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Culture as transition/translation. Vera Pavlova's

"Heavenly animal" ("Nebesnoe zhivotnoe", 1997)

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Abstract

This paper confronts to each other two alternative concepts of the genesis of culture: (1) The model of an all-embracing creativity, which includes physical procreation as well as mental creation, suggested by Vasily Rozanov; and (2) the model of two alternative, either physical or mental creativities, developed by Siegmund Freud.

Furthermore, the paper distinguishes two processes of conversion in culture: transition (the change of the cultural active subject), and translation (the change of objects, with which the active subject is busy). An examination of the two models of culture reveals that in each of the two models transition and translation condition each other, even if they do so in different ways.

The title of Vera Pavlovas book of poems "The Heavenly Animal" (1997) suggests a position, which with regard to the genesis of culture is much closer to Rozanov's than to Freud's model of cultural genesis: It takes the human being as well as an animal (so in procreation), as a holy being in its religious activity. The paper considers different forms of transition of the producing institutions of the poems, so from one culture to others, from one gender to the other, one generation to the other as well as different ways of the translation of language forms and poetical structures, of themes and motifs, of persons and things.

Keywords: culture, transition, translation, creation, aesthetics, sex, Vera Pavlova

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1 What is culture?

He <the artist> is a translation module from one state to another.

D. Prigov (2004)

The word and the concept of "culture" ("cultura") originated more than two thousand years ago from Rome. At first, they meant cultivation of the land, which later, in a narrower sense, was called "agri-culture" ("*agricultura*", [Columella, 1530; Columella, 1941]). On its example it can be shown that every act of cultivation, every cultural action of a person, so to speak, consists of two processes that often are carried out simultaneously, but which should be distinguish from each other in order to understand the complex working of culture: transition and translation.

A prerequisite for cultivating the land is the idea of the human being that the earth is not only something given and inviolable (*natura naturata* in the terminology of Spinoza and Bakhtin), something that can not (or even should not) be changed, something existing without the possibility of redoing it, but that the earth is also something given to mankind in order to redo it, that is, there is a task that requires an activity from him, we can call the processing of nature. In this sense, culture is transition, and in addition there is a movement of the human consciousness from the state of non-action, from passivity in relation to the world to the state of its action, to activity. A person moves from the life of a collector to the life of a plowman. And doing so, mankind knows, that it moves from the life of collectors to the life of plowmen, of farmers.

A person who begins to engage in agriculture, changes his place in the world, he or she is not any more a passive part of nature, but its

active element, which transforms it. In the philosophy of Spinoza and Bakhtin, this position is simultaneously called "*natura naturata*", this is "Created nature" and "*natura naturans*", this is "Creating nature". As Created nature, a person coincides with plants and animals, as Creative nature, he or she corresponds to God. Every creative act, every action in culture, every cooked food, every spoken word, every written poem implies the transition of a person from a Created creature to a creature, which is creating. The person, writing a poem becomes a poet. Changing the world changes the person, who changes it.

By the way, any un-cooked food, every un-spoken word, every un-written poem in a situation in which they are supposed to be cooked, said or written, is also a creative act. This is very important in the context of the preservation of nature and in apophatic culture, when just non-action is the most important cultural action. In these cases non-activity of a person implies his or her transition, his or her transgression from the passivity of a traditional action to the activity of a non-traditional non-action. In this sense, non-writing an article about Hitler the artist and Stalin the poet can be a contribution to our fight against totalitarism. Not taking a plane, can be a contribution to preserving world climate.

The complementary facet of culture is translation. In this case, the change does not occur in relation to the culture of the creative person, the cultural agent, but in relation to his object, for example, the ground. Agriculture transforms nature into fields, natural ground into field lands. In this sense, culture is not only a transgression, not only a transition, but also a transformation, a translation. This translation transforms more or less natural products into an artificial dish, the composition of a poem translates the thoughts, feelings, experiences of a person and the raw material of the language into the meaningful and linguistic whole of a poetic text. This translation acts simultaneously with respect to the translator: he is more or less aware of that, what translates the phenomena into their artistic equivalents. And he notices that he becomes a poet. This means that the work of cultivation leads inescapably to the transgression of its employee. Significantly, this transition, in which, for example, a Poetic subject arises, is one of the most interesting processes of modern culture just in our time.

