin Hanson, Associate Professor of English – UC Berkeley

In his first political pamphlet, Thomas Paine promised to justify revolution with “nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense.” Twenty years later, Jane Austen began *Pride and Prejudice* by facetiously reciting “a truth universally acknowledged.” What these otherwise dissimilar texts share, then, is a certain fundamental concern with how readers perceive truth and authenticity. Writing, both authors concede, must somehow make sense.

But how and why do we make this sense, or these senses? And what about nonsense? Before and after Paine and Austen’s moment, within and without literary texts, the perception of sense and sense perception constantly structure interpretations of the self and its surroundings. Conversely, nonsense threatens to dismantle those structures by frustrating even basic expectations of legibility—but perhaps not without erecting something new in their place. Indeed, we might figure sense and nonsense as dialectically making and breaking each other, or as overlapping in different cognitive, affective, or sensual experiences.

This conference will explore the manifold applications of both sense and nonsense, as well as reconsider their relationship in different systems of knowledge. Can these terms, most often presented in tension with one another, signify independently as well? What factors—social, philosophical, aesthetic, economic—have influenced their evolution and deployment?

Prospective applicants may wish to consider this theme in relation to the following (non-exhaustive) list of topics:

- Theories of affect
- Style, rhetoric, and the art of persuasion
- Ideas of order and chaos
- Perceptions of the body in literature
- Sentiment and sensibility
- Propaganda, citizenship, and human rights
- The conscious/unconscious mind
- Theories of logic, reason, and/or rationality
- Skepticism and doubt
- Generic and formal “sense”

We welcome critical papers and creative works from all disciplinary backgrounds. To submit, please send an abstract no longer than 250 words, and a CV or brief biographical statement to [stanfordberkeley2016@gmail.com](mailto:stanfordberkeley2016@gmail.com) by February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016.