Vernacular Animism:
Cartoon Animals and Multiethnic Empire

This talk proposes to situate Japanese animation of the 1930s and early 1940s at the intersection of three lines of historical transformation. First, there was the emergence of new technologies of animation and new ways of organizing animation production, which spurred dreams of producing feature-length animated films whose liveliness promised to rival that of cinema, and to push beyond the boundaries of the cinematic. Second, this situation also saw animation begin to range across received boundaries of media — across media forms such as comics, films, magic lantern, radio, records, toys, and games, and across domestic and public sites of consumption. Finally, animation explored new ways of imaging and enacting human-animal relations, at a historical moment increasingly characterized by imperial conquest and total war with their ideologies of dehumanization and bestialization. Working across these three lines of technological, socio-medial and geopolitical transformation, I hope to address some of the troubling legacies that continue to haunt animation as well as the radical possibilities yet to be explored. Working across these three lines of technological, socio-medial and geopolitical transformation, Dr. Lamarre hopes to address some of the troubling legacies that continue to haunt animation as well as the radical possibilities yet to be explored.

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