This is shown, for example, by the fact that during the transition of late structuralism to deconstruction and neo-avant-gardism and of social realism into postmodernism, the function of the author was doubted. This is evident in Roland Barth's (1984) thesis that "the author is dead" and the current discussions about the function and status of a Poetic subject. The Poetic subject is precisely the intra-textual point of intersection between translation and transition as a transitive cultural process of a poetic text.

In developed cultures, the majority of cultural translations consist in the transformation of already existing cultural products from one form into another. A good example of this transfer of cultural phenomena into others in the dialogue of cultures is intertextuality, the theory of which is itself the result of intercultural dialogue, in this case Russian, Bulgarian and French (by Bakhtin and Kristeva, Ilyin 1999, pp. 204-206).

Going back to our initial example, to agriculture, we have to keep in mind, that culture as a translation does not only concern nature, the raw earth, but also the field, the cultivated ground. We cannot only convert cultivated land to a different quality and grow vegetables today where corn grew last year, but we can also turn it into uncultivated land, into wasteland. We can transform the cultivated forest plantation, more or less, back into a virgin forest.

In this context the destruction of cultural monuments is also an act of cultural translation; in the case of the removal of fascist or Stalinist monuments, it was a positive, emancipative act, and in the case of the destruction of Assyrian monuments by the so-called Islamic state in Palmyra –a barbarian act.

Another example of early human cultural activity is cattle breeding. Within the framework of animal husbandry, man influences the natural reproduction of animals. This activity is accompanied by the domestication of animals. By the way, the title of the book, we will study now, "Heavenly animal", says that here we deal more with the activity, so to speak, of a breeder, than with that of a plowman. Before we start with

the analysis of the book of Vera Pavlova (1997), we have to remind of two theories of the origin of culture at the beginning of that century, at the end of which she wrote the poems of the collection "Heavenly animal".

2 Two Twentieth Century Theories on the Origin of Culture

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two theories about the emergence of culture arose in Russia and in Austria. The first one was created in Petersburg as a response to the Orthodox Church's concept of the role of gender in a person's life. Another, better known theory, appeared independently of the first a decade later in Vienna as part of psychiatric practice. We start with the second, because it is well-known and, against its background, the specifics of the first come forward more clearly.

Sigmund Freud (1905, pp. 116-117) based his theory of culture on the concept of mental economy. In his opinion, cultural acts of a person imply a temporary rejection of the waste of sexual energy. He called this refusal "sublimation" ("Sublimierung"). With the help of sublimation, that is, the transfer of creative energy from the physiology of sexual activity to the psychology of spiritual creativity, a person can create, for example, artistic works. In this process human beings transfer creative energy from the sphere of nature into the sphere of culture. Freud outlined his theory of the creation of culture by the example of Leonardo da Vinci, who had no children, what, according to Freud indicates the abstention of this artist from sexual life.

Unlike Freud, several years before the emergence and publication of his economic theory of cultural production, the Russian philosopher, journalist and writer Vasily Rozanov (1995, 2008) laid the foundation for a different concept of the emergence of culture. His model of culture was not grounded on the competing with each other physiological and psychological activities, but on the coexistence of human biological and spiritual action. According to Rozanov, there is no competition and there is even no fundamental difference between physical and mental

human creative acts.

In order to emphasize the equivalence of the creation of a child and of an artwork, Rozanov even called the creation of the artifact its birth. He regarded it as a female activity of the writer. Rozanov's theory of human creativity, about which the American Slavicist Adam Ure (2011) has written the interesting book *Vasilii Rozanov and the Creation*, forms at the same time his emancipation from Leontyev's philosophy, which stated that the top of human behavior is not sexual or artistic creation, but austerity.

When Rozanov came into contact with Freud's theory, in special, its economic concept of alternative physiological or mental creation, he pointed to examples of people like Leo Tolstoy, who was the father many children and the author of many books (Grübel 2019, p. 275-278, 344).

According to Freud's theory, man, as the creator of culture, moves from the area of physiology to the field of mental phenomena. At the same time he translates personal experiences into universal human knowledge. According to the concept of Rozanov, a person can freely, without a fundamental change, go from one reproductive action, be it conceiving children or creating a work of art to the other. For Rozanov, culture is the complex realization of the creative power of mankind, whether physiological or spiritual.

