

„Sport“ and „Art(s)“ - a Conceptual Discussion and Proposition

Lecture held at the XII. Internat. CESH-Congreß, 20. 09. 2007 in Lorient (France)

We have met here in Lorient as sport-historians in order to think about sport and art, and to learn something new. I personally noticed that these two concepts - amongst others - are interconnected by a crucial factor: There is only little clarity about what we understand by sport and art.

For scientists, this problem is more meaningful than for every-day's-people. If scientists look for clarity and truth - according to their occupation - and talk together, then they cannot avoid in principle to clarify their concepts. *In principle!* For in the sport-scientific and in the art-scientific literature the central terms of the object of these sciences are rarely clarified. Indeed, many scientists consciously leave them in the unclear; so do in Germany even most scientists of sport and art.

At first I would like to understand this finding. I therefore shall look briefly at the discussion about the concepts and the possibility to define them. Since I think, that in science nothing is as useful and necessary like clear concepts, I want to present you my own suggestions to define „sport“ and „art“. With that, the rough structure of my lecture is already given.

One general preliminary note is still necessary: Since I will discuss philosophical, conceptual problems and their possible solution, the language, in which I formulate my thoughts, is especially important. Of course I've drafted them in my mother tongue German. Since I would like to make myself comprehensible for as many people as possible at this international congress, and since English is the widest spread language, I shall try to inform about my thoughts in a foreign language: English. Neither single words nor the sentences can be translated without imprecisions creeping in or something being lost of the thought. This is the inevitable risk which I am conscious of. I therefore ask you for benevolence and mercy because of this difficulty. - *(End of the preliminary note)*

Let me start with the topic field, that presumably is less familiar to sport-scientists: „Art“. As an example I now show you a painting, by which I want to give you some introductory considerations.

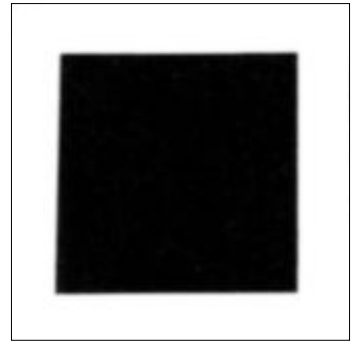
This picture was created 1914/15 and was presented in St. Petersburg as an icon in the „last futuristic picture-exhibition 0.10“ in 1915.¹ Kasimir Male-



¹ Partsch (2003), p. 202.

witsch called it „black square“. Later versions exist, especially the following one displayed 1929 in Paris.

When I saw this picture for the first time, I wondered spontaneously: Is this a work of art? I was confused and didn't have any prepared answer to this question, although I had read, it were regarded as artwork by experts. Would You, estimated audience, regard this picture as a work of art?



Since some generations, the art-public relies largely on the judgement of experts. This attitude in particular is founded in the phenomenal development, that art has taken since over 100 years with its numerous „-isms“. Traditional standards for taste-judgements are largely given up, and art became so self-reflexive, that she even should include her own negation. „The doubt about art, in last consequence, leads to the self-dissolution of the concept of both art and artwork, whose borders become blurred just like the type-division of arts (Dadaism, Fluxus, action painting, Mixed Media, performance).“² Based on this, a speculative business with artworks flourishes promising high profit.³

Which way do so-called experts form their judgement on what they call (a work of) „art“? Ernst Gombrich has pointed out, that the problem is moved even further into the unclear by the tendency, that these experts avoid at all judging about art publicly since almost hundred years, whilst immediately picking up everything, particularly if it is at all new, even if it were supposed to be clearly reevaluating everything previous, or a protest against tradition, or a withdrawal from the ideas being valid till now.⁴ And the public is following this largely without contradiction, often above all confused and intimidated by very contradictory „expert“-judgements in the feuilleton.

However, the confusion that a new work of art can trigger in us, does not prevent us at all to feel favour or aversion. For we primarily judge unconsciously, not only about art. We feel rather fast - by a few seconds -, whether we like something or not; but we often do not know exactly why. This happens at visible objects like paintings as well as when experiencing performances.

What happens with such a fast first judgement? Since this process takes place outside of our consciousness, there is a long tradition of the thesis, one could not answer this question. It remains only the „*je ne sais quoi*“.⁵ An exaggerated deduction from this is the thesis, that for this reason one could not say either, what is to be understood by art.

² „Kunst“, in: dtv-Lexikon in 20 Bänden. (Brockhaus-Redaktion) 1997; vol. 10, p. 189.

³ Cf. e.g. Rauterberg (2007), Saehrendt/Kittl (2007).

⁴ Gombrich (1996), p. 611.

⁵ Cf. Ullrich (2006), p. 9 - 30.

