2013

“The Flow of Blood in Nature” Franz Marc’s Animal Theory

Morgan Rinehart
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/578
“The Flow of Blood in Nature” Franz Marc’s Animal Theory

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Morgan Chelsea Rinehart
B.A. Art History Old Dominion University, May 2011

Director: Dr. Kathleen Chapman, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
November 18, 2013
Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Kathleen Chapman. Her knowledge and guidance were invaluable to the success of this project, and I am very grateful to her for her time and expertise. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Eric Garberson and Dr. Janna Israel, for sharing their time with me and for their considerable insight and enthusiasm for this project. I am sincerely thankful for the generosity of the Robert Gore Rifkind Foundation for sponsoring my research at the Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Art and to the staff of the Rifkind Center for enabling me to draw on their rich collections of prints and rare texts. The Rifkind’s text and art collections greatly broadened and enriched my work. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their endless love and support.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures ........................................................................... v  

Abstract .................................................................................... vi  

Introduction ................................................................................ 1  

Chapter 1 .................................................................................. 6  

Aristotle ..................................................................................... 7  

Descartes ................................................................................... 11  

Darwinism .................................................................................. 14  

Chapter 2 .................................................................................. 18  

A Break with Tradition: Marc’s Animal Art of the 1910s .......... 19  

Developing a New Style: The “Animalization” of Art, its Relation to  
Primitivism and Its Philosophical Significance ......................... 21  

The Influence of Nietzsche and Darwin on Marc’s Hierarchy of Life .... 36  

Chapter 3 .................................................................................. 52  

Marc’s Interest in Animal Death: The Transition from Worldly Being to Pure  
Being ....................................................................................... 52  

Death, Reincarnation, and Progress in Marc’s Hierarchy of Life ........ 57  

The Stylistic Expression of Marc’s theory of Animal Death: “Seeing-Through  
the World .................................................................................. 62  

Conclusion .................................................................................. 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images</th>
<th>82</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Fig. 1. *Saddled Horse*, Pisanello, 1395.................................................................82

Fig. 2. *Water Pipet*, Jean-Bloé Niestlé, 1909.........................................................83

Fig. 3. *Cart Horses*, Franz Marc, 1904/1905..........................................................84

Fig. 4. *Dead Sparrow*, Franz Marc, 1905...............................................................85

Fig. 5. *Horse in a Landscape*, Franz Marc, 1910.......................................................86

Fig. 6. *Dog in Front of the World*, Franz Marc, 1912...............................................87

Fig. 7. *Yellow Christ*, Paul Gauguin, 1889...............................................................88

Fig. 8. Brazilian bird head mask.............................................................................89

Fig. 9. Alaskan shawl...............................................................................................90

Fig. 10. *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, Caspar David Friedrich, Circa 1925-30....91

Fig. 11. *Pumpkin with a Stable Lad*, George Stubbs, 1763........................................92

Fig. 12. *Blue Horse II*, Franz Marc, 1911...............................................................93

Fig. 13. *Birth of Horses*, Franz Marc, 1913.............................................................94

Fig. 14. *Birth of Wolves*, Franz Marc, 1913.............................................................95

Fig. 15. *The Creation II*, Franz Marc, 1914.............................................................96

Fig. 16. *Creation of the Animals*, Heinrich Campendonk, 1916.................................97
Fig. 17. *Fate of the Animals*, Franz Marc, 1914.................................98

Fig. 18. *The World Cow*, Franz Marc, 1913.................................99

Fig. 19. *Head of the Artist’s Father on his Deathbed*, Franz Marc, 1907.................100

Fig. 20. *Head of a Dead Horse*, Franz Marc, 1907-8.................................101

Fig. 21. *Carcass of Beef*, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1657.................................102

Fig. 22. *Legs of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907.................................103

Fig. 23. *Three Studies of a Horse’s Head*, Franz Marc, 1906.................................104

Fig. 24. *Study of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907.................................105

Fig. 25. *Sketch of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907.................................106

Fig. 26. *Deer in the Woods II*, Franz Marc, 1912.................................107

Fig. 27. *St. Julian*, Franz Marc, 1913.................................108

Fig. 28. *Dying Deer*, Franz Marc, 1908.................................109

Fig. 29. *Blue Foals*, Franz Marc, 1913.................................110
Abstract

“The Flow of Blood in Nature” Franz Marc’s Animal Theory

By Morgan Chelsea Rinehart

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013.

Major Director: Dr. Kathleen Chapman, Assistant Professor, Art History

This thesis argues for a coherent theory of the animal in the written and visual works of the German Expressionist painter, Franz Marc. By contextualizing Marc’s animal theory within the history of animal studies, this thesis will analyze how Marc’s animal theory corresponds with several central concepts within this field. One of these concepts—a theory of animal death—is central to the artist’s greater theory of the animal and to the analysis this thesis provides. In examining Marc’s theory of animal death, the following work will propose that the artist’s theory of animal spirituality is his greatest legacy within the field of animal theory.
Introduction

The German Expressionist artist Franz Marc was born in 1880 to a German civil servant, Moritz Wilhelm Marc, and an Alsatian governess, Sophie Maurice. From a very young age, Marc was educated in Calvinist doctrine, and he carried an interest in Judeo-Christian theology with him throughout his life. Indeed, his earliest ambition was to be a minister. This interest in theology and spirituality would occupy the artist in each of the pursuits of his life including his most notable productions—his art and writings.

Marc’s art production began in 1904. His education in the arts was nurtured by tours of famous classical and ethnographic art collections throughout his life. Though his early works (produced from 1904-1906) were influenced by French and German impressionism, subsequent works (created around 1906-1907) showed post-impressionist style. Beginning in 1906 and after meeting his first art mentor, the Swiss animal artist Jean-Bloé Niestlé, Marc focused primarily on animal subjects. During this time, Marc worked in Munich and in the rural town of Kochel am See. By 1911, Marc began exhibiting with secessionist artists and his art grew more abstract and colorful. From 1911-1912, the artist developed a style that would later come to be identified with German Expressionism.¹

Around this time Marc also began to explore the animal theoretically. This deeper interest in the animal would continue to express itself in Marc’s art and writings throughout this prolific period in his life. From 1910-1911, Marc would translate his interest in the animal into a visual language that expressed his artistic and theoretical aim to paint as animals see. This goal would

¹ The term “German Expressionism” was not the only or even the most common term
develop throughout Marc’s life until he was killed in 1916 fighting at the French front of the First World War.  

Although he was also a prolific writer, Franz Marc was, from the time he renounced his ambitions for the church, first and foremost an artist. Therefore, the primary focus of Marc’s intellectual efforts was in his art and, secondarily, in the prose that often supported and expanded on his artistic work. This focus holds true for an important but thus-far overlooked aspect of his production—his animal theory.

Animal theory is a field in philosophy and science as well as a conceptual framework in the humanities that investigates animal being—the way animals exist in and experience the world. This discourse is housed within a larger discipline, animal studies. While animal studies incorporates concepts from zoology to animal rights, animal theory is comprised of the philosophical aspects and applications of animal studies. The field of animal theory consists of excerpts from earlier philosophies (such as those of Aristotle and Descartes) compiled in animal theory primers like The Animals Reader; analyses that center on animal being (like Jacques Derrida’s The Animal That Therefore I Am); and texts written after the establishment of animal

---

2 Marc joined the German army at the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. He was stationed on the French Front throughout his service. On March 4, 1916, the artist was killed by grenade shrapnel while on a reconnaissance ride in Braquis, near Verdun. See Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings, 47.

3 See Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings, 33.

4 For the purpose of this paper, “field” will be considered a category under which philosophies are organized and formed, and “conceptual framework,” will indicate a set of theoretical principles. The definition of animal theory cited here is collated from several source texts on animal studies. See Matthew Calarco, Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). See also Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, eds., The Animals Reader: The Essential Classics and Contemporary Writings (New York: Berg, 2007). See also Akira Mizuta Lippit, Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
theory that were intended to be contributions to this cannon (like Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet*).\(^5\)

Recently, animal theory has also been used as a conceptual framework for analysis in the humanities. This framework is especially prevalent in the scholarship of authors working in theories surrounding topics and individuals that, like the animal, have been historically marginalized. These shared fields or interests include feminist theory, queer theory, and Marxist theory.\(^6\) In art history, animal theory remains an emerging approach.

Notably, Franz Marc’s animal art and his extensive writings on the animal subject have yet to be addressed within the field of animal theory. Despite this exclusion from animal theory, both historical and contemporary authors have explored the topic of the animal in Marc’s art, and the artist himself addressed his interest in the subject several times throughout his life. The following chapters will balance an examination of secondary scholarship, Marc’s writings on the animal, and his animal art to demonstrate that Marc was in dialogue with several notable animal theories of his time and that his works make an important contribution to this field of study.

Chapter One will contextualize Marc within the history of animal studies and animal theory, and outline points of comparison between Marc’s animal theory and the animal theories

---


6. For example, the socialist feminist writings of Donna Haraway also include several works (such as *When Species Meet*) on the animal. The philosopher of semiotics, Jacques Derrida, is also well known for spearheading the flood of animal theory that has appeared since his 1997 Lectures on the animal at the Cerisy conference, “The Autobiographical Animal.” These lectures have since been published in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. See Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), See also Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*. 
of earlier philosophers and scientists such as Aristotle, René Descartes, and Charles Darwin. Like Marc, these authors did not purposefully write animal theory. But like Marc, they can now be recognized as providing philosophical commentary on the animal that is representative of their historical time. Though Marc did not directly borrow from each of these figures, his art and writings put him in dialogue with these authors and their contributions to animal theory. Chapter One will first introduce and analyze this corollary artwork and then enhance this analysis with evidence from Marc's own or secondary texts. This approach will foster a holistic understanding of Marc’s oeuvre that focuses on his art as central to understanding his animal theory and his writings as an expansion of this creative output.

By focusing on Marc’s paintings, drawings, and prints as central to understanding his animal theory, one can fully evaluate and expand the ideals expressed in the artist’s writings. Therefore, Chapter Two will focus on the artistic manifestations of Marc’s animal theory as they clarify and modify both the artist’s and later scholars’ written descriptions of his philosophy of animal being. This chapter will focus on three primary sources for Marc’s animal theory—Friedrich Nietzsche, Darwinian evolutionary theory, and Theosophy. Two of these theories (Darwinism and Nietzsche’s animal writings) are already recognized in animal theory. Two themes in this chapter—animal consciousness and the hierarchy of life—are also central to modern and historical animal theories. The goal of this chapter will be to strengthen the argument for Marc’s inclusion in this field and set the stage for an in-depth analysis of several important aspects and contributions of Marc’s animal theory in the next chapter.

Finally, Chapter Three will focus centrally on the topic of death in Marc’s art. This topic will be shown to be central not only to each of the previously outlined aspects of Marc’s animal theory and his animal art but also to several important topics in the larger field of animal theory.
Discussion of the spirituality of animal death in Marc’s art will expand his connection to Nietzsche, Theosophy, sciences like evolution and microbiology, and the philosophical concept of the hierarchy of life. Finally, this chapter will argue that consideration of the spiritual animal death that pervades Marc’s art constitutes an important contribution not only to the study of animals in Marc’s art but also to the discourse on animals in early twentieth century animal theory.

Together, all of these chapters will show that Marc understood the discourses surrounding the animal in his time and contributed his own well-documented response to them. His response focuses on central concepts within animal theory—animal being, the hierarchy of life, and animal death—and also fills a gap in the growing body of animal theory scholarship. While many animal theorists consider the animal physically, intellectually, even morally, few look at it as a spiritual creature—a creature with an individual soul that exists spiritually as well as physically. In his art and writings Marc brings the physical, intellectual, and moral analyses of the animal from his time together with his Western, Judeo-Christian tradition and interest in theology to explore animal being and outline his own theory of animals’ spiritual being and their spiritual death.
Chapter One: The Context of Animal Theory

Because animal theory and its parent discipline, animal studies, are emerging fields that are not widely represented in art historical scholarship, I will begin this chapter by expanding on this term and its relevance to the following chapters. This examination will focus on several prominent characteristics and theorists that appear throughout animal theories like that of Franz Marc. Beginning with a discussion of the origins of prominent topics of scientific and philosophical exploration in animal theory that also appear in Marc’s work, this chapter will examine Marc’s relationship to the history of animal theory and natural history, and begin to clarify the artist’s unique contributions to the former. These contributions will be discussed in greater length in the chapters to follow.

As I have stated, animal theory is a field in philosophy and science as well as a conceptual framework in the humanities that investigates animal being—the way animals exist in and experience the world. Natural history is foundational to both the scientific and philosophical applications of animal studies, especially those attributes of animal theory that are manifest in Franz Marc’s writings and art. Many aspects of animal studies and animal theory originate in the western tradition of natural history as established by Aristotle. The spiritual aspects of René Descartes’ animal writings and the scientific contributions made by the nineteenth-century naturalist Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution also contributed substantially to the development of animal theory around the turn of the twentieth century (when Marc worked). Indeed, these thinkers are important to the history of specific topics and conceptual approaches.

---

7 See note 4
in animal studies that also arise in Franz Marc’s animal theory.\textsuperscript{8} Primary among these topics and approaches are the exploration and evaluation of animal life, animal consciousness, and animal death as well as the practice of arranging man and animal into a hierarchical scale of being. A brief overview of these aspects of natural history as they relate to animal theory will contextualize Marc’s role in this field historically.

Aristotle

A prominent link between the fields of animal theory and natural science is their shared forefather—Aristotle.\textsuperscript{9} Though Aristotle did not purposefully contribute to animal theory and is not widely considered an animal theorist, his philosophy remains prominent in animal studies. Further, Aristotle’s writings are often included in primers of animal studies because of his focus on the animal and because of the number of conventional aspects of animal theory (such as the application of the scientific method to the consideration of animal being and a scale of being that

\textsuperscript{8} While it is not my goal to argue whether Marc directly consulted any of these three prominent theorists, I do want to note that Marc’s animal theory shares important conceptual and methodical similarities with these important early theorists. These authors’ works have defined the field in which I am placing Marc’s works and a discussion of their theories can help to contextualize Marc’s art and writings as animal theory.

\textsuperscript{9} Aristotle’s primary studies of the animal are drawn from two texts, History of Animals (a biological study) and On Marvelous Things Heard (a study of folklore that includes many animal myths). See Aristotle, Historia Animalium (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). See also Aristotle, On Marvelous Things Heard, ed. Gretchen E. Henderson and G. C. Waldrap (Chicago: Green Lantern Press, 2009). Aristotle’s importance to animal studies is recognized by several important texts in the field. For example, see Kalof and Fitzgerald, eds., The Animals Reader, 5.
ranks man above animal) that are first apparent in his writing.\textsuperscript{10} It is for this reason that I will consider Aristotle a “pre-animal theorist.”

Aristotle laid the foundations for the animal to be considered scientifically and philosophically rather than merely allegorically or religiously.\textsuperscript{11} One of his most notable conceptual frames for exploring this new view of the animal was applying a scientific methodology to its study. This scientific method, similarly to the modern understanding of the term, relied heavily on observation.\textsuperscript{12} Aristotle is also responsible for using a hierarchical ranking system to evaluate life. Aristotle’s system and those that follow evaluate beings according to the presence or quality of one or several factors that the scholar believes separates man and animal. Though many wrote about the animal and contemplated its being before Aristotle, what marks his early work as animal theory, and what also defines the animal theories that followed his, is a systematic approach and focus on the animal as a subject worthy of study in its own right. Further, it seems that Aristotle observed the biology and behaviors of animal-kind to satisfy his curiosity about the animals themselves rather than to supplement his study of humankind.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{11} Before Aristotle, the animal had long been a subject of moral allegory. See Aesop, Aesop’s Fables (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{12} For the purpose of this paper, the modern scientific method is understood to be a process that involves beginning a study with a hypothesis, moving through observation and testing, and finally constructing a conclusion.