As a creature with love, the human being according to Rozanov is on the same level with God (Grübel 2016). This distinguishes his concept from the idea of Nietzsche about the death of God. For Rozanov, God did not die, but became a partner and interlocutor of man.

3 The proximity of the concept of love in Vera Pavlova to Rozanov's theory of culture

In an untitled poem, consisting of five verses, included in the anthology "Majority" and beginning with the words "or maybe …" the Poetic subject reproduces the image of the bodily activity of the collective "we". Calling the production of (celestial) sounds "birth", to designate it with a word, initially indicating a biological phenomenon of reproduction, implies a reference to Nietzsche's (1912) book, The birth of tragedy from the spirit of music. Like Rozanov (and Nietzsche), Pavlova's Poetical I puts the creativity of man and God on one and the same level.

This, of course, is contrary to the spiritual canon of the Orthodox Church. In this text, the un-audibility of the sounds of the bodies of people, engaged in sexual intercourse, indicates that the music of spheres in the philosophy of Aristotle (1981) is not audible to a person in his treatise On the Sky (Περὶ οὐρανοῦ, II.9).

> а может быть, биенье наших тел рождает звук, который нам не слышен, а слышен там, на облаках и выше, но слышен тем, кому уже не слышен обычный звук...

or may it be, the beating of our bodies gives birth to sound that is not heard by us, but heard there on the clouds and there above, but heard by those who can no longer hear the normal sound...

(Pavlova 2001, p. 127)

Comparing the movement of human bodies with the movement of celestial bodies, we explain the meaning of the name of "Heavenly animal". Pavlova's human being is not so much $\zeta \tilde{\varphi} ov \pi o \lambda i \tau i \kappa \acute{o} v$ as $\zeta \tilde{\varphi} ov o \upsilon \rho \acute{a} v i o v$. He is more cosmic than a political being. Human physiological activity,

which is identified by the word "birth" with heavenly creation, like the movement of the planets, is not heard by the human being himself, but by celestial beings who, for their part, cannot hear the same sounds if they do not have a creative basis.

If someone doubts that the expression "the beating of bodies" in Pavlova's text has a sexual meaning, this will be clarified by the following poem of the same collection (I apologize for the frank language of the author):

> О чем бы я не писала, пишу о ебле. И только когда я пишу о самой ебле, то кажется, что пишу совсем не о ебле. Вот почему я пишу только о ебле.¹

What about I ever write, I write about the fuck. And only when I write just on the fuck, it seems that I'm writing not at all on fuck. This is why I write only about the fuck.

(Pavlova 1977, p. 223)

In this case, we find in this poem a figure of denial, which can be attributed to Freud's concept of repression (Verdrängung), but since Pavlova has put it upside down, this figure is here anti-Freudian. By the way, the author's reflection on sexual action translates this very action into an act of culture, into creativity, and this act contributes to the fact that an active person moves from a biological animal to human culture.

¹ The question asked by a professor of linguistics after the reading of this paper at the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow whether there is really a poet called Vera Pavlova and his indication that a Russian woman still does not speak about sexuality in the public eye, can be interpreted as a proof of the thesis, that Vera Pavlova's poetry really processes a translation in Russian culture and that precisely by this translation the Poetic subject of these poems performs a cultural transition.

4 Figures of cultural transition / transgression in the collection "Heavenly animal"

If the closeness of Pavlova's concept of culture to Rozanov's philosophy of culture is fairly obvious, then examples of the transition of the Poetic subject to a new cultural state are less evident in most of Pavlova's poems. This lesser salience follows from the complexity of the position of the author and the Poetic subject in her poetic world.

Our first example is the poem "Corps" ("Body"), which, within the framework of the cycle *Blasons* (*Coats of Arms*), is printed in the middle of the book not with the usual horizontal, but with the vertical position of the verses. Of course, such a rotation of the book by 90 degrees, when we are reading the text, indicates the general world reorientation, expected from the reader in the process of receiving this book.

