

cute ecologies

critical-creative symposium
7 June 2024 (online)



A day of lightning talks and presentations on critical research and creative practice, hosted by AWW-STRUCK.

Roundtable panelists: Miranda Lowe CBE, Natural History Museum Principal Curator; Hugh Warwick, ecologist and hedgehog advocate; Claire Catterall, Senior Curator of the CUTE exhibition at Somerset House.

Encountering cute forms of nature, from bunnies to monkeys and deer, is an everyday experience for most of us. They appear on tea towels, cakes and images gone viral on social media. The cute nonhuman might even be our companion animal. The apparently simple, benign nature of cuteness means it goes unexamined, especially in the context of the environmental crisis where the aesthetic is likely to appear irrelevant, if not irreverent. This symposium challenges such thinking by asking: Can cuteness prompt care-giving behaviour for environments? What power dynamics exist in the 'cutification' of flora and fauna? What fate for 'uncute' species?

Recent developments in cute studies demonstrate the power of cute to increase pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours. Conservation charities know as much, employing the cutest species to drive public donation. However, the bias toward charismatic megafauna is also known to be a problem. Anthropomorphism and domestication emerge again and again in our encounters with the nonhuman. And perhaps ourselves. As cute studies scholar [Joshua Paul Dale](#) recently suggested, Homo sapiens may well have emerged because women preferred cuddlier companions to cavemen.

We welcome papers that address topics through critical research and/or through creative practice (poetry, film, performance, music, visual artwork). Topics or areas of research may include:

- Animal studies and plant studies
- Childhood culture and children's geography
- Charismatic megafauna
- Domestication and scale
- Conservation science and political ecology
- Popular culture, Disney studies, anime and manga studies
- Commodification, material objects and waste
- Technology, cyborgs and artificial intelligence

Possible formats include: 5-minute lightning talks, 20-minute presentations (on Zoom). Please submit abstracts and/or short proposals (300 words max), telling us whether you'd like to give a lightning talk or presentation, to awwstruck.info@gmail.com by **Friday 19 April 2024**. Please include a short bio (100 words max). If you are a creative practitioner, please include two samples of your work.

This event is organised by Dr Isabel Galleymore (University of Birmingham) and Caroline Harris (Royal Holloway, University of London) who founded [AWW-STRUCK](#) in 2021. This symposium is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, part of UK Research and Innovation.



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