\textsuperscript{13} Richard Sorabji provides a useful overview of the debate over animal reason in the ancient era and a history of the Western adaptation of Aristotle’s view—that animals lacked reason. See Richard Sorabji, Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western
As Akira Lippit notes in his overview of animal studies, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*, Aristotle was one of the first figures in western philosophy to use animal corpses for purposes other than religious sacrifice or human sustenance. Instead, Aristotle observed animal behaviors and dissected animal specimens with the same purpose and attention to detail that his contemporaries applied to the dissection of human remains and life. This scientific focus is one of the primary reasons that Lippit and others give for Aristotle’s importance to animal studies.\(^{14}\)

Aristotle’s scientific method is a stark contrast to studies of the animal conducted by his historical predecessors, his classical contemporaries, and even many of the medieval and Renaissance inheritors of his philosophy.\(^{15}\) These contemporaneous theorists primarily used the behavioral and scientific study of animals to further their study of man. Such authors wrote literally rich but scientifically lacking allegories of sly foxes and grave-robbing hyenas, and made dubious studies of the similarities between pig and human flesh, but few focused on the animal as a subject in its own right as closely as Aristotle.\(^{16}\) Because Aristotle was one of the first western theorists to observe and theorize about the animal centrally, scientifically, and

---


philosophically rather than peripherally or allegorically, and because his hierarchical order and application of scientific method to this study became commonplace in subsequent animal theories of generations of scientists and philosophers, his work is foundational to the development of modern animal theory.

Aristotle’s study led him to several conclusions, including the denial of the faculty of reason to animals. This criterion led to the earliest cited formation of a concept common to later animal theories—the hierarchical division of man and animal. As the philosopher studied animal being, he concluded that reason and intelligence, more so than any other factors, separated the actions of man from those of the animal. And in the hierarchical scale—the scala naturae (scale of being)—that he developed from this observation, reason and intelligence are the criteria that calibrate each point on a spectrum that stretches from those creatures possessing the least of these qualities—insects—to those Aristotle found the most reasonable and intelligent—men.

While denying animals reason, Aristotle acknowledges parallel behaviors like following a scent to food that might imply equivalent intelligence. Yet he argues that there is no correlation between animal actions and motivations. He further discounts the intelligence of animals by asserting that their lack of speech has also hampered their evolution into societies. This aspect

---

17 This conclusion that Aristotle is responsible for the earliest cited scale of being considers the scholars mentioned in the primers on animal theory cited in note 4 and throughout this paper.


19 However, Sorabji notes how close Aristotle actually comes to assigning intelligent reason to animals. He argues that the philosopher’s solution to this lack of reasoning—that animals have limited intelligence supplemented by heightened sense and strength abilities—actually resembles a sense of reason much more so than the analyses of animal intelligence outlined by later generations of philosophers. See Sorabji, Animal Minds and Human Morals, 7-16.
of his theory, more than any other, would lead later scholars and Descartes in particular to explore the implications of animals’ presumed lack of reason.

Descartes

The seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes is another figure who is frequently cited in animal studies, yet, like Aristotle, he did not intentionally contribute to discourses now called animal studies or animal theory. In fact, the documents now recognized by various scholars as Descartes’ contributions to animal studies are a series of letters that mention animals only peripherally in their discussion of man. In contrast to Aristotle’s attention to the animal topic, animals in Descartes’ writings are analyzed only to contrast human characteristics.

Nevertheless, scholars have incorporated Descartes’ writings on man and animal into the field of animal theory primarily due to their influence on later generations of animal theorists. As Lippit states, “It is Descartes who instilled in the philosophical tradition the idea that the capacity for reason and consciousness—or self-awareness—determines the ontological universe.” Lippit goes on to posit that, because humans are most capable of reason—a value that Descartes and many other theorists have chosen for ranking consciousness—they are the most conscious figures in Descartes’ universe. Lippit’s analysis addresses one of Descartes’ most important

---


contributions to animal theory. This is Descartes’ use of reason as the primary criterion for ranking his hierarchy of being. Descartes’ second important contribution to this field is the second qualitative difference that he values in his hierarchy of life—the nature of the animal versus the human soul.

Whereas Aristotle’s main focus was on the nature of animal lives and consciousness, Descartes’ analysis of the animal soul expanded this focus to include the nature and qualitative analysis of animal death. Descartes’ theories mark a point from which many subsequent animal theories, including Marc’s, would address animal death. In several letters written between 1646 and 1649, Descartes seems to agree with Aristotle that animals lack any reason. However, Descartes’ hierarchy of being differs from Aristotle’s in that it focuses on the question of animals’ eternal soul in addition to their powers of reason. These hierarchical measures are supported by secondary measures: what Descartes defines as the outward expressions of reason—action or movement and communication or speech.

In regards to these secondary measures of consciousness, Descartes limits the faculties of animals even further than his predecessor, Aristotle. In a letter to Henry More, written on February 5, 1649, Descartes acknowledges that animals’ sense organs must allow them to perceive sensations such as sight and smell, but he denies them the ability to recognize and react to these sensations. Instead, he equates their responses to sights and sounds with automatism rather than true consciousness. Thus, according to Descartes, animal actions are more like those

23 While Aristotle’s On the Soul mentions human, animal and plant souls, these are not directly comparable to the Judeo-Christian concept of the eternal or intellectual soul that Descartes considers. For information on Aristotle’s animal souls, see Sorabji, Animal Minds and Human Morals, 15. See also Aristotle, On the Soul (New York: Penguin, 1986), 217-218.
of machines than those of conscious humans. He backs this assertion by suggesting that animals are animated not by reason but by “spirits,” and his understanding of the animal spirit is related more to an idea of motion than the esoteric spirit or the “eternal soul.”

The progress of Descartes’ theory follows this progression: if mindfulness (conscious action) and the soul animate man, and animal completely lacks both of these qualities, then yet another factor must drive animals. And because animals are clearly not machines that can be reanimated and repaired once they have gone lifeless, this factor must distinguish moving and reacting animals from the dead. The spirit that Descartes identifies to solve this issue is defined by its dissimilarity to human consciousness, the related concept of the human soul, as well as machine energy.

The animal spirit is further contrasted with the human soul in death. In the Christian belief to which Descartes adhered, the human soul is what remains of human consciousness after death. Therefore, death defines the importance of the soul and its particularity to man, and contrasting the eternal human soul with the mortal animal spirit leads Descartes to consider the nature of animal death.

In his letter of February 5, 1649, Descartes contrasts the concept of the animal spirit with his own unique description of the human soul. Descartes asserts his belief in the postmortem survival of the essence of the human spirit, but he does not grant the animal world this eternal soul. Instead, he concludes that, while the animal spirit is the impetus for movement in both

---

24 See Descartes, *The Correspondence*, 301, 366.
26 See Descartes, *The Correspondence*, 365-366.
man and animal (as both share machine-like bodies), the soul is the impetus for human reason. As animals lack this reason they must also lack the eternal soul.27

Descartes’ scale of being represents Aristotle’s philosophical legacy in his body of thought. Descartes, like Aristotle and the many philosophers that lie between these two, compares and evaluates man and animal to prove his theory that animals lack the eternal soul that would grant them reason. The resulting analysis of animal death and the adaptation of the scala naturae to include the criterion of the soul proved one of the most influential additions to animal theory as it is defined around the time of Marc’s work.

Darwinism

During Marc’s lifetime, the most important change to these conceptual traditions (the consideration of animal consciousness, animal death, and the hierarchy of being) in animal theory came from Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. By linking man to animal in an evolutionary progression rather than separating them on a scale of being, and by suggesting that reason was a universally available evolutionary tool rather than a gift divinely bestowed and supernaturally manifested in some organisms over others, Darwin opened the door for generations of natural historians and animal theorists to challenge the primacy of reason and language that divided and ranked man and animal on the scale of being. Marc’s art and writing provided one of these challenges.

Through the filter of the German popular science author Wilhelm Bölsche and the French scientist and author Jean-Henri Fabre Darwin’s theory of evolution spread throughout Germany

27 See Descartes, The Correspondence, 301, 366.
and into Franz Marc’s library.\textsuperscript{28} While it is possible that Marc may have read Darwin’s evolutionary theories, his contact with Bölsche and Fabre is more clearly documented.\textsuperscript{29} In fact, the vastly popular works of the social historian and part-time scientist Bölsche were particularly inspiring for the artist. In three letters to his wife sent from the French front in 1915, Marc mentions several Bölsche volumes by name and requests others to be sent to him there. These titles demonstrate his particular interest in geologic time and in the evolution and domestication of horses. In a letter mentioning Bölsche and Fabre, Marc writes

I can think of no more stimulating pastime or education, than the research of these scientists of nature: origin and genealogy of the plant and animal worlds and the geological age (the latter especially), insect life, zodiac studies, etc… These things interest me 100 times more than the national economy, modern inventions, etc. I read these things: geological regularities, mathematical laws always with an undertone of the subconscious, and the ideas and conclusions, which can be read between the lines. For me, the concept of a law of nature falls short. There are at most approximations of law. Indeed the periodization of all evolution is no longer law but change, degrees of variation in vast periods of time.\textsuperscript{30}


\textsuperscript{29} Two Bölsche works which the artist mentions are his text on geology (\textit{Komet und Weltuntergang}) and the evolution of horses (\textit{Tierbuch II: Das Pferd und seine Geschichte}). The artist does not mention Fabre’s books by their titles, but he does mention the author and further exploration of their connection could come from consulting the Marcs’ personal literary catalogue mentioned in Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 67. See also Marc’s letters of July 29, 1915 and December 5-8, 1915 in Marc, \textit{Briefe aus dem Feld} (Munich: Piper, 1982), 84; 120-121; 122-123.

\textsuperscript{30} I have translated this from Marc’s letter (of December 7-8, 1915) to Maria Marc. This letter can be found in Franz Marc, \textit{Franz Marc: Briefe aus dem Feld}, 122. In its original German, this excerpt reads: “Ich kann mir gar nichts Anregenderes und Befriedigenderes als Zeitvertreib und Bildung denken, als das Forschen dieser Naturwissenschaftler: Entstehung und Ahnenfolge der Pflanzen und Tierwelt, die geologischen Zeitalter (letzteres ganz besonders), Insektenleben, Sternenlehre u.s.w. Kennt eigentlich Kandinsky viel in diesen Dingen? Mich interessieren diese Dinge jedenfalls 100 mal mehr als Nationalökonomie, moderne Erfindungen u.s.w. Ich lese diese Dinge, geologische Gesetzmäßigkeiten, mathematische Gesetze stets mit einem Begleitklang des
The long, geologic time required for evolutionary progress may have proven a significant challenge to the supremacy of briefer, human measures of time (and other concepts) in Marc’s art and writings.\(^{31}\) Indeed, the concept of geologic time was an important factor in the artist’s philosophical exploration of the animal. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the theory of evolution laid the groundwork for Marc to formulate his own theory of the animal in his writings and his art. This theory proposes (among other things) that if animal was not denied reason, consciousness, or a soul by a higher spiritual power, then, perhaps, it had developed its own sense of reason or consciousness, its own language of expression, and its own spiritual existence. Marc’s theory proposes that this animal being might even be superior to human being and that, if man was connected by evolution to the animal, perhaps he could experience this superior existence. Marc’s art was an effort to explore these possibilities.

---

\(^{31}\) Geologic time is measured by analyzing the composition of layers of rock in the earth’s crust. Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the discovery of geologic time led to an understanding of the great age of the earth while the discovery of different fossils in different layers of rock was foundational to theories of evolution. For more information on geologic time, see Don L. Eicher, *Geologic Time* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968). In her chapter in *Franz Marc Horses*, “From looking at the world to looking through the world,” Karen Von Maur also discusses human versus animal and other measures of time. In this analysis, Maur suggests animals existed outside of human time. However, I think that Marc saw the earthly existence of both man and animal as comparable. I further believe he viewed both as comparatively short in light of Bölsche’s revelations about the age of the earth. In fact, Marc remarks on the shortness of animal life in a letter of December 6, 1915 to Maria Marc. In Marc’s animal theory, this short earthly existence is in contrast to the eternal existence of the divine in all things. See Karin Von Maur, "...from looking at the world to looking through the world' Franz Marc and Der Blaue Reiter in the Struggle for Modernism," in *Franz Marc: Horses*, ed. Christian von Holst (Hatje Cantz: Ostfildern, 2000), 203-205. See also Marc, *Briefe aus dem Feld*, 121-122.
Like generations of previous and subsequent animal theorists, Franz Marc confronted the conceptual framework and assumptions of three of his most notable predecessors—Aristotle, Descartes, and Darwin in formulating his own animal theory. As he developed his contribution to this field in his theories about animal being and expressed these in his art and writings, the artist incorporated additional sources from across his various fields of interest. From Theosophy’s spiritual belief in reincarnation to Nietzsche’s description of the “overman,” Marc’s animal theory incorporates ideas that are representative of his own interests, of his own time, and of larger traditions in the discourse of animal theory. By identifying these traditional characteristics in Marc’s works, we can recognize the legitimacy of including Marc in the field of animal theory and identify his contributions to this field.
Chapter Two: The Basics of Marc’s Animal Theory

Though several contemporary and historical authors of art history and art criticism have written about Franz Marc’s animal subjects, few have sought to isolate or analyze the animal theory within Marc’s artwork, and even fewer have studied his writings on the topic.32 One author who does investigate Marc’s written and visual animal theory is Barbara Eschenburg. However, Eschenburg’s chapter in Franz Marc the Retrospective, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” is brief in content and broad in scope. It looks at many aspects of Marc’s written and artistic examinations of the animal—such as its Eastern and Nietzschean influences—without outlining the relationship between these disparate influences and without contextualizing Marc’s adaptation of each within a coherent philosophy. Eschenburg’s chapter also does not relate Marc’s animal art or writings to the larger body of animal theory. The product of Eschenburg’s writing, therefore, belongs to animal studies in general, but not to animal theory in particular. In contrast, this chapter combines analyses of Marc’s art and writings in order to distill from his work a brief but coherent theory of the animal. This theory will provide a context for analyzing the central role that death plays in Marc’s animal theory.

32 Scholars have noted Marc’s interest in the animal as an artistic subject since the very beginning of his popularity. Because of his interest in animal art, Marc’s friend, the publisher Reinhard Piper, invited Marc to contribute to a 1910 book he published on the subject. See Marc, Das Tier in der Kunst, ed. Reinhard Piper, (Munich: Piper and Company, 1910), 190-191. For an informative contemporary text on animals in Marc’s art, see Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 51-71. Though Eschenburg does not seek to describe a coherent theory of the animal in this work nor relate Marc to the grater body of animal studies, her text provides an insightful and well-documented analysis of several key aspects of Marc’s animal theory.
A Break with Tradition: Marc’s Animal Art of the 1910s

Though he was also a philosopher, theologian, and writer, Franz Marc was first and foremost an artist. The artist expresses this priority in a 1909 letter to his mentor—the clergyman Otto Schlier—saying, “Truthfully speaking I’ve been an artist all my life, but education and environment and my own disposition have meant that I’ve also been half-minister and half-philologian.” Dividing and ranking Marc’s art (his primary focus) and his side-interests in theology and philosophy is a clear way to consider the various artistic, spiritual, and philosophical sources and aspects of his animal theory. The primary expressions of Marc’s intellectual efforts are in his art, and, most especially, in the artistic style he created for himself around 1910. However, spirituality and philosophy are also important to the artist’s background and to his animal theory. Therefore, focusing centrally on Marc’s art and complementing this analysis with the artist’s written works of philosophy and theology will identify an animal theory that is true to the division of Marc’s efforts and to his own approach to interpreting his work.

Though Marc was always fascinated with animal life, animals did not figure centrally in his philosophy until 1910. In this year, his philosophy of animal being is first expressed in a new style within his art. Sketches and paintings from this period were a break with the artist’s own

---


34 As Frederick Levine notes, Marc often reconsiders the interpretations, titles, and significances of his works in subsequent writings. See Frederick Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision: The Art of Franz Marc as German Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 56.
practices as well as with the larger tradition of art history. Before 1910, Marc’s animal art was naturalistic.

Sketches and paintings of deer, birds, squirrels, dogs, and cats are among Marc’s earliest works (beginning around 1903). These animal subjects appear in anatomical studies, portraits, or as details in a landscape, and they differed little in this way or in their artistic style from the animal studies of historical and contemporaneous artists. Like the horses of the Renaissance painter, Pisanello (for example Saddled Horse [1395], [figure 1]) or those of Marc’s contemporary and teacher, Jean-Bloë Niestlé (for example, Water Pipet [1909] [figure 2]), they were an attempt to capture the figure, nature, or behaviors of the animal with visual exactitude. In content, expression, and style, Marc’s sketched study, Cart Horses [1904/1905] (Figure 3), and his oil painting, Dead Sparrow [1905] (figure 4), are typical of this early phase in his art. While Cart Horses displays great attention to naturalism, Dead Sparrow captures the artist’s early interest in genre and still life, and displays his initial imitative, post-impressionist style (a style comparable to that of Niestlé). However, by 1910, Marc had abandoned both these styles for one that better conveyed his growing theoretical interest in the animal.