The Poetic subject calls the body of the speaking I, first, as his only property, which is given to him by the creator in the form of a naked figure. This means that the human body is a work of art from the very beginning. However, the raw body gets this property only in the process of thinking and writing poems about it with the name "Le corps". Moreover, the French name gives the subject of the body the semantic aura of French culture. As examples, we recall the bodies in the work of the sculptors Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin. However, according to Pavlova's poem, this is man-made work, his so-called divine sculpture, which over time is lost:

Le corps

Что мне терять на земле, кроме этого тела? И – уже теряю. Тело уже поредело. Но оно и сейчас – у меня ведь судьба не дура! –

удача

всевышнего мастера обнаженной натуры. <...> (Pavlova 1977, p. 112)

Le corps

What do I have to lose on earth besides this body? And – already am losing. The body is already thinned. But it is also now – because my fate is not a fool! – success

of the almighty master of the nude. <...> (Pavlova 1977, p. 112)

The feminine person about which the text speaks, appears in the recollection of the Poetic I in the form of some kind of libretto of a dream, which however is the text of an opera, that in this case on its side is left without the words that the woman sang with the man, while they made love:

> Подружка! Кто научил тебя вовремя поднимать ножки и, кончая, кричать, окликать отлетающую душу? Никто не учил. Природа Природа, меня наделившая тонким запястьем, чтобы сошлись на нем намертво мужские пальцы, природа, меня наделившая телом компактным и белым, чтобы стелиться ему по земле под тяжелым телом мужчины, которого пишет влюбленная память в сновиденьи. натура которого дышит под боком, в сновиденьи, либретто которого вместе распели... Вокализ андрогина и взбитые сливки постели.

Girlfriend! Who taught you in time to raise the legs and coming, to cry and to echo the flying off soul? Nobody taught it. Nature Nature has given me a thin wrist, to come together on it tightly male fingers, nature has given me a body compact and white to move along the ground under the heavy body of a man which love memory writes in a dream whose nature breathes alongside in a dream the libretto of which was sung by us together ... Vocalise of androgyne and whipped cream of the bed. (Pavlova 1977, p. 113-114)

Here the transgression is performed by the work of memory and by writing a poetic text. At the same time, it is worth to pay attention to the fact that nature itself, which gave the human being the body, appears in these lines also as *doctrina*, as a teaching, in the center of which there are Russian words with the root "gender": childbirth, give birth and birth: "*rody*", "*rodit*" and "*rozhdenie*". Secondly, it's great that the vocalization, i.e. the text of this libretto, unlike the text of the poem itself, does not contain any words, but consists only of sounds, and that at the end of the text the sexual opposition of woman and men is removed, as in the androgyne.

Our second example of transition is a poem in which the Poetic subject talks about those life tasks that it could have accomplished, but did not accomplish in fact. There remains only one position, realized by the person. This position is designated with such irony and humor, which are characteristic precisely for the artist of which it speaks –for

Prigov. The text realizes the posterity, which the verses call by name, with the help of four rhetorical Litotes-figures. Here transition serves as the choice of a person's life opportunity, a career, which eventually leads to the existence of a poet-artist:

Во мне погибла балерина. Во мне погибла героиня. Во мне погибла лесбиянка. Во мне погибла негритянка. Как много их во мне погибло! И только Пригов жив-здоров.

In me has died a ballerina. In me has died a heroine. In me has died a lesbian. In me has died a woman, black. How many of them died in me! And well, alive, is only Prigov.

(Pavlova 1977, p. 201)

If all the four not-carried out possibilities (Rozanov intended to write his second philosophical monograph about the philosophical problem of possibility), are designed as properly constructed four-foot jambes with exact rhymes, then these rhymes are absent in the last two verses, speaking about the really chosen path. Un-realized opportunities rhyme with each other, but the real career does neither have a metrical nor a sound-match.

Our third and last example for the implementation of transgression is given in a relatively short poem without a title from the same collection. It contains only eight words. The first two verses of this text, "Goes / a man", repeat the beginning of many Russian anecdotes, such as "There is a man walking through the cemetery at night". In contrast to these comical texts, the poetic subject of Pavlova's poem conveys in her very short, one- or two-syllable words the development of a person through death into another state, in which, however, his movement coincides

with the original one. So, this text can, as an endless story, approaching its end, be restarted from its very beginning.