With different reasons, this is a significant opinion in the art-science since approximately 50 years: „art“ could not be defined because everyone understands something else by it; already therefore, the attempt were useless.⁶

It is just as natural as banal, that everybody understands something else by „art“. However, this just means, too, *that* everybody understands *something* by it! Everybody *has* a concept of „art“, at least deep in his inside. Whether he can put it into words, is independent from that - and probably mostly not the case; this justifies the art-theoretical topos „*je ne sais quoi*“.⁷ But this intuitive idea of art is each human being's own scale for his amazingly fast and often sound taste judgements on art and works of art, even if he does not give any account to himself about his scale or communicates via it. Clive Bell has formulated this 1914 this way: „Everybody secretly believes, that there is a genuine difference between works of art and all other objects; ...“⁸

Intuitive-emotional processes of judging take place spontaneously and quickly like lightning. Above that men can overthink their pre-judice and revise it. Everyone of you will presumably be able to remember a taste-judgement of his own, that he has changed - perhaps even repeatedly - in the course of his life. I assume that this becomes possible not only by new emotional experience but also by (new) insight, by re-thinking. So we can - at least partially - grasp the reasons of our taste-judgement by language and thus communicate about them with others.

Many scientists, who deal with art, are afraid of a clear concept of the object of their science. This trend culminates in the thesis, it were not at all sensible to try a definition of art.⁹

This basic concept-skepticism, spreading since more than fifty years, is founded especially on Ludwig Wittgenstein's 1953 posthumously published book „philosophical investigations“, in which he formulated so-called „remarks“ on language; it is one of the main sources for the „linguistic turn“. Whether the concept-skeptics can rightly refer on Wittgenstein at all, I can not discuss here for time reasons.¹⁰

Most „Wittgensteinians“¹¹ assume that - like the concept „game“, at which Wittgenstein has developed his thoughts¹² - also the concepts „art“ and „sport“ are concepts with „family

⁶ Cf. Schmücker (2005), p. 8.

⁷ Cf. the text in Augustin's Confessiones XI/14 about time: „quid ergo est tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.“ It is, by the way, quoted by Wittgenstein (2003, #75 indirectly und #89 completely).

⁸ Bell (1914), p. V-VI (quote after Matthews (2005), p. 114, annot. 27).

⁹ Cf. Schmücker (2005), p. 8; Mandelbaum (2005), p. 74.

¹⁰ Cf. Schulte, J. (2003), esp. p. 296 ff. Wittgenstein in his „philosophical investigations“ formulates much unclearly and even contradictorily; therefore, interpreting his text is very risky. He also has formulated, for example: „(... And therefore a definition usually does not suffice to this; and less than ever the statement, a word were >undefinable<.)“ (#182) His philosophical object is „the actual use of the language“, which „the philosophy... in no way (is allowed to) touch“; „she leaves everything like it is.“ (#124). He formulates his claim, similarly hybrid like in his first book „Tractatus logico-philosophicus“: „Te clarity for which we strive, is, however, a perfect one.“ (#133)

¹¹ This wording does not claim, that there were not considerable differences among the supporters of Wittgenstein.

¹² Wittgenstein (2003), # 65 ff. Wittgenstein himself in his „remarks“ plays gambling, that the „language game“ with the word „game“ simply is (merely) a game, too. It is hard to be recognized in principle, when Wittgenstein does argue seriously, when playfully, when as advocatus diaboli or alter ego, when as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

resemblances¹³, „concepts with blurred edges“¹⁴; admittedly, one *could* define them, but only „for a particular purpose“¹⁵; this were of use for only those, who draw the sharp line; for communication, however, it were a „hopeless service“, „(to look) in the aesthetics... for definitions“¹⁶. Wittgenstein considers the everyday linguistic usage¹⁷ an untouchable¹⁸ standard for his considerations.

The philosophical tradition in the wake of Wittgenstein has not remained undisputed in the art-science. There has been a lively criticism particularly in the Anglo American area, which has been reported among others by Maurice Mandelbaum¹⁹, Robert J. Matthews²⁰ and Robert Stecker²¹. They defended the „essentialistic“ position; and Matthews has even proposed a „minimal definition of artworks“, however, without defining the term „art“: „An artwork is, whatever relates in a suitable way to the paradigms of art - even if we do not know, and perhaps never will know, which is the suitable relation to the paradigms, that artworks must show.“²²

I claim, that the answer to the question „*What is art?*“ is just as possible, meaningful and useful like the answer to the question „*What is sport?*“. „For to determine the purpose of art and be able to justify scales for the assessment of art, we have to know what art is according to its nature.“²³

Besides the „Wittgensteinian“ theory with the thesis, a definition of „art“ were not appropriate or actually not possible, there is still another philosophical tradition to look at art theoretically: the theory of the aesthetics. The aestheticians look at „art“ predominantly from the public's viewpoint.²⁴ Thus, they examine the question „*when is art?*“, not „*what is art?*“. I do not share this displacing of the perspective, because I would like to clarify, what art is. But I admit, that in the aesthetic theory much meaningful has been reported about how *works of art* have effect on us human beings.