Works like Horse in a Landscape [1910] (figure 5) and Dog in Front of the World [1912] (figure 6) are examples of this new style. In addition these works increasingly portrayed the animal as a philosophical as well as visual subject. In a series of notes on the animal image

---

As seen in Aristotle’s animal studies, Marc’s study of the animal began with methodically observing and recording many examples of animals and animal behaviors. Studies of animal musculature and mannerisms are among the earliest and most frequent records in Marc’s sketchbooks and notebooks. For a full collection of Marc’s sketches, see Annegret Hoberg and Isabelle Jansen, Sketchbooks and Prints, vol. 3, Franz Marc: The Complete Works (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004).
written between 1911 and 1912, Marc outlines his new style and its connection to the animal. He writes

What does the deer have to do with the worldview as we see it? Does it make any reasonable or even artistic sense to paint the deer as it appears to our retina or in cubist form because we find the world cubist? Who says that the deer feels the world as cubist; [the deer] feels it as “deer,” so the landscape must also be “deer.”… I can paint a picture, “The Deer.” Pisanello has painted such [pictures]. However, I can also want to paint a picture, ‘The Deer Feels.’ What an infinitely finer sense a painter must have to paint that!36

This quotation hints at the concept of stylistic “animalization” that the artist would expand upon in his essay for Reinhard Piper’s Das Tier in der Kunst (The Animal in Art). Increasingly, even when animals were not present in Marc’s art of the 1910s, they were the subject of his focus through a new working style—what he called “animalization” of art. This “animalization” of art describes his exploration of animal consciousness. This focus on animal consciousness is the first of several interests that Marc’s art and writings share with prior and later centuries of animal theory.

Developing a New Style: The “Animalization” of Art, its Relation to Primitivism, and its Philosophical Significance

One of the earliest images demonstrating Marc’s increasing focus on the animal as subject for a new style of art is Horse in a Landscape. In this image, a rolling yellow landscape

36 I have translated this citation from “Aufzeichnungen auf Blättern in Quart,” published in Marc, Schriften, 99. The original text without my ellipses reads: “Was hat das Reh mit dem Weltbild zu thun, wie das wir es sehen? Hat es irgendwelchen vernünftigen oder gar künstlerischen Sinn, das Reh zu malen, wie es unsrer Netzhaut erscheint oder in kubistischer Form, weil wir die Welt kubistisch fühlen? Wer sagt mir, daß das Reh die Welt kubistisch fühlt; es fühlt sie als ‘Reh,’ die Landschaft muß also ‘Reh’ sein. … Ich kann ein Bild malen: das Reh. Pisanello hat solche gemalt. Ich kann aber auch ein Bild malen wollen: ‘das Reh fühlt.’ Wie unendlich feinere Sinne muß ein Maler haben, das zu malen!”
is viewed over the shoulder of a red-brown horse. The horse stands with its back to the viewer on an elevated patch of green earth framed in complementary red. The horse is abstracted, outlined in thick black, and outlined with thick, contouring brushstrokes of blue.

Stylistically, this image is an early example of Marc’s maturing aesthetic. Though previous images like *Dead Sparrow* showed narrow, impasto brushwork reminiscent of postimpressionists like Vincent Van Gogh and Edward Munch, *Horse in a Landscape*—with its vibrating complementary colors, thick black borders, and wide brushstrokes—is more clearly related to a French Modernist and especially a Fauvist aesthetic. With depth described less by shading than by the ocular effect of contrasting color (seen in the yellow hills turned red in the shadow of taller, green mounds), *Horse in a Landscape* is reminiscent of landscapes like that of Gauguin’s *Yellow Christ* [1889] (figure 7).

Marc first became familiar with the works of French Modernists like Paul Gauguin and Fauves like Henri Matisse around 1910. He, along with other German modernist artists, subsequently embraced the style of Fauvism and other contemporaneous French modernisms in his work. These German modernist artists emphasized their stylistic relationship to French artists by including Gauguin, Matisse and other French Modernists in their publications and exhibitions. For example, the German artists’ group, the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM)—with

---

37 This is not inconsequential as (in the early Twentieth Century) the French artists now known as Fauves were grouped and cited under the same name as the artists we now call “Expressionist.” For a full explanation of these artists’ roles in Expressionism, their influence on Marc, and a history of the term “Expressionism,” see Gordon. “The Origin of the Word ‘Expressionism,’” 368-385.

38 See Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*, 38.
which Marc began to exhibit in 1910—began many of their exhibitions with rooms displaying French Modernist art.  

This physical proximity illustrated and contributed to the increasing stylistic and ideological similarity between French and German modernism. The French influence on German modernism was especially apparent in the increasing abstraction of NKVM style. French modernist abstraction was attractive to Marc and the artists of the NKVM partly because it deemphasized the physical details of an image. Abstraction thus provided an artistic challenge to the concept of materialism that Marc and other NKVM artists observed and derided in their written analyses of modern society.

This shift towards abstraction had domestic roots as well. For Marc and other NKVM artists like August Macke and Wassily Kandinsky, folk art was important to the development of a German form of modernism. The stylized art of traditional German and Eastern-European peoples provided another source of abstraction and brought NKVM artists closer to the historical peoples and rural peasantry they believed embodied a simpler, more natural lifestyle. For Marc,  

39 Marc first became associated with this group after coming to their defense in a work of art criticism. After writing a letter praising NKVM art, Marc was invited to meet with several members of the group and, later, to exhibit with them. See Annegret Hoberg and Isabelle Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*, 38. For more information on the NKVM, their relationship to French Modernism, and for a brief history of Marc and Kandinsky’s role in the NKVM, see: Joan Weinstein. *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany 1918-1919*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 14.

40 For more information on Marc and other NKVM artists’ view of modern society, see Annegret Hoberg and Helmut Friedel eds, *Der Blaue Reiter und das Neue Bild, 1909-1912*, (Munich: Prestel, 1999), 356-357.

41 The folk influence on abstraction in the NKVM and, later, in the Blue Rider is noted in Maur, "...from looking at the world to looking through the world,” 201-202. These German and Eastern-European folk artworks and folk tales also lead to an increased nationalist sentiment within NKVM art and shows. See Weinstein. *The End of Expressionism*, 14.
animals were even nearer to this natural ideal. Folk art and animal art were especially influential in the work of Marc and Kandinsky’s NKVM splinter group, the Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider).43

The establishment of the Blue Rider in 1911, allowed Marc and Kandinsky to pursue their interest in more abstracted and spiritual works. For Marc, this interest was increasingly expressed in an “animalization” of art, the attempt to paint as animals see in images like Horse in a Landscape. It is also elaborated on in contemporaneous writings.

In his 1910 essay for publisher and art collector, Reinhard Piper’s, book, The Animal in Art, Marc describes how his desire to create a new way of seeing is intimately linked to his choice to paint animals. He states,

I am attempting to enhance my sensibility for the organic rhythm that I feel is in all things; and I am trying to feel pantheistically the rapture of the flow of blood in nature, in the trees, in the animals, in the air… I can see no more successful means towards an “animalization” (Animalisierung) of art, as I like to call it, than the painting of animals. That is why I have taken it up.44


43 Kandinsky and Marc formed the Blue Rider in response to growing tensions between themselves and the NKVM over (among other things) the group’s rejection of more abstract works and their refusal to include non-NKVM artists in their later exhibitions. See Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings, 38-40.

In this same essay, Marc later asks, “How does a horse or an eagle see the world, or a deer or a dog?” Marc’s essay also expresses his opinion that the only thing more important to his art than offering the world new things to see is creating new ways of seeing.

This method of painting as the animal sees is related as much to creating a new style of art as to exploring a singular animal consciousness, but the significance of this practice has been widely misunderstood in existing scholarship. In contrast to recreating what an animal sees, as Eschenburg and others suggest, Marc’s painting is a process whereby the artist experiences animal seeing through painting. This process is more similar to the shamanistic practices of many Non-Western cultures than to the Western comparison of Caspar David Friedrich that Eschenburg offers.

In fact, Marc casually studied ethnography and was familiar with various Non-Western cultures, many of which practice shamanic animal seeing like that described in his essay. Marc

45 See Barbara Eschenburg, "Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures," 59-60. See also Marc, Das Tier in der Kunst, 190-191.

46 For Marc’s definition of this new way of seeing, see Marc, Das Tier in der Kunst, 190. Maur also provides a very informative analysis of Marc’s new way of seeing. Although this author relies too much on interpreting the visual manifestation of this new way of seeing as symbolism, she connects Marc’s new vision to developments in the pure and applied sciences. See Maur, "...from looking at the world to looking through the world,” 203.

47 For Eschenburg’s comparison between Marc’s Dog in Front of the World and the work of Caspar David Friedrich, see Eschenburg, "Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures," 60.
may have come in contact with these cultures in the many ethnographic collections that he frequented in Munich and Berlin.\footnote{Marc records one visit to the ethnographic museum in Munich in a letter written to Macke on January 14, 191. See Franz Marc et al., \textit{August Macke Franz Marc Briefwechsel} (Cologne: M. DuMondt Schauberg, 1964), 39-42.} Certainly the artist would have been familiar with the art of Non-Western peoples like the indigenous peoples of Brazil and Alaska by the time he and the other members of the Blue Rider reproduced such works in the \textit{Blue Rider Almanac}.\footnote{Several Non-Western art works can be seen in Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Klaus Lankheit, eds., \textit{The Blaue Reiter Almanac}, trans. Henning Falkenstein (Boston: MFA Publications, 2005), 83-88. As noted in \textit{German Expressionist Painting}, most of the objects in the Blaue Reiter almanac were in the collection of the Munich ethnographic museum. See Note 28 in Peter Selz, \textit{German Expressionist Painting} (1968; repr., Berkley: University of California Press, 1957), 346.}

The portrayal of shamanism in indigenous American art (or “primitive” art as it was known in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century) like that which is reproduced in the \textit{Almanac} is contentious within the field of indigenous American art history.\footnote{Peg Weiss adds in \textit{Constructive Dissonance} that most of these objects were ritual objects relevant to resurrection. See Note 10 in Peg Weiss, "Evolving Perceptions of Kandinsky and Schoenberg: Toward the Ethnographic Roots of the ' Outsider,'" in \textit{Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture}, ed. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 54. For information on the use of the term “primitivism,” in early twentieth century art, see David Pan, \textit{Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking German Expressionism}, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.} Nevertheless, animal art in indigenous American cultures (like the Brazilian bird head mask (figure 8) or the stylized animal face of the Alaskan shawl (figure 9) that illustrate Macke’s contribution to the Almanac, “Masks”) is widely associated with shamanic seeing.\footnote{For a brief overview of Shamanism in Mesoamerican indigenous art and for information on the debate over the use of this term, see Ccelia F. Klein et al., "The Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art: a Reassessment," \textit{Current Anthropology} 43, no. 2 (June 2002): 383-419, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339529.} Animal masks or certain animal attributes on ceremonial
clothing in indigenous American art often indicates a shamanic seeing practice wherein a human spirit left a shaman in a spiritual ceremony to exist inside of a spiritually significant animal.  

Marc’s seeing as a deer, horse, or dog and its artistic manifestation in images like *Horse in a Landscape* or *White Dog in Front of the World*, illustrates a similar relationship between spiritual practice and animal art. In each instance, the artistic product—the mask, the shawl, or the painting—is a tool that is worn or created in the process of exploring animal being. While it is difficult to prove that Marc was directly inspired by Mesoamerican or other forms of shamanism when conceiving his “animalism” of art, the similarities in purpose between these shamanic artworks and Marc’s animalized paintings are notable. Whereas the “primitives” whose art was reproduced in *The Almanac* experienced their animal visions by assuming the form of animal-headed men or depicting spiritual animals on ceremonial clothing, Marc eventually developed his own visual language for painting as animals see. Throughout the next few years of his life, Marc would consult and develop artistic and philosophical methods that would further this spiritual and artistic goal of painting as animals see.

The resulting visual language was based heavily in abstraction—a stylistic characteristic that other scholars have linked to the German Expressionist interest in “primitivism.”

In his book, *Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking German Expressionism*, David Pan outlines the cultural exchanges not only between Western modernist artists and Non-Western artists, but also between

52 For a Definition of shamanism with a focus on the role of spiritual trances and animal “familiars,” see Klein et al., "The Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art: a Reassessment," 386-287.

53 For more information on the influence of “primitivism” on German Expressionist artistic style, see Pan, *Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking German Expressionism*, 98-120. See also Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
these modernists and a more western form of primitivism. This western primitive includes works of folk art like Bavarian Hinterglasmalerei (reverse glass painting) and Medieval manuscript illuminations. Pan concludes that Blue Rider Expressionists borrowed not only from the abstraction of “primitive” art but also from its spirituality. Both of these sources of influence can be seen in Marc’s “animalized art.”

*Horse in a Landscape* contains both an early example of the stylistic method of abstraction and one recurring image that indicates Marc’s goal to paint as animals see. This image is the animal viewed from behind with a single exposed eye. This eye serves as the viewer’s cue for Marc’s intention to see as the horse. In contrast to the Friedrich works that Eschenburg compares to these images (where the figure is completely faced away from the viewer and sometimes completely absorbed in its landscape), Marc’s animals and their eyes are a much more prominent part of his images. They are proportionately much larger than their landscape and even partially obscure it. Indeed in Marc’s images, the animal subjects are often

---

54 Much of the folk art Pan cites is religious in nature. For example reverse glass paintings and manuscript illuminations often depicted saints or other scenes from the Christian cannon. See Pan, *Primitive Renaissance*, 100-107; 205-207.

55 Eschenburg addresses the role of animals seen from behind as viewers in Marc’s work, and compares them to the viewer seen from behind in a Caspar David Friedrich work, implying that Marc is attempting to directly depict what the animal sees or, in the case of *Dog in Front of the World*, smells. In contrast, I argue here that Marc is trying to express how (not what) the animal sees. For Eschenburg’s interpretation of this seeing, see Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 59-62.

56 Though not directly analogous, Marc’s process of signaling his intention to see as animal through the backwards-facing animal with one exposed eye can be compared to the suture process used in film. In this process, a viewer is given a visual cue (for example, a close-up of an actor’s head) to explain a subsequent switch to this actor’s first-person perspective. For a full definition of this process, See Margaret Olin, "Gaze," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 323-324.
centered on the canvas rather than skewed to one side as in Friedrich’s *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* [Circa 1825-30] (figure 10).

Even when the animal subject is placed in a corner (as in *Horse in a Landscape*), it retains a central role in Marc’s “animalization.” In a method that would later become commonplace in Marc’s art, the viewer’s gaze in *Horse in a Landscape* begins in the far right corner of the canvas, rolls over the horse’s rounded hindquarters and sloped back, and moves into its head. Few features define this head other than a black mane and the back of a single eye socket. This socket hints at the goal of Marc’s image and explains the abstracted nature of the landscape that lies before it. In painting this image Marc was seeing as the horse.

The undulating expanse of landscape beyond the horse is abstracted and stylized in an attempt to explore this animal sight. Abstraction of the rolling hills beyond the horse also mimics the curves of the horse’s body. The horse, thereby, melds with the earth as a representation of the very connection between animals and nature, which led to Marc’s interest in animal subjects.

The horse in Marc’s *Horse in a Landscape* is an active, intellectual (and not merely visual) subject. In contrast with more traditional examples of horse portraiture in the vein of George Stubbs or other sporting artists, Marc’s horse takes up less visual space, is portrayed with less detail, and is situated in the corner of the canvas. While Stubbs’ *Pumpkin with a Stable*

---

57 More traditional sporting art like that of George Stubbs normally situates the visual subject—the horse at center in front of a barn or sprawling landscape. The horse is normally shown in profile, facing forward, and sometimes attended by a jockey. Unlike Marc’s art these naturalistic paintings are not mental portraits of a horse’s experience of a world. Instead, they are literal life portraits of sporting horses or other exceptional examples of their species. For an example of animal studies examining the work of Stubbs and other animal artists, see Douglas Fordham, "George Stubbs's Zoon Politikon," *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 1 (March 2010): 1-23, [http://oaj.oxfordjournals.org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/content/33/1/1](http://oaj.oxfordjournals.org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/content/33/1/1).
*Lad*[1763] (figure 11) is a visual record of a physical specimen with details included for scale and attention paid to naturalism, Marc’s canvas is a mental portrait.