The border between this world and the world beyond is indicated by me by means of a straight line. Here the transition concerns not only the way from nature to culture, but also the path from earth to heaven:

There goes
a man.
He fell.
He rises.
There goes
a man.
He fell.
Is lying.
There lies.
a man
and does
not rise.
And then
he rises.
And then
he goes.
(Pavlova 1977, p. 6)

It is noteworthy here (and this distinguishes these verses from ordinary infinite stories) that in this Russian repetition begins already from the fifth word, the verb "Uдет" – "goes", which at the same time personifies transition itself. Thus, transition is implemented as a possibly endless passage from transition to transition. This idea of an endless course contradicts both the Marxist and Soviet concept of communism as the final stage of human history on the one hand and Fukuyama's famous thesis about the end of history on the other.

5 Figures of cultural translation in the collection "Heavenly animal"

Transformation, or translation as a cultural strategy, is found in Pavlova's poems often in a dialogic form. In one poem, starting with the question "Got you, my darling" («Попался, голубчик?»), this translation is given as an inversion of the biblical story about the creation of man. Unlike the first book of Moses (3,22), according to which the woman Eve is created by God from the rib of the already existing man Adam, in Pavlova's poem the man is present in every cell of Eve, the woman, and can be (re-)created from it:

> Попался, голубчик? Ты в клетке, ты в каждой моей клетке, могу из одной своей клетки создавать тебя, как голограмму, всего тебя – из миллиграмма, из Евиной клетки – Адама.

Gotcha, honey? You are in the cell you are in every cell of me, I can from one of my cells create you like a hologram all of you – from a milligram, from the Evian cell – the Adam. (Pavlova 1977, p. 19)

First, this turn changes the traditional gender hierarchy: now priority is given to Eve. If in the previously considered text about the body, and in some form also in the poem, where the subject is poetically identified with Prigov, the opposition of genders is neutralized, in this poem their opposition is reversed. Secondly, the manner of re-creation is changing: in the world of the poem it is not only the biological process of multiplying a person from an egg cell, but also the reduplication and the diversification by using a hologram. There is not only a new biological creature, but also an optical illusion of another person. In this sense, the poem provides, in addition to the alternative to the religious concept

of the creation of man, that is, in addition to the biological concept of reproduction (procreation), also a model for the creation of the poetic text. And indeed, at the end of the text, we witness the creation of Adam in verse.

In another case of translation, in the eighteen verses, which begin with a quote from Lermontov's Heine-translation, "In the North is wild ...", the poetic subject initially rejects the opinion that the translation of the verse "In the North is wild ..." is a motive, taken from Heine. Of course, in the narrow sense and even historically verifiable, Lermontov's verse is a translation from Heine:

> Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam Im Norden auf Kahler Höh'. (Heine 1827, p. 173)

На севере диком стоит одиноко	In the wild North stands alone
На голой вершине сосна	On the bare top a pine
	(Lermontov 1961, p. 512)

But in the broad sense of love songs, about which the lyrical "I" of this poem speaks, the motive of unrealized love is in fact rather the matter of Sappho, who according to the legend committed suicide, having been thrown down the Levkady rocks because of the unrequited love for the ferryman Phaon. This means that the semantic correspondence is created not so much by the coincidence of words, like in a superficial quotation, as by the deep meaning of the literary motive. If in this context Heine can be taken into account at all, the lyric "I" argues, then with his poem about Lorelei, where, on the contrary, the skipper of a small ship, who cannot take his eyes off a beautiful girl, is sinking because of that to the ground of the river Rhine.

As is well known, the translation of Lermontov already implies a gender "exchange" because in Heine's North the German "Fichtenbaum" ("spruce tree"), having the masculine gender, is opposed to the in German feminine tree "Palme" ("palm"), whereas in Lermontov's poem the

feminine word "sosna" ("pine") is opposed to another feminine word, to "palma" ("palme"). This is a gender game, in which Lermontov transforms the heterosexual relation into a homosexual one, and the Poetic subject of Pavlova restores it by contrasting the female poetess Sappho with the male poet Heine:

«На севере диком...» – Сапфо, а не Гейне. Ты – пальма. И юг твой, как север мой, дик. А если из Гейне, то пенье на Рейне, дуэт лорелей. А сплочая сплетенье – Наталья, пойдем в хоровод эвридик, которым орфеи и лели – до фени: с нездешнею нежностью, без сожаленья покажем им розовый острый язык!

