

States of Smallness (Small States in The Anthropocene)

Abstract

This panel is devoted to the theme of smallness in the current era, specifically targeting metanarratives that assimilate, homogenize, and control what is knowable and what is doable. One such metanarrative is the Anthropocene narrative, whose effects include experiences of paralysis, despair, and nihilism. In response, our papers reorient the conversation toward what we call “small-scale narratives” that unsettle metanarrative omniscience. The concept of smallness, we contend, generates new ways of seeing and understanding the processes and practices of lived experience. In exploring this theme, we introduce provisional “unsettling narratives” that posit nature poetry, terminal illness, and the notion of spirit as compelling ecological perspectives through which to read our current situation/situatedness. Collectively, these papers read diverse narratives and offer new ways of imagining biorelationality, agency, and materiality in the time of climate change.

We pose three major questions, seeking to bring clarity and attention to the unsettled situation in which we find ourselves:

- What forms of bio-relationality are expressed in nature poetry and how can religious naturalism, as a model of new materialism, help us depict these alternative relations?
- How does a terminal diagnosis unsettle the language of identity and inform an ethic of agent-less attentiveness to futurity?
- How do Indigenous theorizations of matter’s spirited energy peculiar to space and time revitalize the genius or spirit of local places in times of ecological dislocations?