By placing the horse in partial view and in the corner from which the painting’s perspective originates, the landscape, and not the physical details of the horse occupies most of the canvas’ visual space. This choice accentuates the intellectual role of the horse as viewer. The horse’s role is reinforced by the coloration of the image. Though the horse’s naturalistic, brown coloration is chosen for its position in front of Marc’s human viewer, the landscape’s shades of acid yellow and vibrant green are selected to draw attention to the separate vision of the horse. This relationship between animal viewer and the new artistic style that this landscape shows defines Marc’s early attempts to paint not what but how animals see. Though the yellow landscape is not necessarily a literal interpretation of what a horse might see, its bright coloration indicates that the animal has a separate sight from ours. Further, the landscape’s abstraction indicates that the horse has a less materialistic perception and, in fact, a less materialistic existence from our own.

This image of a an animal viewed from behind with one exposed eye in front of an abstracted landscape recurs throughout Marc’s animal art of 1910-1911. Each time, it signals his artistic and philosophical pursuit to paint as animals see. In works such as *Blue Horse II* (1911) (Figure12) and *Dog in Front of the World*, the artist explores the implications that this new perspective could have on landscape and subject. In these images, the respective subjects are seen from differing angles, but always (as with the subject of *Horse in a Landscape*) from behind and with one eye visible in profile. Through an obscured or foreshortened animal subject in the foreground, the human viewer is repeatedly invited to contemplate the animal view of the world. The preponderance of such abstracted, stylized, and vividly-colored landscapes in the images of
Marc’s later years suggests that the artist continued to develop this “animalization” of art, even when an animal viewer was not depicted.

The stylistic development of Marc’s “animalization” of art coincided with and defined his philosophical exploration of his animal viewer and his study of animal consciousness. Painting and abstraction in Marc’s works were as much expressions of animal modes of seeing as they were active explorations of animal being. In his letter comparing his “animalization” of art to the more classical animal art of Pisanello, Marc states the importance of adapting this new style to the nature of the animal subject rather than simply contrasting it with a human way of seeing. By exploring animal sight in this way, Marc makes his own contribution to a central topic in animal theory—the study of animal consciousness.

Marc’s philosophical (and not merely artistic) focus on the animal is evident when comparing his animalized art not only with historical examples like Pisanello or Stubbs but also with that of one of his friends and contemporaries, Heinrich Campendonk. Because both men regularly depicted animals and because Marc’s animalized style had great influence on Campendonk’s early art, a number of the two artists’ works are visually similar. However, Campendonk’s adaptation of the visual aspects of “animalization,” lacks Marc’s philosophical investment in animal consciousness. Visual comparison of several of Marc’s and Campendonk’s most similar works shows that the two artists differ philosophically on the topic of the animal. Most notably, Marc is interested in using symbolism to explore animal consciousness, while Campendonk uses animals more conventionally as symbols for expressing themes in human consciousness.

\[^{58}\text{See “Aufzeichnungen auf Blättern in Quart,” published in Marc, Schriften, 99.}\]
In 1912, at age 22 (nearly 10 years younger than Marc), Heinrich Campendonk was invited to join the Blue Rider. As a previous acquaintance of Campendonk’s and one of the leading members of this group, Marc had a great influence on Campendonk’s subsequent subject matter and style. Campendonk’s paintings circa 1912 began to adopt Marc’s luminescent color, multiple, intersecting planes, and his prints mimicked Marc’s use of intersecting planes and adapted Marc’s linearity. Campendonk’s paintings and prints also borrowed directly from Marc’s use of sunbursts, diagonal rays, and decorative naturalistic motifs like swirling tree branches and sawed-off tree trunks. Often the artists addressed the same topics as well. One topic that both artists address is the story of creation. Comparison of Marc’s and Campendonk’s images of creation is an apt illustration of how the themes of Campendonk’s images and the role of the animals in expressing these themes are often more symbolic, allegorical, and anthropocentric than Marc’s.

Although Marc did not avoid using animals to illustrate myths and allegories, even these images showed an attention to their animal subjects that demonstrates their critical role in the artist’s philosophy of life. In such works as the mural (created in cooperation with August Macke), Paradise [1912], or the sketch, Arcadian Group in a Landscape [1910/12], Marc’s

59 Marc’s influence on Campendonk’s work is noted in Timothy O. Benson, "Heinrich Campendonk," in Oxford Art Online, Ostfildern, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T013509?q=campendonk&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit. It is also expressed in Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings, 40. For more information on Campendonk, see Gerhart Sohn, Heinrich Campendonk: Das Graphische Werk (Dusseldorf: Graphik-Salon Gehart Sohn, 1996).

60 Compare Campendonk’s Bucolic Landscape [1913] with Marc’s Fate of the Animals [1913], St. Julian [1913] (two sources for the sawed-off tree Motif), Deer in the Woods I [1911] (a source for the tree with swirling branches), or Deer in the Woods II [1912] (an example of Marc’s translucent color and intersecting plane motif) for examples of Marc’s stylistic influence on Campendonk.
animals remain as active and central as their human counterparts. Marc’s focus on animal subjects in even the most anthropocentric allegories (like the Judeo-Christian creation story) strengthens this theoretical focus on the animal subject in his art.61

Marc was greatly interested in creation themes and, each time he portrayed an image of creation, he focused on animal subjects. Two out of three examples of creation imagery in Marc’s work originated in a 1913 Blue Rider series aimed at creating an illustrated Blue Rider Bible. In the division of the books between himself and other artists in the group, Marc was assigned the Book of Genesis.62 This series includes two Marc prints, *The Birth of Horses* [1913] (figure 13) and *The Birth of Wolves* [1913] (figure 14), that demonstrate the artist’s preference for animal subjects, even in a narrative that, in Marc’s Judeo-Christian tradition, normally focuses on human subjects. In style, these images are a print adaptation of the “animalization” of art begun in Marc’s paintings. This continuation of the “animalization” of art is signaled first by the animal subjects themselves.

These subjects appear in multiple views, but always with only one visible eye. Their settings remain abstracted—possibly as an “animalization” of the scene, or possibly to represent the chaos of creation—and these surroundings continue to absorb and echo the shapes of their bodies. When colored, the animals’ colors are expressive rather than naturalistic. In *Birth of

61 The Judeo-Christian creation story is anthropocentric in that it builds up to and focuses greater detail on the creation of man and woman than on the creation of animal life. See Gn 1:1-2:25 AV. Works of animal theory have often addressed the Creation story and focused on the first man, Adam’s, naming of the animals. For a summary of Hegel’s and several animal theorists’ analyses of Adam’s naming the animals, see Lippit, *Electric Animal*, 42.

62 Marc began work on an illustrated Blue Rider Bible in 1913. He planned to divide the work of illustrating various books of the bible among himself, Erich Heckel, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, and Alfred Kubin. See Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*, 309-310; 316.
Horses (which was colored posthumously by the artist’s wife and according to his notes), shades of green represent fertility and creation, while shades of red symbolize earth and chaos. Though stylistically abstracted and symbolically colored, Marc’s animal subjects are not, themselves, symbols. As the only subjects in Marc’s creation prints, they are central to their images both visually and narratively. They retain their natural characteristics—body shapes, fur patterns, and proportions—in contrast to the more symbolic distortion of their chaotic surroundings.

Another of Marc’s creation images, *The Creation II* [1914] (figure 15), is similar to his birth prints in both theme and style. In this work, Marc once again portrays animal subjects and again repeats his animalized style with animal heads depicted in profile and an overall abstracted setting that absorbs and reflects the shapes of his animal bodies. Once again, humans are absent from the creation event, and once again, aesthetically chosen and aesthetically applied colors define symbolism in the image. Of the three creation images discussed here, *The Creation II* seems to have had the most influence on Campendonk’s creation print.

When Campendonk made his 1916 print, *Creation of the Animals* (figure 16), he included imagery that stylistically connects his thematically similar print with Marc’s creation works. Like Marc, Campendonk choses the woodblock print to convey his scene of creation. He also mimics Marc’s layout in his composition. Both artists choose to portray a horse in the upper left corner of their image, and two stylized, crane-necked creatures in their lower right corners. The

---

63 These interpretations are drawn from Marc’s color theory as expressed in a series of letters written between Marc and his artist friend Macke between December 9 and 12, 1910, See Franz Marc et al., *August Macke Franz Marc Briefwechsel*, 25-30. Hoberg and Jansen note that this image was posthumously colored, see Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*, 309-310.

64 Color in this image as well as in Marc’s other two creation scenes is not used to define individual animals. Instead, it is applied in patches throughout the work. These patches give the image an abstracted, decorative quality. See Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*, 310-314.
sunbeams, and especially the beam of light that diagonally divides Campendonk’s image are a stylistic trait seen throughout Marc’s art and first visible in Campendonk’s Blue Rider works. Similar beams appear throughout both *The Birth of Wolves* and *The Birth of Horses*. In Campendonk’s print, this beam divides the mortal and divine planes, while in Marc’s images it engulfs the animal subjects. While Marc’s animals are actively emerging into their worlds, intersecting and infused with these creationary beams, Campendonk’s animals are the passive recipients of the active humanoid presence that literally presides over their creation from an elevated vantage.

Despite a title that names its animal subjects, Campendonk’s creation story allots animals the intermediary role traditional to a Judeo-Christian telling of creation. Moving clockwise through the image, one can see important stages in the seven-day creation story addressed chronologically. Beginning in the top right corner with a haloed male divinity—God—surrounded in the darkness of the universe before creation, the image moves through the introduction of light in the universe on day one. Campendonk indicates this light in the orbs surrounding God, the diagonal beams that separate the divine plane from Earth, and several white beams that emanate form the top right corner.

In the bottom right corner, the viewer encounters the creation of land and sea—which occur on day two and three. Then the viewer sees the emergence of the first creatures—those of sky and sea—which God created on day five. In the same corner where the creation of land and sea is shown, Campendonk depicts a chimeric combination of bird and fish. Moving left, Campendonk shows a pig, a ram, and a horse—representing the animals of the land (created on day six). Finally, the central figure hints at the last stage of creation—man. This central figure has a humanoid face that emerges from an animal body.
As this figure represents, animals in Campendonk’s image are a stage between man and nature, and the divine presides over each. This combination of man and animal diverges from the otherwise traditional telling of the Judeo-Christian creation myth and may signal Campendonk’s interest in the evolutionary theory that man evolved from animal. Nevertheless, its central position and its inclusion of a human form in a story of animal creation reinforce the centrality of man in both the Judeo-Christian creation story and in Campendonk’s thought. In its arrangement and content alike, Campendonk’s image remains focused on the traditional pinnacles of creation—man and his creator.

While Marc’s creative force remains unseen, Campendonk’s takes a human form. Proportionally this figure is the largest of the group and his importance is further emphasized by the chronological and physical hierarchy of the image. Campendonk’s print begins and ends with a human form. The human head depicted at center is, thereby, emphasized for its proximity in both location and appearance to the important image of divinity. By excluding both the human and the divine in each of his prints, Marc allows his viewer to focus on the animal portion of the creation tale. Furthermore, by incorporating his stylistic beams of light into his animal bodies and by mirroring their shapes in his backgrounds, Marc emphasizes the animals’ harmony not only with nature but also with the divine. This incorporation with the creational force also gives Marc’s animals an active role in the creation event. In comparing Marc’s and Campendonk’s creation images, Marc’s unique attention to portraying animal consciousness is apparent.

The Influence of Nietzsche and Darwin on Marc’s Hierarchy of Life

Like many other animal theories, Marc’s theory of the animal includes a hierarchy of life. This dimension of his theory is well expressed in his writings of around 1915, and it is also well
illustrated throughout his contemporaneous art. While other animal theorists follow in the traditions of Aristotle or Descartes and cite reason or language as the primary qualitative divisions between man, animal, and other forms of life, the most important influences on the qualitative divisions of Marc’s scale are evolutionary theory and Nietzsche’s philosophy of the “overman.” Notably, the theory of evolution undermined reason and other criteria that might be used to define Marc’s hierarchy. Furthermore, evolutionary theory united man and animal on a literal scale of progress towards higher forms of being. The basic criterion for ranking that filled the vacuum left by reason in Marc’s scale is the artist’s belief in the spiritual purity that occupies all life. In Marc’s hierarchy of being, pure spirituality is the ideal against which all life forms are evaluated.

Marc’s writings assert that his ranking criterion (spiritual purity) is enhanced by proximity to nature and the rejection of the material. In early versions of his philosophy of life, Marc believed animals were less materialistic and nearer ideal purity than man. With the incorporation of the “overman” (an artistically creative figure and the next stage in man’s progress in Nietzsche’s philosophy) in Marc’s art and animal theory, man could aspire to a higher rank on the scale of being. The “overman” even provided an example by which man could overcome animal in Marc’s hierarchy. Therefore, in his own quest to pursue a higher level of being, Marc pursued the qualities of both animals and the “overman” in his art. These take the

---

65 See The Higher Type and Aphorisms 14 and 20 in, Marc, Schriften, 168-173; 189-191.

66 The idea of the “overman” and the concept of a materialistic modern Europe are drawn from Nietzsche’s book, Thus Spoke Zarathustra. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006).
form of decreased materialism and increased “animalization” (defined as sensitivity to the pure spirituality in all things) as well as greater creativity and expression.\(^{67}\)

Marc believed several prominent aspects of modern European life including industrialism and materialism challenged his goal of spiritual purity. The artist grouped these challenges to purity under the term “europäische Erkrankung” (“European disease,” also called the “European view”).\(^{68}\) While the European disease is discussed at length in Marc’s Aphorisms, the importance of purity as the criterion for ranking in Marc’s hierarchy and its application to animals is described in a letter of April 12, 1915 the artist sent to his wife from the war front. This letter also recounts Marc’s early view of animals’ purity and his later revaluation of animal being, stating,

On the whole my instincts have not, so far, guided me too badly, even though my works are not, as yet, pure; especially those instincts that led me away from my sense of feeling for man and towards a feeling for the animalistic, for the ‘pure animals.’ Those unspirited impious people who surrounded me (specially the males) never inspired my true feelings. While the animals with their untouched, innocent sense of life allowed all that was good in me to resound…Very early in life I found man to be ‘ugly;’ the animals appeared much more beautiful, more pure. But then I discovered in them, too, so much that was repulsive and ugly… Trees, flowers, the earth, all showed me more of their ugly and repulsive sides… until now when I have suddenly become fully conscious of all the ugliness of nature, its impurity. Perhaps it is our European view of the world that has so

\(^{67}\) See Aphorism 7 in Marc, *Schriften*, 187.

\(^{68}\) Marc’s first mention of the European disease in his Aphorisms comes in Aphorism 4. In Aphorisms 5-7 he discusses how previous attempts to return to old ways or seek abstraction in art have only made this disease or “condition” worse. He begins to speak of the First World War as a cleansing process or cure to this disease in Aphorisms 76, 77, and 78. In these Aphorisms, Marc also addresses forming a new art (with similarities to primitivism) to bring about a new European era. In Aphorisms 84 and 86 Marc again refers to purifying Europe of its disease and progressing towards a new Europe, stating, in Aphorism 86, “to be pure is everything. “ (“Rein sein ist alles.”). See Aphorism 86 in Marc, *Schriften*, 210.
poisoned and distorted it. It is, indeed, for that reason that I dream of a new Europe.\textsuperscript{69}

In this passage, it is clear, first, that Marc valued pureness and spirituality in ranking the life forms around him both in the earliest and in the contemporaneous forms of his hierarchy. This statement also makes clear that the artist once viewed animals as more pure than men and that this perception of animals’ superior purity had diminished by 1915. However, while several prominent scholars have interpreted this passage to mean that Marc eventually began to see animals as less pure (and therefore lower on his scale of being), Marc’s statement lends itself to another interpretation.\textsuperscript{70} His passage can also be interpreted as saying that his ability to perceive animals and nature (not the subjects themselves) changed with time. Thus, when Marc says, “Perhaps it is our European view of the world that has so poisoned and distorted [nature.]” he is stating that his criterion for ranking—purity—and perhaps even the quality of animals’ purity


\textsuperscript{70} Eschenburg and Levine interpret Marc’s statements to mean he has lost faith in animal purity. See. Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 63. And Levine, \textit{The Apocalyptic Vision}, 103.
remained unchanged, but his own ability to perceive this purity was degraded by the “European view of the world.”

This interpretation of Marc’s statement is reinforced by the role of the “European view” in Marc’s hierarchy of life. This reading of Marc’s letter and the analysis of the “European view,” that it relies on would also explain why the artist continued to refer to animal subjects and develop his “animalization” of art in pursuit of the artistic purity he mentions in his letter. In fact, Marc’s portrayal of animal subjects in his art continues even after his submission to the “European view.” Therefore, by 1915, animals still represented an ideal purity in Marc’s hierarchy of life, but the artist had to purify his view in order to reach or eventually surpass this animal purity. The animal point of view Marc pursued in his contemporaneous art could have served as a purer alternative to the “European view” and a method for Marc to advance towards the ”overman,” in his hierarchy of life.

