

# EXHAUSTION

*tired bodies, tired worlds*

An interdisciplinary graduate student conference  
Department of English || University of Chicago  
November 15-16, 2018

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr. Macarena Gómez-Barris, Chairperson of Social Science & Cultural Studies, Pratt Institute

An exhausted world is one in which the sustaining resources have been deprived, sequestered, or worn out such that life is no longer fully livable within it. Exhaustion also names the embodied experiences associated with persisting in an exhausted world, and is bound to feelings of abandonment, liminality, numbness, fatigue, and precarity. At the same time, exhaustion can serve as a resource for coalition-building, aesthetic revisioning, and the cultivation of alternative social, political, and ecological ways of being in the world. As a critical term, then, exhaustion describes the processes that produce zones of depletion, as well as the ambivalent conditions of enduring in these zones. This conference asks how ideas about exhaustion haunt and motivate renderings of worlds and world-making projects both past and present, and how creative texts encode and represent—or fail to represent—modes of exhaustion across formal and narrative structures.

We might ask, then, how are the resources of a world differentially depleted, producing uneven topographies of exhaustion? What, or who, gets to live on the back of this exhaustion versus within it? What does endurance look like in a world where all options have seemingly been used up? What new forms of life sprout up in the wake of austerity? How might scholars stage ethical engagements with these worlds without perpetuating processes of exploitation and exposure? How do makers and artists represent exhaustion as a personal, political, and/or ecological feeling?

We welcome papers and presentations from across the humanities and social sciences, with no limitations on objects of study or modes of inquiry. We will also consider creative responses and performances that engage with the conference topic. The following is a non-exhaustive list of possible areas of exploration:

- Living with, against, and beyond trauma, including traumas related to colonization, gender, race, and sexuality, as well as critical perspectives on these conditions (e.g. critical indigenous theory, afropessimism, queer antisociality)
- “Exhausted” affects (e.g. ennui, malaise, apathy, hopelessness, disaffection, anemia)
- Poetics of toil, hard labor, and incarceration
- Apocalypse, dystopia, and living past states of no-return
- Tired tropes and types; stock characters and form; limitations of genre
- Historical periods of dormancy or unproductivity; historical conceptions of sustainability
- Biopolitical and colonial networks of exploitation and extraction
- Chronic illness, fatigue, and slow violence
- Care and life-maintenance practices operative in spaces of deprivation
- Bricolage, recycling, detournement, mythologization and parody as modes of resourceful (re)making
- Histories of exhaustion as an object of science (e.g. symptomologies, etiologies, remedies)
- Protracted forms of embodied dissidence (e.g. hunger strikes, endurance art)
- Waning resistance movements, unsuccessful causes, political fatigue

Please forward proposals to [exhaustion.uchiconference@gmail.com](mailto:exhaustion.uchiconference@gmail.com) by June 30, 2018. Include a title, brief abstract (300 words or <5 minutes film/audio), and a short biography including your university and department affiliation. Speakers will present for 15 minutes with time for questions at the end. Do not hesitate to be in touch with any questions.