KOIAS Dialogue: Kawaii — Between Design and Atmosphere

July 24, 2026 | Room C462, Graduate School of Humanities, Kobe University

On July 24, KOIAS hosted Kawaii: Between Design and Atmosphere, an interdisciplinary dialogue exploring kawaii as both an aesthetic category and an atmospheric experience. The event brought together three speakers: Gianluca Pulsoni (JSPS Fellow), Lorenzo Marinucci (Tohoku University), and Manuela de Mattos Salazar (KOIAS Fellow).

Although kawaii is often associated with cuteness, smallness, softness, and lovable characters, the dialogue approached it as a more complex cultural and aesthetic phenomenon. The presentations examined how kawaii operates beyond the visual qualities of objects, considering its relationship to perception, emotional experience, design, and contemporary media culture.

Drawing on phenomenological, aesthetic, and media-cultural perspectives, the speakers explored different ways of understanding kawaii, from its experiential qualities to its cultural contexts and functions. The discussion considered how kawaii might be understood not simply as a property of objects or a recognisable visual style, but also as an atmosphere that shapes how people sense and relate to their surroundings.

The dialogue generated a productive exchange between the speakers and participants, opening further questions about the relationship between aesthetic categories, cultural practices, and atmospheric experience. By bringing different disciplinary approaches into conversation, the event contributed to KOIAS's ongoing investigation of the aesthetic and atmospheric dimensions of everyday life.