A “European disease,” or a “European view” is mentioned throughout Marc’s 100 Aphorisms (written in 1915) as well as other essays the artist penned from the front (for example, Der hohe Typus [The Higher Type] and Das geheime Europa [The Secret Europe]). These interchangeable phrases refer to a concept of modern Europe as being separated from its folk roots, too reliant on old forms of spirituality, too materialistic and, therefore, impure.

These texts can be found in Marc, Schriften, 163-173; 185-213. For portions mentioning the European condition, see note 65.

This interpretation is drawn from Marc’s Aphorism 6. Several oppositional forces are relevant to this view of modernity. For instance, Marc saw folk traditions and mechanization as mutually exclusive. Similarly, spirituality and materialism (even in art) were opposed to one another. Furthermore, the artist saw the First World War as an opportunity to purify Europe of the forces of mechanization and materialism. See Aphorism 6 in Marc, Schriften, 186.
Eschenburg plots this European view in relation to two other important factors in Marc’s scale of being. She states, “There are three spheres in [Marc’s] thought that should be distinguished: old craft skills as the unity of man with himself and the environment, modern technology as the result of applied science, and pure sciences to which Marc attributes almost religious qualities.” Eschenburg’s craft skills can be identified with “primitive man,” her category of modern technology is associated with the mechanization and industrialism that are associated with the “European view,” and her category of pure science correlates with nature, its study (especially philosophy and evolutionary theory), and art.

Holding purity as Marc’s criterion for ranking, one can plot these three spheres on a hierarchy or scale of being that resembles those of Aristotle or Descartes in its structure, but that differs from each in its unit of measurement. On a scale of impure (or materialistic) to pure (or spiritual), Marc’s hierarchy of being stretches from its base at the materialistic European disease, through a point represented by primitive or folk man, to its peak in the natural realm—the subject of pure science and animalized art. Indeed, pure science in Marc’s scale of being is an idea increasingly associated with evolution, the “animalization” of art, and the pursuit of the “overman.”

The connection between pure science, “animalization” and progression in Marc’s scale of being towards the “overman” is outlined in Aphorism 44 in which Marc writes, “The laws of

---


74 These connections between themes in Marc’s work and Eschenburg’s categories are drawn from Eschenburg, "Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures," 55.
nature are the tools of our second, better sight.” In other words, the laws of nature—pure
science including the study of natural and evolutionary science—aid in the process of “seeing-
through” the world (the second, purer sight). Seeing thorough the world to its spiritual essence
is, in turn, the goal of Marc’s “animalization” of art and of his “overman”. The “animalization”
of art seeks to reveal the shared spiritual kinship of all life in much the way that the evolutionary
theories of Marc’s time united man and animal in a chain of being with a common ancestry.

By studying nature and incorporating this study into his art, Marc was pursuing the
second, purer and better vision described in his writings. This is seen in Marc’s use of animal
subjects of particular evolutionary significance in his animalized art of around 1910-1915. Most
important was his interest in the evolution and depiction of horses. As we have seen in the
previous sections, in Marc’s “animalization” of art, horses were the artist’s first and most
common subjects of theoretical significance in art dating after the beginning of his 1910
“animalization.” Their evolution was also the subject of one of Marc’s favorite Bölsche works,
*The Horse and its History.*

By focusing his scientific reading on the natural subjects that demonstrate and illustrate
the purity he seeks for his art, Marc used the science of evolution to further his understanding of
animal being as well as his artistic exploration of their purer manner of seeing. This is especially

---

75 This translation comes from Eschenburg, "Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and
Pictures," 55. The Original German reads, “Die Naturgesetze sind das Werkzeug unsern zweiten,
besserer Einsicht, unsres zweiten Gesichts, mit dem wir das Weltgeschehen heute betrachten.”
See Marc, *Schriften*, 198.

76 Marc describes this process in Aphorism 20. See Marc, *Schriften*, 191. He relates the
concept of pure science to natural and evolutionary science in letter of August 7 1915 to Maria
Marc recorded in Marc, *Franz Marc: Briefe Aus Dem Feld*, 122.

77 See Marc’s letter to Maria Marc of July 29, 1915 in See Marc, *Briefe aus dem Feld*, 84.
true for Marc’s exploration of those animals he depicted as most pure and most highly ranked (like horses). But evolution is also important to the devaluation of reason in Marc’s hierarchy of being.

The process of evolution through natural selection suggests that reason is merely one of a number of evolutionary skills available to man and animal alike. Whether the animal world developed a lower form of reason or did not develop reason at all, it was not a divinely bestowed gift denied to animals by God. Therefore, reason was less divisive and more arbitrary in Marc’s consideration of life forms. Spiritual rather than rational accomplishment is the highest goal of being in the artist’s hierarchy of life.

By 1915, the peak of this spiritual purity in Marc’s hierarchy of being and the end of his evolutionary path was increasingly found in Nietzsche’s “overman.” Nietzsche’s influence on Marc is seen in several aspects of his written works. As Barbara Eschenburg notes, the aphorism format of Marc’s 1915 work of philosophy (100 Aphorisms) is a clear link to Nietzsche.\(^78\) In his aphorisms and his 1916 essay, The Higher Type, Marc also addresses Nietzsche’s concept of the “will to power.” Each of these connections indicates Marc’s ties to a theorist who is often included in anthologies of animal theory.\(^79\) In his adaptation of the “overman,” to his own theory of the animal, Marc moves beyond the conceptual framework of this recognized animal theorist and towards a unique contribution to the field.

\(^{78}\) Eschenburg interprets this connection between Marc’s aphorism format and Nietzsche’s work in Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 51.

\(^{79}\) For information on Nietzsche’s contributions to animal theory See Lippit, Electric Animal, 67-77. See also Calarco, Zoographies, 32-35.
In Marc and Nietzsche’s writings alike, modern man was overly materialistic and consumed in a mob mentality that favored technological over spiritual progress. In outlining a path for overcoming this state of being, Nietzsche described a higher being which he called the “übermensch,” (translated as “overman,” in English). This figure would serve as an ideal towards which modern men could strive in order to overcome materiality and, instead, embody the characteristics of artistic creativeness that both Nietzsche and Marc favored.

In The Higher Type, published posthumously, Marc outlines his own parallel to Nietzsche’s “overman,” the “higher type.” In his essay, Marc suggests a similar goal of man’s growth beyond the materiality he saw as endemic in modern Europe and towards a more pure, “higher type” of being. In his own pursuit of this goal, Marc sought new forms of creativity and pursued his interest in the animal point of view that he saw as less materialistic.

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche elaborates on his theory of how man will achieve the elevated status of “overman.” Like Marc, Nietzsche often relies on animal imagery to describe this process. Unlike Marc, however, Nietzsche’s references to animals are mostly symbolic. The place of animals in Nietzsche’s hierarchy of being is likewise more conventional than Marc’s.

Nietzsche’s description of the process of overcoming man in pursuit of “overman” is mirrored in Marc’s written and artistic descriptions of the “higher type.” Nietzsche describes how the “overman” must abandon the crowd mentality, and Marc adopts this message of individualism in the Higher Type.  

In his writings and art, the artist further suggests abandoning

---

80 Marc repeatedly refers to the higher type as an individual and states, “Nur der Einzelne kämpft weiter, der Geistige, dessen Typus im Kriege gestählt ist.” I have translated this as, “Only the individual—the spiritual whose type is hardened in wars—continues to struggle.” This
the materialism that he believed was also endemic in his generation. He favors the pursuit of spirituality and pursues this idea himself in his art via the less materialistic subject of the animal and the less materially descriptive stylistic mode of abstraction. Nietzsche also uses animals, albeit as metaphoric images in describing the characteristics of his “overman.”

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, animals are employed in parables. Birds are symbolic of spiritual ascension and lions exemplify wisdom in Zarathustra’s description of spiritual progress towards the “overman.” In the hierarchy of life that these stories also communicate, animal is below man who is below “overman.” In contrast, the position of the animal in Marc’s evolution towards a more pure being is more prestigious. Only by studying nature can man move closer to the animal purity that outranks human purity in Marc’s scale of being. Further, it is only by taking on the pure characteristics of animals—namely their lack of materialism—that man can make progress towards the pinnacle of the “higher type.”

In Marc’s art, this progress and this pinnacle are portrayed in triangle imagery. The triangle’s wide base, narrowing slope, and pointed pinnacle, are indicative of the hierarchical ascent towards the “higher type” and of the few individuals capable of reaching this stage. The triangle symbol is shown directly in the recurring triangle motifs seen throughout his print works.

---

81 In his own hierarchy of life, Nietzsche describes man as a midpoint between animals and the supreme being, the “overman.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 59. Nietzsche also uses animals allegorically and symbolically, offering several analogies between animals and man. See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 64; 67; 79; 81.

82 For examples of animal imagery in *Zarathustra*, see Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 64; 67; 79; 81.
and indirectly in the triangular composition of many of his works as well as in the triangular form of one icon of the “higher type” in Marc’s art—the upward-facing animal.

Triangle motifs pervade Marc’s creation images. Works like Birth of Horses and The Birth of Wolves employ both triangular shapes and triangular compositions. The three central figures in both the Birth of Horses and The Birth of Wolves are each arranged in an ascending, triangular order. Further, in Birth of Wolves, the spirit of creation that endows Marc’s wolves is embodied by pointed, triangular lines that mesh with the animals and lead upwards into the heavens.

A triangle motif is also employed in Nietzsche’s and also Wassily Kandinsky’s writings to demonstrate how an escape from the masses (represented by the narrowing walls of the triangle as it moves away from its wide base) eventually leads to the pinnacle of individuality (the triangle’s narrowest point).\(^83\) In his book, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Kandinsky suggests that, often, only one man will occupy his pinnacle.\(^84\) There is often only one primary animal in Marc’s paintings as well. In Birth of Horses, Birth of Wolves, and other images, this animal is repeatedly located at the pinnacle of a triangular composition. This animal illustration of the “higher type” is further indicated either by size, visual prominence or, increasingly, by a gesture—the lifted head—which also gives the animal enacting it the rough shape of an isosceles triangle. For example, the blue deer in Fate of the Animals [1913] (figure 17) is roughly triangular in shape.

\(^{83}\) For triangle imagery in these authors’ works, see Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 6-9, originally published as The Art of Spiritual Harmony (London: Constable and Company, Limited, 1914). See also Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 233

\(^{84}\) See Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 6.
Theosophy in Marc’s Work: The Hierarchy of Life and the Importance of Death

Another motif important to Marc’s art of this period (1910-1915) and indicative of his hierarchy of life was the circle or pictorial cycle. Circular compositions and other markers of cyclicality recur throughout those works informed by another of the strongest influences on Marc’s hierarchy of being—Theosophy.

In the context of nineteenth and twentieth century, Europe, Theosophy refers to a movement that combined Eastern and Western theology into an esoteric philosophy addressing topics from aesthetics to reincarnation. The organization behind this movement, the Theosophical Society, was led by a Russian mystic, Helena P. Blavatsky. In publications such as *The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled* (two of the most important texts in Blavatskian Theosophy), Blavatsky and other theosophist authors outline several points that are relevant to Marc’s animal theories. Two of the most relevant theosophist discourses address the symbolism of color in art and the interconnectedness of man, animal, and other forms of life through the cyclicality of life and death in reincarnation.

In 1910, Marc wrote a series of letters to August Macke and Wassily Kandinsky which presented a theory of the use of color in his art. This theory drew heavily on Blavatsky’s theosophical writings and on Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater’s theosophist book

---


86 For a comprehensive look at Marc’s color theory, see John F. Moffitt, "Fighting Forms: The Fate of the Animals. The Occultist origins of Franz Marc's 'Farbentheorie,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 6, no. 12 (1985): 107-126, JSTOR.
on aesthetics, *Thought-Forms*. As they evolved, Marc’s theories were increasingly influenced by Kandinsky. Kandinsky’s theosophically-inspired book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* was especially important to Marc’s color theory and his adaptation of Theosophy.

In Marc’s color theory, red stands for “brutality and matter,” yellow stands for “serenity and woman,” and blue stands for “melancholy and man.” After encounters with Kandinsky’s work, blue also came to stand for the spiritual in Marc’s art. As Moffitt records, theosophists such as Blavatsky, Leadbeater, and Besant, also accorded the color blue a spiritual significance. In Besant and Leadbeater’s book, *Thought Forms*, blue is described as symbolic of “devotion,” and the “universal brotherhood of humanity—a spiritual concept within Theosophy by which all societies of men were spiritually connected.” It is possible that in his own adaptation of this concept, Marc extended this brotherhood to animals.

Likewise, in Marc’s art, blue is used to designate animals’ spirituality. The symbolic use of blue in Marc’s animals between 1910 and 1916 evidences Marc’s initial and continued interest in these authors is recorded in Marc et al., *August Macke Franz Marc Briefwechsel*, 27-30.

Kandinsky’s influence on Marc’s color theory is recognized by John Moffitt in Moffitt, "Fighting Forms,” 114.

As John Moffitt records in “Fighting Forms,” blue in Kandinsky’s work is symbolic of both spirituality and rest. This is outlined in the letter that Moffitt cites in Moffitt, “Fighting Forms,” 114.

The theosophical belief that all people were spiritually related—the brotherhood of man—could also have been a source for Marc to explore his connection to the primitive and folk peoples he believed led a more pure lifestyle.

Reincarnation may have facilitated the extension of this brotherhood to the animal world. All men are related in theosophy to each other through the oversoul (to which each individual soul returns in death). As the oversoul extended to animal souls, the brotherhood that it creates may also have extended to animals.
assertion of their spiritual purity and of their spiritual superiority over man in his hierarchy of life. The fact that blue was reserved for animals is indicative of this consistently elevated place in Marc’s hierarchy. When shown, people (even masculine figures that might merit a masculine hue) are a shade of either white, red, or yellow. There are no blue men or women in Marc’s art because humans had yet to reach the purity of spirit exhibited in Marc’s blue horses, bulls, and boar.

Marc’s theosophical influences reinforce this view of animals’ superiority by further devaluing the Cartesian measure of hierarchy (reason). In Isis Unveiled, a text published in 1877 and translated into German in 1907, Madame Blavatsky states,

…as all matter had a common origin, it must have attributes in common, and as the vital and divine spark is in man’s material body, so must it lurk in every subordinate species. The latent mentality which in the lower kingdoms is recognized as semiconsciousness, consciousness, and instinct is largely subdued in man. Reason, the outgrowth of the physical brain, develops at the expense of instinct—the flickering reminiscence of a once divine omniscience: spirit. Reason, the badges of sovereignty of physical man over all other physical organisms is often put to shame by the instinct of an animal. As his brain is more perfect than that of any other creature, its emanations must naturally produce the highest results of mental action; but reason avails only for the consideration of material things; it is incapable of helping its possessor to a knowledge of spirit. 

Intelligence and the soul are the vital and divine sparks that Blavatsky mentions. In this theosophical doctrine, the common source from which all matter originates—overarching or omniscient intelligence—mirrors the common soul, the “oversoul,” from which all spiritual matter originates. While man’s intelligence is his reason, animal intelligence is instinct. Despite the Aristotelian or Cartesian valuation of reason over instinct, Blavatsky argues here for the evaluation of animal instinct over human reason because (as she states) instinct is nearer the

higher concept of spirituality while reason is related to the material. Marc directly adopts this value system and these oppositional dualities—reason versus instinct and materiality versus spirituality—in his evaluation of being. This is described in Marc’s 100 Aphorisms.