"In the wild north,..." – Sappho, not Heine. You are a palm tree. And your south is like my north, wild. And if from Heine, then singing on the Rhine, the duet of Lorelei. And rallying interlacement Natalia, let's go to Eurydice's dance, which Orpheus and Lily – give a damn about: with tenderness from above, without regret we will show them a pink sharp tongue!

(Lermontov 1961, p. 215)

Here again, we meet a cultural translation: first, gender transfer from the point of view of a man to a woman's point of view and, second, aesthetic translation from a tragic situation to a comic one. In place of Heine's deadly end, Pavlova's Poetic subject uses the crudely humorous gesture of showing the ,tongue' (which in Russian is also the language). In this context the reader should not forget that Sappho created a fabulous female homophil culture. So, we have to do with an inaccurate – though very precisely calculated – translation from German and Greek cultures that gives rise to the original Russian text in both: Lermontov and Pavlova. These transfers show also that culture as translation implies

inevitably also deliberate productive inaccuracy. The creative translation of a cultural element is never its identical repetition

Pavlova's poem, which begins with the word "Poetry" and with the colon sign, raises the expectation that it gives a definition of this word. In fact, however, it speaks about the function of verses. In the beginning, it defines this function as a "lie", but as a "lie in the salvation of an idea", and then as a transfer of an object from the negative position of death, destruction, danger, misfortune or / and sin to the positive state of existence, security, happiness or / and bliss. Through poetry, says the poem, the idea of the divine nature of the word expressed at the beginning of the Gospel of John (1,1) is resurrected: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." However, the subject of the text denotes poetry not as truth, but as a lie, however as such a lie that can save the idea of the divine nature of the word. In this way, it makes the resurrection of man possible:

Поэзия: ложь во спасение	Poetry: a lie for the salvation
идеи, что слово – бог, ²	of the idea that the word is god,
что легкое слово гения	that the light word of the genius
спасительно, как вдох	is saving, like a breath
ныряльщику, что колыбельная	to the diver, that a lullaby
печальнейшей из панихид	is the saddest of the dirges
рули повернет корабельные	will turn the rudders of the ship
и спящего воскресит.	and resurrect sleeper.
	(Pavlova 1977, p. 188)

This text implies the possibility that the poet, with the help of a poetic word, becomes the savior, the messiah, and this is in the horizon of Jewish and Christian cultures the most far-reaching human transition in the world. In fact, this is a transgression to another world, namely, to that world, from which, according to Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the seed of the people of our world is taken: "God took the seeds from

² The spelling of the word "god" in a post-Soviet context with a lowercase letter shows that the lyrical I means not the God of Christian faith, but any concept of God. Thus, the prophet John's maxim is summarized and the poem passes from the field of religious art to the area of the religion of art.

other worlds and sowed them on this earth and raised up his garden". (Dostoevsky 1976, p. 290).

In such poems, the Poetic subject of Pavlova enacts the transfer of culture from this world to the world above, in favor of the designation of that, for which we have no words. So, in our last example, he calls the expression "the other world" – "the figure of speech," that is, the traditional manner of speaking, to which a real subject corresponds only conditionally. In this six-liner, the speaking "I" crosses the border of possible expression:

Тот свет – фигура речи.	The world above is a figure of speech.
Но там не будет речи.	But there will be no speeches.
Кладбищенские речи-	These cemetery speeches –
последний натиск речи	the last onslaught of speech
и последнее поражение речи	and the last loss of speech
в борьбе с неизреченным.	in fight with unspeakable.
	(Pavlova 1977, p. 210)

Translating a poetic verbal culture across the border of what can be expressed (and this is the biggest step, possible in this field) the Poetic subject of this text transfers us into the sphere of the world above, in which, in his words, "there will be no speech". And as the philosopher Wittgenstein said at the end of his book The Logical Philosophical Treatise (Tractatus logico-philosophicus): "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein, 1971, p. 115).

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