While reason is related to the concept of the applied sciences in Marc’s Aphorisms, instinct is more in line with pure science—what Marc also calls “old nature” and associates with the study of nature and art. Instinct—the more animal characteristic—is also more spiritual in Marc’s theory. Throughout The Higher Type, Marc calls for a return to the instinctual and a greater connection with nature.93 This connection to nature is exemplified by animal being and depicted throughout Marc’s art in images of animals that are visually and spiritually connected to their surroundings and imbued with spiritual colors (like blue) and spiritual forms (like the circle, triangle, or diamond).94

Although man does not reach this animal spirituality in Marc’s art or writings, these mediums explore the possibility of purifying the human race and moving beyond even an animal’s connection to the spiritual through exploring those creatures currently closest to this purity. In both Marc’s animal theory and Theosophy, man and animal are spiritually connected in a manner that would promote man’s advancement towards and even beyond animal purity. As has been discussed, Marc’s “animalization” of art in images like Horse in a Landscape or Dog in Front of the World are methods of exploring this connection. The theosophical aspect of this connection (that is also illustrated in Marc’s artworks) is the belief that man and animal souls both belong to a transcendental “oversoul” through which they pass in the process of

93 See The Higher Type in Marc, Schriften, 170-173.

94 More information on the spirituality of the diamond in Marc’s work is available in Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 62-63.
reincarnation. One image especially evocative of Marc’s exploration of this theosophical theory of reincarnation is *The World Cow* [1913] (figure 18). This image will be discussed in Chapter Three.

---

95 The theosophist concept of the “oversoul” is described in Peter Fingesten, "Spirituality, Mysticism, and Non-Objective Art," 2.
Animal death is a central aspect of many animal theories from Descartes to Heidegger, and death is central to Marc’s animal theory in particular because it was central to the artist’s understanding of spirituality. Examples of animal death in Marc’s art and writings illustrate the ways in which the artist is connected with the history of this field. Because they are central to Marc’s animal theory, these examples of death in Marc’s animal art can be expanded upon to make the case for his inclusion in the discourse of animal theory, and more importantly, represent Marc’s own contributions to this body of scholarship.

Death is also a recurring theme in Marc’s creative and intellectual pursuits around the time of his “animalization” of art. Levine recognized this fact when he wrote of the “apocalyptic vision” in Marc’s art around 1913-1916. Though Levine interpreted these scenes of animal death as mostly symbolic of human suffering, instances of death and destruction in Marc’s animal art can be reanalyzed to show that Marc was centrally concerned with the nature and hierarchical place of animal being and the nature and spirituality of animal death in these images of dead or dying creatures.

**Marc’s Interest in Animal Death: The Transition from Worldly Being to Pure Being**

Notably, Marc’s sketchbooks contain at least one early example of Marc’s artistic and philosophical interest in animal death. This early image of animal death bears a striking resemblance to the death portrait, *Head of the Artist’s Father on his Deathbed* [1907] (figure 19). This image and Marc’s *Head of a Dead Horse* [1907-1908] (figure 20) were made concurrently and share many similarities. Each head is viewed from the side with almost equal attention to
physical detail and theoretical content. Particular emphasis is given to the subjects’ eyes and mouths—which are roughly centered in each image. While the eyes and mouth of Marc’s father are shaded and obscured, the eyes and mouth of Marc’s dead horse are bulging and swollen.

Marc’s image of his father’s death is a conventional addition to the tradition of the deathbed portrait in western art history in several ways. Notably, there is an effort to portray the peace of death. The man’s head is propped up and his eyes have been shut and obscured by heavy shading. Conversely, Marc’s portrait of the dead horse breaks with tradition. While famous studies of dead animals like Rembrandt’s *Carcass of Beef* [1657] (figure 21) use the dead animal subject as an opportunity to focus on animal anatomy (and Marc does this in other examples form his sketchbook), here Marc shows only the head of his dead horse. He does not take this opportunity to show the animal from an unfamiliar angle or investigate the musculature beneath its skin, but instead, the artist chooses the same format and view he had given his own dead father. Further, Marc’s attention to the unaltered details of death—the swelling of organs and the stiffening of skin tissue—in his image of the dead horse shows a focus on the morbid effects of death that differentiates this image from both the image of his dead father as well as other, more conventional examples of living and dead animals in Marc’s oeuvre.

The descriptive title of Marc’s image of animal death, *Head of a Dead Horse*, helps to outline Marc’s focus on the nature of animal death in this image, but it is not needed to differentiate this subject from Marc’s contemporaneous animal art. A mere visual comparison of this image with two images—*Legs of a Slaughtered Bull* [1907] (figure 22) and *Three Studies of a Horse’s Head* [1906] (figure 23)—makes clear that this image is as much a study of the figure of a dead animal as of the effect of death on this creature. The horse’s empty, outward-gazing eyes, stiff thin skin, and slack-jawed, swollen-tonged mouth are demonstrative of an animal that
has not only lost the consciousness or spirit of momentum shown in Marc’s living animals but also the animal soul described in Marc’s writing. *Head of a Dead Horse* visibly lacks the detailed naturalism applied to defining movement, musculature, and anatomy in *Three Studies of a Horse’s Head*—a contemporaneous example of a horse head study from Marc’s 1906 sketchbook—as well as in a series of images of a dead bull entitled *Study of a Slaughtered Bull* [1907] (figure 24), *Sketch of a Slaughtered Bull* [1907] (figure 25), and *Legs of a Slaughtered Bull* [1907] In fact, Marc’s image bears more resemblance to his written description of another dying horse (described in a letter written to Maria on December 6, 1915) than to any living horse shown in the artist’s contemporaneous sketches. Marc writes of this dying horse:

In these days I also experienced the quite curious and upsetting death of a horse... a real Pegasus of the legends, suddenly died... during its last 2 hours it was in enormous pain and moaned and groaned like a human being. I felt at the time that it sighed like a man that was being shaken out of a lively dream. A few minutes later, an awkward, ugly, decaying horse’s body lay in front of me—Pegasus was nowhere to be seen—all that remained to us was the stinking mortal remains, and we had these buried. I thought of those eternally memorable words that have resounded through the ages: “Let the dead bury their dead.”

In this letter and in the image of animal death discussed above, Marc chose to depict a horse—one of his most spirited creatures and one that he most often paints in his most spiritual

---

hue (blue). This choice and the visual and textual details that compose these examples support the artist’s focus not only on the bodily but also the spiritual effects of death in these animals.

Just as Marc discusses the passing of the horse in his letter from a divine, Pegasus-like creature to a decaying corpse, he points to a similar spiritual loss in his image of a dead horse. This is expressed in the contrast between the faces and eyes of his living horses and those of his dead examples. While Marc’s living horses have gentle expressions with lidded eyes and closed mouths (see *Three Studies of a Horse’s Head or Horses head*), the eyes of his dead horse are bulging and completely without lids. The horse’s mouth is also agape, separated by a swollen and exposed tongue. This is in contrast to the well-muscled, closed jaws of Marc’s living examples.

This attention to the ugliness of death is lacking in Marc’s examinations of a slaughtered bull. The dead bull series, unlike the dead horse image, appears to be a study of anatomy. This study is performed on a dead animal for the convenience of obtaining a unique angle from which to show its anatomy. This image does not show the same interest in the process of the animal’s death, especially the spiritual process of this death. The bull’s musculature is still stressed and almost animated. Further, Marc chooses two angles—one of the bull’s legs viewed from below and one if its body viewed diagonally from above—both of which obscure or omit the bull’s possibly expressive face. These views and the details they omit further indicate that the artist’s focus in this instance is not on the spiritual loss of death (as in *Head of a Dead Horse*), but many other examples from Marc’s oeuvre and writings do maintain this spiritual analysis.

---

97 Examples of Marc’s attempts to capture unique angles, unique animal behaviors, and unique animals abound in his sketchbooks of this period. These include many images of lying or sleeping animals, examples of horses cleaning their hooves, and several images of exotic zoo animals. See Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*. 
Further proof of Marc’s belief in the spirituality of animal life can be drawn out of his written description of the dying horse. First, Marc compares the horse’s sigh in his passing moment to that of a man waking from a deep dream. In Marc’s art and prose, the dream is often used as a symbol for a temporal state. Likewise, death has long been considered a temporary or transitional state between earthly and heavenly being in the Western Christian tradition to which Marc belonged.  

That an animal in Marc’s theory could participate in this transitional stage between mortal and spiritual being begins to demonstrate two things: first that they, like man, experience a mortal being and, second, that they, like man, carry an individual soul that leaves them in death, but that continues to exist after death.

Indeed, the horse in Marc’s anecdote is promoted as a spiritual, even deified being more-so even than the men who buried it. The quote at the end of Marc’s story is an excerpt from the Book of Matthew (8:22) wherein Christ tells a prospective disciple who has asked for leave to bury his father to “Let the dead bury their dead.”  

The implication of Christ’s words is that his

---

98 This concept of the temporal dream state recurs in Marc’s images and writings on both man and animals. Marc specifically analogizes the dream state when describing the brevity of animal life in an earlier letter to his wife lamenting the death of his favorite pet deer. See Maur, "...from looking at the world to looking through the world," 297. Images like *Dreaming Horse* (1913) and *The Shepherds* (1912) show Marc’s belief that animals, like man, participated in the temporal state of dreaming. Blavatsky also discusses the dream state as a method for man to escape the body and pass into the spiritual, saying” In the stillness of the night hours, when our bodily senses are fast locked in the fetters of sleep and our elementary body rests, the astral form becomes free.” Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 42.

99 This is in contrast to the Cartesian animal spirit that also leaves both man and animal in death but is not individualized and continues to cycle into and animate further mortal life. Marc’s animal and human souls seem to be unique spiritual entities more in line with Descartes’ contrast for the animal spirit, the tradition of the Christian eternal soul.

100 The exchange from the Book of Matthew (King James Version) follows: 8:18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. 8:19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. 8:20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests;
follower should not abandon his spiritual journey, but allow the spiritually dead to attend to the mundane matters of life. In Marc’s story, his fellow soldiers are the spiritually dead burying the now spiritually empty horse. Though they were once spirited, the soul of each horse is no longer a part of either Marc’s sketched or described horses. The continuation of this now absent animal soul in an afterlife is a possibility further described by animal imagery throughout Marc’s art and writings.

Death, Reincarnation, and Progress in Marc’s Hierarchy of Life

The presence of the soul in Marc’s horse and the representation of the men in Marc’s story as “the dead,” are also significant to positioning the horse and man in the artist’s hierarchy of life. In this story, both man and animal can be in similar ways and pass out of this being into another state of purer being through the soul. Therefore, they are near one another in the progression towards the purely spiritual being that tops Marc’s hierarchy of life.

Because Marc describes death as the ultimate process by which an individual can attain a higher being and a higher purity, it is notable that animals die similarly to men. Marc outlines this process in a letter to his mother written February 17, 1916 from the French front. He writes:

Nothing is more calming than the peace of death, the one thing common to all. [It] leads us back into normal “being.”… The only, true, constant, philosophical comfort is the awareness that this exceptional condition will pass and that “I-consciousness” which is always restless, always piquant, in all seriousness inaccessible will again sink back into its wonderful peace before birth. Whoever strives for purity and knowledge, to him death always comes as a savior… There

but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. 8:21 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. 8:22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. 8:23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. See Mt 8:18-8:23 AV
is only one blessing and redemption: death, the destruction of the form which liberates the soul… Death leads us back into normal being.\textsuperscript{101}

The process of dying described above has been seen to be shared between man and animal in Marc’s art. The first two lines describing this death are straightforward. Death is the ultimate peace and it leads to normal (pure) being. Notably, this being is described as a preexisting state to which the individual (the “I-Consciousness,”) returns, in spirit, after death. For those that can see spiritual purity in material life (as Marc does and as he perceives animals do) death is the ultimate destruction of the material. It leaves only the pure being Marc describes in his \textit{Aphorism 86}. If man and animal share the path towards higher being (death) and each possesses a soul that is released through the process of dying, then each is capable of reaching the pinnacle of Marc’s hierarchy of being—purity or true being.

The manner in which man and animal share the spiritual process of death goes beyond each possessing a soul or Marc’s observing and depicting each similarly in death. In the theosophical philosophy that influenced Marc’s art and animal theory, man and animal share an “oversoul” from which their individual souls originate before birth, to which their individual souls pass in death, and through which their reincarnation can be initiated. This same idea of an eternal soul from which the individual soul originates and returns is roughly outlined in the passage quoted above.

Though there is no mention of a direct theosophical source in Marc’s theory of the cyclical soul, it is known that Marc relied on theosophical writings for the development of his color theory, and similarities between his works and works of Theosophy are widely recognized.\textsuperscript{102} Marc’s receptiveness to the theory of reincarnation in certain eastern religions is also recognized in scholarship.\textsuperscript{103} However, the similarities between Marc’s art and the theosophical theory of reincarnation have yet to be recognized.

Marc’s adaptation of the theosophical theory of reincarnation is demonstrated particularly clearly in one painting, \textit{The World Cow} (also known as \textit{Bos Orbis Mundi}). In this image, a large heifer (the “world cow”) dominates the visual plane. She is colored red—a color that Marc associates with earth—and she faces the viewer in three-quarters view. Two cows—one black and one brown—graze in the world outside of her body and another white cow grazes in a landscape set within her womb.\textsuperscript{104} Though parts of the landscape surrounding the “world cow”

\textsuperscript{102} See Moffitt, "Fighting Forms."

\textsuperscript{103} See Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 67-69.

\textsuperscript{104} Though Eschenburg cannot directly link Marc to any study of Hinduism, she notes that white is a color of great significance in this religion. She goes on to discuss how the Hindu
are proportionate to her (for example the white rocks in front of her are big enough to support her forelegs), others (like the hills and mountains surrounding her) are more proportionate to the smaller black and brown cows. The red cow’s planetary size suggests her role as the title “world cow” and is a testament to her cosmic importance.

A prominent motif in this work—the large, slanted tree that intersects the cow at center—is seen in other images from Marc’s oeuvre around the time that World Cow was painted. For example Deer in the Woods II [1912] (figure 26) and Fate of the Animals are both intersected at center by a tall, thin, black-trunked pine similar to the one in the center of World Cow. In each instance the tree directs movement around an image. In his interpretation of this tree motif in Fate of the Animals, Levine suggests that the tree is representative of the world-ash at the center of the universe in Nordic cosmology. The similarities between the concept of the world-tree and the “world cow” and Levine’s statement that this tree stands for “the vastness of the universe and mortality” is in line with the esoteric themes of this image.105

In World Cow as in Fate of the Animals, the slanting tree further complicates the scale and organization of the image’s overlapping planes as it directs movement around the image. Following the slant of the tree, the eye is led around this painting counterclockwise and elliptically. This elliptical view is halted from continually revolving around the “world cow” by the same black-trunked tree that initiated its flow. Beginning with the black tree trunk, the viewer follows its slant right to the brown cow grazing in the nearest plane. The view then moves over the “world cow’s” rolling hind leg, back, and downward-tilted head, and, following the

religion believes in reincarnation and values cows (especially white cows). See Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 68.

head’s slope, rolls onto the figure of the black cow. The black cow, in turn, points inward to the white cow situated within the “world cow’s” circular womb. Constrained from moving forward by the dark, slanted tree, this final, central cow is the resting point in this image.

The role of the four cows, their placement, and the symbolism of the “world cow” in particular are each clarified through comparison with Marc’s contemporaneous writings and the theosophist texts on which Marc appears to draw his imagery. In Isis Unveiled, Blavatsky describes an image of reincarnation wherein the “oversoul” or the “spiritual sphere above” is circular or spherical. Further, its border is composed of smaller circles—the individual souls of man and animal. The soul (or “astral monad”) of a flawed human (Blavatsky gives the examples of an “idiot,” an aborted fetus, or a dead infant) can reenter the circle of life and be born again as an animal or, through incremental promotions, another man. Indeed, the only purpose of reincarnation in theosophical thought is to provide a path for a flawed worldly being to become more perfect until it can recognize its spirituality. Once a man is able to think introspectively, he has the ability to recognize and attain his final spiritual form in death. He then becomes and remains a soul within the “oversoul.”

In this elliptically-flowing image, the “world cow” represents the “oversoul” from which the smaller cows emerge and to which they return until they are perfected. The perfected individual soul is represented by the white cow at center. In Marc’s images and writings on reincarnation themes, a similar goal of spiritual perfection (a promotion in the hierarchy of life) is attained through death (the abandonment of the material). A parallel to the theosophist “oversoul” is also outlined in Marc’s The Animal in Art and Aphorisms when the artist describes the process of

---

106 See Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, 88-89
unifying with the divine by recognizing its existence in the everyday.\textsuperscript{107} Whereas Blavatsky describes the oversoul and “all matter [having] a common origin,” in \textit{Isis Unveiled}, Marc describes a concept similar to the “oversoul,” as “the organic rhythm.. [that] is in all things.”\textsuperscript{108} Marc also writes (in Aphorism 14), “physics are completely absorbed in the psyche, not the other way around like the great error of materialism would teach.”\textsuperscript{109} Outside of death, another way of gaining distance from the material and promoting unity with the spiritual or “psychic,” (or “psyche”) as Marc calls it in aphorism 14, is evident in the increasingly abstract style of Marc’s “animalized” art.

\textbf{The Stylistic Expression of Marc’s Theory of Animal Death: “Seeing-Through” the World}

For long enough already, man has insisted through that boldest dualism [between material and spiritual perception], and, through the deactivation of himself, on obtaining ‘exact knowledge’ about himself and capturing the deceptive nature (which has denied him, for so many millennia, a glance behind the world) and behind the divine. The “looking at the world” (“Weltanschauung”) of the old world will be the “looking through the world” (“Weltdurchschauung”) of the new world.\textsuperscript{110}

In this quotation from \textit{The Higher Type}, Marc outlines his attempt to “see through” the world to the divine that inhabits all material things. As the artist describes early in this passage

\textsuperscript{107} For these concepts in Marc’s \textit{Aphorisms}, see Aphorisms 14, 24, and 34 in Marc, \textit{Schriften}, 189; 193; 195.

\textsuperscript{108} See Blavatsyk, Isis Unveiled, 102-103. See also Aphorism 14 in Marc, \textit{Schriften}, 189.

\textsuperscript{109} I have translated this from Marc’s Aphorism 14 which, in its original German and without ellipses, reads, “Man wird die Wesensgleichheit von Welt- und Naturgeschichte eines Tages ebenso sicher beweisen, wie man die Einheit von Physik und Psyche in dem Sinne erkennen wird, daß die Physik in der Psyche restlos aufgeht, – nicht umgekehrt, wie es der grobe Fehler des Materialismus lehren wollte.” See Aphorism 14 in Marc, \textit{Schriften}, 189.

\textsuperscript{110} See \textit{The Higher Type} in Marc, \textit{Schriften}, 168-173.
and in the lines that lead up to this excerpt, this “seeing-through” is accomplished by denying the senses or the perceptions of the material in favor of the spiritual or the “psychic.” The dualism that Marc refers to in the first line is the conflict between material and spiritual perception. This dualism and the “seeing-through” that leads one to a greater spiritual being is a recurring aspect of the artist’s work from this time and is one of the most important themes in Marc’s painting, *Fate of The Animals* (subtitled *The Trees Show Their Rings, the Animals their Veins*). It is also central to Marc’s “animalization” of art, his theory of animal death, and his theory of the animal on the whole.

Marc outlines a manner of “seeing-through” the world, when he initially describes his “animalization” of art. The artist’s definition of this “animalization” as the attempt to depict “the organic rhythm that [he feels] is in all things… the rapture of the flow of blood in nature, in the trees, in the animals, in the air” is very similar in description and stylistic execution to “seeing-through,” (described as the attempt to visualize and pursue the pure divinity in all things). Both approaches seek to express a more spiritual sight through artistic abstraction and the use of animal subjects in Marc’s art.

The spiritual energy underlying everything material that both approaches—“animalization” and “seeing-through”—seek to visualize is also behind the equality of man and animal in Marc’s hierarchy of life. Further, understanding the spiritual energy that Marc believes is shared by all material things and individuals is one of the most important characteristics of the higher type (the pinnacle of his hierarchy of being). Indeed, an individual’s ability to see through defines his spiritual purity and, therefore, his rank in Marc’s hierarchy. As discussed in Chapter Two, within this hierarchy, the animal may have been nearer this spiritual perception and this

---

111 See note 43
pinnacle than man. Certainly in Marc’s work, the animal is the active subject in animalized art, the primary subject of images that seek to “see through,” and often the embodiment of the “overman,” as well.

While Marc’s animals as a group may have been better able to perceive the spirituality underlying the material, one image in Marc’s oeuvre illustrates the various degrees to which individual animals could still fall victim to materiality. In *Fate of the Animals* several groups of animals represent the lower and intermediate stages between materiality and pure spirituality while a lone animal subject at center represents the ability of animals to completely overcome the material. This “overman” figure—the single blue deer at the center of this image—reinforces Marc’s description of the progress towards the “overman” as the journey and the gain of the individual, not the masses. The fates of the various animals in this composition further illustrate Marc’s concept that, while a fearful, violent death and possibly a reincarnation are often necessary for the purification of the masses, the spiritual individual who can already see through the material to the spiritual, experiences death as only the final transition out of the material body and into a wholly spiritual state.112

Marc chose animals to depict the various stages of this escape from materialism—the triumph of the individual as “overman” and the purification in death of the masses—not as symbolism, but because animals as a group were already nearer this ideal than man. In order to illustrate the multiple stages of this progress, Marc had to portray subjects that (unlike man) already demonstrated progression in the spectrum of being. This is a fact that is not well

---

112 Levine also notes the spirituality of this image in Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision*, 85.
recognized in the scholarship surrounding this work, but it is key to a full understanding of this image.

In paintings like *Fate of the Animals* and other images that demonstrate “seeing-through” the material world, Marc sought not only to depict advancement in the hierarchy of life, but also to advance himself in this recognition and assumption of spiritual purity. As with the “animalization” of art, Marc’s “seeing-through” was as much about the process of creating this new artistic style as the product. In *Fate of the Animals* specifically, Marc combines the materialization of the spiritual with translucency in the material to actively explore his own understanding of the second purer sight, in much the way that he had previously used abstraction to actively explore how animals see. The artist describes this relationship between his spiritual ambition to see through the world and the development of his art as well as his study of the natural world in his Aphorism 24. In this aphorism, he writes, “Herein, also, is our main idea...Science raised us to the second stage of recognizing the hundred stages of cognition of “seeing-through” (*durchschauen*) or penetrating into the meaning of things... Art will recognize the second face of things...”

In *Fate of the Animals*, Marc enacts these words. As Karen Von Maur notes, Marc takes his cue from the emerging sciences of x-ray technology and microbiology, and uses his art to look beyond the first material face of things and depict the second, spiritual face of animals and

---

nature.\textsuperscript{114} He portrays this “seeing-through” by painting literally translucent animals and trees in more figuratively translucent colors. He then situates these on perforated, intersecting planes.

Marc’s spiritual modality must also be understood in relation to the two most striking instances of this transparency, the white triangle that reveals the veins of one horse and the rings that are shown through the trunk of the slanting, intact tree at center. More subtle examples of transparency in this image are seen in the translucent fading to white of many of Marc’s colorful creatures and the seepage of color and lines between his various planes. In each instance, this transparency symbolizes a spiritual “seeing-through,” but, as Maur notes, scientific modes of “seeing-through” that were also newly available in Marc’s time.\textsuperscript{115} As Maur suggests, twentieth century discoveries in x-ray technology, atomic science, and microbiology allowed man to see what was once invisible, and she concludes that these discoveries had the effect of widening Marc’s and other artists’ subject matter to include the world behind the visible. For Marc, however, the most important aspect of this world behind the visible is the invisible: the spiritual energy or “flow of blood in nature,” that he believed existed within all things.

Another reason why animals figure prominently in Marc’s art of “seeing-through” is that, in Marc’s animal theory, nature and animals serve as man’s models for moving beyond the material and into the purely spiritual. Indeed, Marc states explicitly that the study of nature (the applied sciences of biology, zoology, etc.) is the first tool for the second pure science of

\textsuperscript{114} The influence of sciences like microbiology and atomic physics of Marc and other early twentieth-century artists is proposed in Maur, "...from looking at the world to looking through the world,” 203.

\textsuperscript{115} Maur discusses the effect of x-ray technology and atomic physics on artists like Marc and Kandinsky in "...from looking at the world to looking through the world,” 203-205.
philosophical evolution and art. An individual uses each of these tools to pursue the divine being within all things. This relationship in which science (specifically the study of the natural world) influences art is seen throughout Marc’s written works as well as his art. In *The Higher Type*, Marc states, “Nature, the earlier target, image and exemplar, wall and border of the world war, will be for the Europeans formula and tool.” Nature, as the step between an individual and the spiritual, represents intermediate materiality.

Scientific methods of “seeing-through” the world—the advances in atomic physics and x-ray imaging that Maur cites in her chapter—are practical sciences and are second only to the pure science of art that Marc used to look through the world. When early twentieth-century revelations in atomic physics and microbiology revealed (as did evolution) that all life shared the same origins and the same building blocks, Marc used these practical sciences as a foundation for the pure science of his art. In his theory, the artist transferred these connections to the spiritual belief that all life shared the same spiritual essence. In his art, he illustrated this spiritual concept in the layout, style, color, and narrative of his images. *Fate of the Animals* is a particularly rich example of Marc’s artistic expression and exploration of these ideas.

In this apocalyptic scene, several groups of animals in various attitudes populate a forest. Flames represented by hard red triangles and lightning represented by jagged yellow lines tear through the image from its edges. Tree stumps jut out around a group of two boars in the bottom

---

116 As described in Chapter Two, Marc’s definition of pure science differs from the modern definition of pure science (i.e. physics or biology). In Marc’s division between applied and pure sciences (as outlined by Eschenburg), the applied sciences include most traditional scientific fields (like biology and zoology). In contrast, “pure science,” in Marc’s body of through refers to the theoretical side of evolution and pure (or theoretical) art like his own. See Eschenburg, "Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures," 55.
left corner, four deer in the bottom right corner, two horses in the top left, and a single deer at center.

The hard diagonals that animate this scene and that pierce the planes and animals represent the visualization of the spiritual energy that Marc is exploring. These hard, triangular diagonals are especially apparent in the spiritually purifying flames that flow throughout this image as well as in the yellow lightning bolts that emanate from the heavens. In their attitudes, coloration, and positioning, each of the animal groups absorbed in this energy demonstrates a different quality or phase of the purification of life. While some demonstrate purification through death, others represent purification by “seeing-through.” Each animal group also illustrates a separate place in the hierarchy of Marc’s animal theory. While the horses represent pure materialism and fear of death, the boars represent a stronger connection to the natural world and wear an expression either pitiful ignorance or resignation to their fate.\footnote{Levine interprets the boar’s expressions as pitiful or scared in Levine, The Apocalyptic Vision, 83.} In contrast, the deer in the bottom right are bent in form to resemble and sympathetically draw towards the purifying force of the painting’s flames. These figures show the first stages of recognition of their fate. Finally, the single deer at center represents total recognition of and assumption into the divine as well as the overcoming of the material. These characteristics and this central figure are indicative of the “overman.” As a creative individual working to depict the spirituality of all matter, Marc might have identified with the group of four deer in the beginning stages of understanding. Both the artist and these figures are in the early stages of the “seeing-through,” that would lead them to the overcoming of the central deer.
In the bottom right corner in which these deer are situated, restoration work has repaired the third of the painting that was damaged in a 1917 warehouse fire. Marc’s close friend and fellow Expressionist painter, Paul Klee, reconstructed this damaged corner in 1919, and the brown tint that Klee added to his repairs separates his restoration from the original painting. In the brighter half of the image, Marc’s use of color allows his viewer to discern three divisions in an otherwise spatially and temporally tangled space. There is a predominantly green foreground, a mostly red mid-ground, and a blue background. While a blue deer overwhelms the small wedge of green in the foreground, several purple boars, red and brown stumps, and a slanting red tree are in the process of being consumed by purifying flame in the red middle space. Behind the boars, two green horses leap from the red mid-ground and are suspended between it and the blue sky of Marc’s background. Several more triangular red shapes (possibly more flames) and a few bolts of yellow lightning descend from the top corners of the painting and meet with the red leaning red tree that bisects the painting at its middle.

The blue of spirituality in this image is deepest in the heavenly plane at its rear and in the figure of the deer at its center. Unlike the rest of the animals in this composition, the central deer seems unconcerned with the chaos surrounding him. In further contrast to the other animals, the deer is not a victim of the flames. Nevertheless, he is in mortal danger. The

---

118 Klee studied color photographs of Marc’s work and tinted his restoration brown to maintain its distinction from the original condition of the rest of the canvas. See Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings, 254.

119 The purifying fire is referred to in the subtitle Marc wrote on the back of the canvas. This reads “And All Being is Flaming Suffering.” See Levine, The Apocalyptic Vision, 77. Levine interprets the fire as purifying and regenerative through a comparison of Fate of the Animals to Nordic myths. See The Apocalyptic Vision, 95-100.
yellow streak of lightning that crosses over his white neck is identified in Levine’s
Apocalyptic Vision as deadly.\textsuperscript{120} But instead of emerging from the earth like the red flames
that consume the deer’s compatriots, the lightning bolt that is killing this spiritual individual
descends from the blue heavens.

Despite being most concentrated in the sky and in the deer, heavenly blue tones
appear throughout this composition in the tinges of blue that dilute or interrupt the earthen
reds of its middle space.\textsuperscript{121} In this middle ground, two purple boars (their own coloration
composed of a mixture of earthen red and spiritual blue) seem resigned to death or else are
unaware of the fire that is consuming them. The four deer in the tinted bottom right corner
are not yet aflame, but they are surrounded by another image of destruction—a group of
sawn-off tree stumps.\textsuperscript{122} In contrast, two green horses in the top left corner are fleeing the fire
of the red plane by jumping into the blue. They are, nevertheless, torn open by the sharp form
of the flames, thus fulfilling the animal role in Marc’s subtitle for the image—The Trees
Show Their Rings the Animals Their Veins.

The color symbolism of this image has been the subject of extensive scholarship. The
assignment of spirituality to blue, purifying destructiveness to red, spiritual cleansing to

\textsuperscript{120} See Levine, The Apocalyptic Vision, 83; 86.

\textsuperscript{121} This interpretation of the color blue and the blue deer in particular is also noted in

\textsuperscript{122} Levine recounts the scholarly argument over whether these figures are deer, foxes, or
wolves and concludes that these figures are deer. See Levine, The Apocalyptic Vision, 87-88.
yellow, and rebirth to white in Levine, Moffitt, and other authors’ works is valid.\textsuperscript{123}

However, additional color symbolism can be drawn out of this painting’s animal theory.

Most significantly, green (the tone of the fleeing horses) is a color Marc associated with the “industrial arts.”\textsuperscript{124} In contrast to pure science, (or spiritual art like this painting), industrial or commercial arts would have been associated with applied science and the modern European materialism that opposed spirituality in Marc’s hierarchy. In this image of spiritual purification, the figures associated with this materiality are those that suffer the most.

Similar imagery of the destruction of symbols of materialism can be seen in the stumps that appear in this painting and in a study for this work, \textit{St. Julian [1913]} (figure \textsuperscript{27}).\textsuperscript{125} In each example, the trees that make these stumps are not snapped in half—as if by a natural disaster. Instead, they are sawn clean as if they were cut down by man. Trees in \textit{Fate of the Animals} do not need to be cut down to show their rings and fulfill their role in Marc’s subtitle. As seen in the central tree, artistic transparency is another method for “seeing-through” to tree rings in this work. In contrast, these stumps show their rings not because of an artistic “seeing-through,” but because of their propensity to create the material, lumber. Therefore, their place in the path of the purifying flame is appropriate to the tone of this image. This interpretation of the symbolism of these trees mirrors the symbolism of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} For Levine’s analysis of color in this image and throughout Marc’s art, see Levine, \textit{The Apocalyptic Vision}, 57; 88-89. For Moffitt’s analysis of color in this image, see Moffitt, “Fighting Forms,” 123-124.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Moffitt translates a letter of December 21, 1910 from Marc to Macke stating Marc’s identification of green with the industrial arts. See Moffitt, “Fighting Forms,” 112. As Moffitt records, Marc goes on to state that Green is a comparatively weak color that lacks the strength and significance of both yellow and blue, but especially of red. Notably, Moffitt does not make this association between green and the color chosen for the horses in \textit{Fate of the Animals}.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Hoberg and Jansen identify \textit{St. Julian} as a study for \textit{Fate of the Animals} in Hoberg and Jansen, \textit{Sketchbooks and prints}, 247.
\end{itemize}
horses that are also destroyed in the flames that tear through *Fate of the Animals*. Each object of materiality is released from the material by death and destruction in sharp, purifying fire. This fire opens them up in the process of their destruction to show the white or spirituality inside of them.

The material exterior often impedes the spiritual interior, requiring a “seeing-through” in Marc’s writings in much the same way that it does in these examples of horses and trees. When describing the “European disease,” of materialism in *Aphorism 7*, Marc states, “[The Europeans’] wonderful sciences, their “progress,” was made at the expense of talent… they displaced a unique capability inherent in him toward the external..in equipment and machinery. This impoverishment of man… diminished…his intuitive abilities—that is the problem of the European disease.”

According to Marc, the conventional European View strengthens the material and the industrial at the expense of the instinctual or the spiritual. Marc returns to this concept of the material undermining the spiritual in man and the true supremacy of the spiritual through aphorisms like *Aphorism 14* in which he states, “physics are completely absorbed in the psyche, not the other way around like the great error of materialism would teach.” In these writings Marc expresses his opposition to the modern European perception of this order (that the material supersedes the spiritual).

---


In Marc’s art the solution to this issue of the reversed hierarchy of the European condition is clear. Only by abandoning (through death) or looking beyond (as Marc’s “seeing-through” seeks to perform) the material is man or animal able to advance towards pure spirituality in the hierarchy of life. Because Marc associated industrialism with materiality and contrasted the material with the spiritual, symbols of industrialism are destroyed by purifying fire in his image. In destroying these symbols of materiality or materialistic individuals, Marc is illustrating the destruction of materiality that is necessary for the purification of life (whether animal or human). In the transparent stylistics of “seeing-through,” he is also asserting his own progress towards the spiritual purity that he idealizes in his hierarchy of life.

This “seeing-through” was available to Marc as a spiritual, creative individual. But for other men, death and destruction (especially that wrought by the First World War) was the path towards greater purity in Marc’s hierarchy of being. Marc repeatedly refers to the war as a cleansing process in his Aphorisms. In Aphorism 6, Marc states outright, “The Great War has provided a swift… cleansing.” It is likely this connection between destruction, purification, and the war that has lead other scholars and Marc himself to compare Fate of the Animals with the First World War.

---

128 See The Higher Type and Aphorisms 14 and 20 in, Marc, Schriften, 168-173; 189-191.

129 The full quotation in its original German without ellipses reads, “Der große Krieg hat dem hoffnungslosen Treiben ein rasches Ende bereitet und fuhr als deus ex machina reinigend über die europäische Bühne; wenigstens könnte man endlich erwarten, daß an die Stelle der Reform die Form selber tritt.” See Marc, Schriften, 186.

130 Marc relates Fate of the Animals to the First World War in a Letter written to Maria Marc from the French war front. See Levine, The Apocalyptic Vision, 77. See also Marc, Schriften, 50-51. The artist also repeatedly describes the war in his writings as a purifying experience. In
In fact, in *Aphorisms* 26 and 29 Marc uses fire imagery to describe the war, and it is fire that destroys forms in his painting. In a letter dated March 17, 1915 addressing a post card he received with a reproduction of the image, Marc again outlined the connection between his painting and the war outright, writing, “Koehler wrote me today on a postcard with my *Fate of the Animals* on it. At first glance I was completely shaken. It is like a premonition of this war, horrible and gripping; I can hardly believe that I painted it.”

But the figures in *Fate of The Animals* and the composition’s connection to the purifying force of the First World War run beyond the directly analogous symbolism described in Marc’s letter. The purifying deaths of the animals in this image relate as much to the propensity of animals to die spiritual deaths in Marc’s animal theory as to their comparison with the purifying force of the First World War. Indeed, as Marc’s letter demonstrates, his image was not painted as an analogy for war; it was only taken as such later. Marc’s focus in this painting and in his later analysis of it is not on animal symbolism, but on the direct comparison of human and animal being and especially human and animal death.

another letter from the French front, Marc also states, “The war was nothing if not a moral experience [seemingly] a preparation for a breakthrough to a higher spiritual experience [necessary for] sweeping dirt and decay away to give us the future today.” This translation comes from Mark Rosenthal, *Franz Marc* (Munich: Prestel, 1989), 34. In fact, in the last line of *The Higher Type*, Marc writes, “The Great War has freed and refreshed us.” (in its original German it reads: “Uns hat der große Krieg erfrischt und befreit.”). See Marc, *Schriften*, 173.

---

131 See aphorisms 14 and 20 in Marc, *Schriften*, 189; 191.

For both man and animal the destruction of the material that death represents leads to the same higher form of being. This being from which the individual came and to which it returns in death is analogous with the concept of the theosophical “oversoul.” The theosophical “oversoul” in this image is analogous with “flow of blood in nature.” Like the “oversoul,” this “flow of blood” is an invisible energy that generates and animates all life, and all life returns to this energy after death. In Fate of the Animals, Marc illustrates the spiritual concepts of the “flow of blood in nature,” and “seeing-through,” and connects these concepts to that of reincarnation by incorporating the blood of his animals into the spiritual field. In fact, the hard diagonals of fire that represent this “flow of blood,” split the exposed veins out of one green horse and carry its blood up and across the spiritual plane of the blue sky.

In this image, some animals are ignorant of this “flow of blood.” Other animals perceive the danger approaching, but do not grasp it significance. Both of these groups are consumed by purifying flame. An important aspect of this death by flame is the propensity for new life to rise from ash. As in the reincarnation of an individual soul from the “oversoul,” this recycling of organic matter allows a dead individual to assume another, better form. Still others (like the central deer) perceive the spiritual flow behind the purifying flames and are freed from the material and absorbed into the “oversoul,” or the brotherhood of man by beams of heavenly light.

The ultimate goal of this release from the material and this progress towards a higher being (whether through death, reincarnation, or “seeing-through”) is the “overman” status

---

133 Eschenburg notes a similar regeneration of dead matter into new life in The World Cow. See Eschenburg, “Animals in Franz Marc’s World View and Pictures,” 69.
illustrated by the blue deer at the center of *Fate of the Animals*. The identification of the deer as “overman” is strengthened by his coloration, spiritual death, arrangement on the canvas, and posture. The blue deer is positioned at the center of the canvas, and is situated at the beginning and end of its cyclical flow. It is also the largest and most prominent animal in the painting. Further, this figure is arranged beneath the triangular meeting of a leaning tree (entering diagonally from the right) and a body of flames (entering diagonally from the left). The extension of its head up and over his back forms its body into another, smaller triangle. This triangular shape is a symbol of ascension towards the “overman” in Marc’s, Kandinsky’s, and Nietzsche’s writings on the “overman” or “higher type”.¹³⁴

The light from the beam of deadly and heavenly yellow lightning that runs across this deer’s neck illuminates the ground behind the deer as well as the faces of the boar and, after reflecting off the deer’s white underbelly, this light hits the trunk of the leaning tree. Levine connects this deer’s posture to that of another mortally wounded deer in Marc’s 1908 lithograph, *Dying Deer* (figure 28).¹³⁵ While *Dying Deer* is thematically related to *Fate of the Animals*, the blue deer’s posture is more closely related in appearance, time, and significance to the extended head of another blue animal—the foremost horse in *Blue Foals* [1913] (figure 29).

Whereas the subject of *Dying Deer* is crouched and wounded, the blue deer bends only to exaggerate the expression of his lifted head. His neck is not twisted in agony; instead

¹³⁴ The significance of the triangular shape as a symbol of ascension towards the “overman” in Marc’s Kandinsky’s and Nietzsche’s writings on the “overman” or “higher type” is discussed in Chapter Two.

it is dropped backwards in spiritual ecstasy and pure relief. Similarly, the raised head of the foal (who shares the deer’s spiritual coloration) is hyperextended, but not strained.

Nevertheless, *Dying Deer* does share a thematic connection with *Fate of the Animals*. The lithograph is an illustration for Gustave Flaubert’s short story, *The Legend of St. Julian Hospitator*. In Flaubert’s story, Julian commits a series of sins as a young man when he hunts down and kills animals in cold blood. One of Julian’s victims, a stag, confronts him in its death throes, and Julian realizes and repents for the error of his ways. Marc’s lithograph and a sketch he made for *Fate of the Animals (St. Julian)* depict the scenes of Julian’s confrontation and repentance, respectively.\(^{137}\)

Whereas the deer in the lithograph and sketch are pitiful and pained, the deer in *Fate of the Animals* (like the horse in *Blue Foals*) is triumphant. Despite his species, the deer resembles the resplendent figure of St. Julian more than he does one of the saint’s animal victims. His upright posture and coloration are more similar to Julian’s and, as they do for the saint, these aspects represent the deer’s spiritual significance. Further, the deer is painted in Marc’s most spiritually significant color, blue. Moffitt acknowledges the spiritual significance of the deer and his color when he states that the blue deer at the center of *Fate of the Animals* is the embodiment of the theososophist concept of the “brotherhood of Man.”\(^{138}\)


\(^{137}\) Notably, Marc’s sketch depicts St. Julian in a blue jacket and a blue war helmet mounted on a blue horse and towering over a bent deer and twisted boar.

Like the deer in *Fate of the Animals*, St. Julian is depicted in blue to symbolize his spiritual awakening. And like the deer, he is surrounded by symbols of the materiality and sin from which he is released via his spiritual awakening. Animals cower at Julian’s feet and sawed-off stumps plunge out of the background to each side of him while spiritually lesser animals (also boars and deer) and similarly sawed tree trunks surround *Fate of the Animals’* blue deer in nearly the same configuration. But whereas St. Julian is saved by literally recognizing the error of his ways, the deer and the artist (who paints as an exploration of his spirituality) are saved by a more symbolic recognition: the literal (in the case of the deer) and symbolic (for Marc) destruction of the material to show the spirituality within it.

For Marc, the spiritual essence of life that his “looking through” revealed in his art was of the utmost importance to his concept of being. This essence—the organic spirit that unites his life forms—is expressed as well as released through the destruction of form. Stylistically, this results in Marc’s growing abstraction. Literally, this destruction (the releasing of the spiritual from the material) is expressed through the artist’s depiction of the suffering or death of animals. In *Fate of the Animals*—death marks the transition of life essence. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, in animals and men alike, a soul passes from one body into the overarching existence from whence it sprang. The “I-consciousness” returns to “normal being” like the “astral monad” returns to the “oversoul.”

Indeed there is a spiritual reality as well as a stylistic approach embodied in Marc’s “animalization” and his “seeing-through.” While this unity of being is ever present and observable in Marc’s physical world, it is visible only in his art, and both the reason and the method behind Marc’s approach to “seeing-through” the world are related to his desire to escape the materialism of life and explore the spirituality of death.
In the resulting images of animal death the details of his hierarchy of being and of animals’ equality and even superiority to man are well illustrated. *Fate of the Animals* in particular includes many central aspects of Marc’s theory of animal death and his theory of the animal on the whole. As we have seen, the color and stylistic expressions of this image touch on the role of Theosophy and applied sciences in Marc’s theory of the spiritual being of animals, man, and “overman.”

The topic of death as illustrated in *Fate of the Animals* is also central to animal theory on the whole. Beginning with Aristotle’s and Descartes’ consideration of the animal “spirit,” and the plant “soul,” the question of the animal experience of death has pervaded some of the most prominent animal theories. And while many have theorized the animal’s ability to recognize or experience the passing of life, few scholars (and even fewer early twentieth-century artists) have theorized about the spiritual aspects of animal death. Recognition of Marc’s theory of the animal, and particularly his theory of the spiritual animal death not only fills a gap in the emerging field of animal theory, it also provides another valuable facet to the body of scholarship surrounding Marc’s artistic output and theoretical writings. This aspect of his work aids in the understanding not only of the artist’s stylistic development but also of his prolific philosophical output.
Conclusion

Beginning in 1910-1911 with the “animalization,” of art, Franz Marc painted images and composed written works that expressed a distinct theory of the animal. As Chapter One demonstrated, Marc’s animal theory addressed topics (such as animal being, the hierarchy of life, and animal death) which are central to both historical and contemporaneous examples of animal theory. In fact, many of the same Darwinist and Nietzschean texts that are cited throughout the discourse of animal theory have also been shown to have direct influence on Marc’s theoretical and artistic works of animal theory. Chapter Two combined these influences with the artist’s esoteric interest in Christian and theosophical philosophies to begin to contextualize Marc’s contributions to animal theory. Primary among these contributions is Marc’s analysis of the spiritual being of animals. In Chapter Three, death is shown to be central to Marc’s animal art as well as to his analysis of animal being, especially animal spirituality.

Using death as a touchstone for each of the previously addressed aspects of the artist’s animal theory and considering Marc’s art as the central source of evidence for this theory, I have sought to expand on important aspects of Marc’s animal theory and show firstly that Marc believed that animals experience the world intellectually and spiritually, second that their experience of the world is a model for the ideal human experience, and third that animals experience death spiritually. In explicating these topics, I have addressed Marc’s concepts of applied and pure science, materiality, and spirituality as expressed in the artist’s letters, essays, and Aphorisms.

In all I have sought to demonstrate that these factors contribute to a coherent theory of the animal that is in dialogue with notable historical animal theories and that fills a gap in the animal
theory scholarship of Marc’s historical era. The animal theory that I have sought to outline in Marc’s art and writings brings attention to a topic that is well evidenced but that has been overlooked by previous scholarship on the artist. Likewise, the analysis of Campendonk in Chapter Two is meant to provide another, English-language resource on an artist that is unfortunately overlooked within current Blue Rider scholarship.

In addition, the English translations of Marc’s German texts that appear throughout this work are (in several instances) the first of their kind. These quotations are applicable to many other approaches to Marc’s work and it is my hope that they will be of use to scholars with diverse interests in the artist. The application of these quotations to Marc’s animal theory and the focus on death in the final chapter of this thesis represents only one point of departure from which future scholarship can analyze and explicate the source material cited in this thesis and the theory of animal being that it draws out of Marc’s work. Marc’s hierarchy of life, his theories of animal consciousness and animal spirituality, as well as many as-yet unrecognized parallels between his work and that of the larger field of animal theory provide equally promising material for future work.
Fig. 1. Saddled Horse, Pisanello, 1395 (Musee du Louvre via ARTstor)
Fig. 2. *Water Pipet*, Jean-Bloé Niestlé, 1909 (Städtische Galerie, Munich)
Fig. 3. *Cart Horses*, Franz Marc, 1904/1905 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 4. *Dead Sparrow*, Franz Marc, 1905 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 5. *Horse in a Landscape*, Franz Marc, 1910 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 6. *Dog in Front of the World*, Franz Marc, 1912 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 7. *Yellow Christ*, Paul Gauguin, 1889 (Albright-Knox Art Gallery via ARTstor)
Fig. 8. Brazilian bird head mask (Kandinsky et. al., *The Blue Rider Almanac*)
Fig. 9. Alaskan shawl (Kandinsky et. al., *The Blue Rider Almanac*)
Fig. 10. *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, Caspar David Friedrich, Circa 1825-30 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art via ARTstor)
Fig. 11. *Pumpkin with a Stable Lad*, George Stubbs, 1763 (*Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*)
Fig. 12. *Blue Horse II*, Franz Marc, 1911 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 13. *Birth of Horses*, Franz Marc, 1913 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 14. *Birth of Wolves*, Franz Marc, 1913 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 15. The Creation II, Franz Marc, 1914 (Hoberg and Jansen, Sketchbooks and Prints)
Fig. 16. *Creation of the Animals*, Heinrich Campendonk, 1916 (Sohn, *Heinrich Campendonk: Das Graphische Werk*)
Fig. 17. *Fate of the Animals*, Franz Marc, 1914 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 18. *The World Cow*, Franz Marc, 1913 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 19. Head of the Artist’s Father on his Deathbed, Franz Marc, 1907 (Parsch, ed., *Franz Marc 1880-1916*)
Fig. 20. *Head of a Dead Horse*, Franz Marc, 1907-8 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 21. Carcass of Beef, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1657 (Louvre)
Fig. 22. *Legs of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 23. *Three Studies of a Horse’s Head*, Franz Marc, 1906 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 24. *Study of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 25. *Sketch of a Slaughtered Bull*, Franz Marc, 1907 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 26. *Deer in the Woods II*, Franz Marc, 1912 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Fig. 27. St. Julian, Franz Marc, 1913 (Hoberg and Jansen, The Oil Paintings)
Fig. 28. *Dying Deer*, Franz Marc, 1908 (Hoberg and Jansen, *Sketchbooks and Prints*)
Fig. 29. *Blue Foals*, Franz Marc, 1913 (Hoberg and Jansen, *The Oil Paintings*)
Bibliography


Bronner, Stephen Eric, and Douglas Kellner, eds. *Passion and Rebellion: The

Calarco, Matthew. Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida

(New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)

Descartes, René. The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Vol. 3 of The Correspondence.


Fudge, Erica, ed. Renaissance Beasts: On Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures.


Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and


Wiese, Stephan von. “A Tempest Sweeping This World: Expressionism as an International Movement.” In German Expressionism 1915-1925: The Second


Vita

Morgan Chelsea Rinehart was born on July 12, 1990, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Great Bridge High School, Chesapeake, Virginia in 2008. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History from Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia in 2011.