If I now try to put my considerations to the definition of „Kunst“ in English, the already mentioned translation-problem emerges more intensively: in English, the word „art“ ties, like in French and other Roman languages, at the Latin word „ars“. In the German word „Kunst“ the origin from „können“ is still contained („to can“ = „to be able“ in English), and that was meant also by the Latin word „ars“; this meaning is contained in the English and French word „art“, too. But in the English concept „*fine arts*“ and in the French concept „*beaux arts*“, ideas of

¹³ Wittgenstein (2003), # 67.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein (2003), # 71.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein (2003), # 69.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein (2003), # 77.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein (2003), # 116 ff.

¹⁸ Wittgenstein (2003), # 124.

¹⁹ Mandelbaum (2005) (first 1965).

²⁰ Matthews (2005) (first 1979/80); the English version is my re-translation of the German translation of R. Bluhm!

²¹ Stecker (2005) (first 1997).

²² Matthews (2005), p. 113.

²³ Schmücker (2005), p. 7.

²⁴ Cf. Bertram (2005), p. 39.

„art“, that are largely abandoned in the German language, are still alive; nobody almost in German uses the term „schöne Künste“ any more.

Now to my suggested definition of „art“:

Art is a cultural field of activity, in which human beings strive to express both their feelings and thoughts by means of either a work of their own or a performance, founded on individual gifts, abilities and skills. When the expressive process yields an object (work) perceivable by other people when finished, it is called „fine art“; when the expressive process consists in a performance requiring the physical presence of the artist, it is called „interpretative art“.²⁵

So I look at art from the side of the art-producing people. I think that on the basis of such an understanding also the reception of works of art by an audience can be disclosed conceptually. By the way: in my definition of „sport“ I take the same position; also there, I define from the side of the people doing sports, not from the sport-public's side.²⁶

I want to introduce the language-philosophical position to you, that I represent: Definitions are not instruments for to change reality; rather, the reality found (given objectively) should clearly and separating sharply be brought on the concept by them. While defining, I do not pursue any merely objectivistic ideal (which is not attainable anyway) on the one hand. On the other hand I do not understand my wording as merely subjectivistic or constructionalistic either.

My definitions are meant to take reality to the concept as clearly as possible, and at the same time also to indicate in due fineness at least, how reality also could be.

Several kinds of definition can be distinguished: real- (or nature-) definition, nominal-definition, determination-definition, ostentative and operational definition. I, in accordance with a philosophical tradition tracing back to Aristotle, propose a so-called real-definition.²⁷ It ought to establish the nature of the object by stating both the next-higher genus (*genus proximum*) and the type-forming difference (*differentia specifica*). There can also be „mistakes“ in a regular definition, if it is too narrow or too wide, for example, contains contradictions, is formulated unclearly, contains a negative formulation or even the word to be defined itself.²⁸

For me, the next-higher genus for the concept „art“ is „field of activity“. I emphasize that I do not speak of an activity but of a *field* of activities; this is a distinction of conceptual level, which is often missed. Art is one of many fields of activity. The activities painting or singing

²⁵ Cf. my steadily updated internet-publication: <<http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/kunstdefinition.html>>.

²⁶ This point of view I share with Claudia Pawlenka (2004).

²⁷ Following the analytic philosophy tracing back to Rudolf Carnap, my definition could be more precisely called „concept-explication“; cf. Cohnitz (2007).

²⁸ Cf. Ulfing (1999), p. 77 - 78.

are not art in any case, but may be - according to the further regulations of my definition - activities in the field of activity called „art“. They also may be activities in another field, for example in the field everyday-life.

Another frequently occurring displacement of conceptual level is to use „art“ as a concept for works or performances. The spontaneous everyday-question „Is this art?“ is an example for this. In my conceptual assignment, this question should be formulated this way: „Is this a work of art (or an artwork)?“

In the second step of defining, one must name the type-forming difference, that means, what distinguishes the (cultural) field of activity „art“ from other (cultural) fields of activity. This ought to be formulated as tightly and clearly as possible with words resp. concepts, which are comprehensible as commonly as possible. From the fundamental necessity, that the concepts used with this ought to be defined themselves in turn, some philosophers conclude that such an action is circular in the end; and that would represent a serious violation of the definition-rules; therefore it were both impossible and unnecessary at all to try this. This objection is just as puristic as barren. In my opinion it is both adequate and necessary to accept the indeed logically thinkable circularity as a „blurredness“, in order to acquire a big profit of practical and conceptual clarity. Perhaps this „optimistic“ variant is a good solution of the linguistic dilemma formulated by Wittgenstein so „pessimistically“.

It is obvious, that also this definition is subjective, the result of my action and my decision; others will act and decide differently. Science consists of discussing with other subjects, their actions and decisions - including the offer to give the reasons for the own acting and deciding comprehensibly and thus make it verifiable. If art-scientists (just like many sport-scientists) support the point of view, one could not define „art“, they fail to do that, what makes up (art- and sport-) science fundamentally; for they remain in the everyday-usage of language.

All elements of my (art-) definition are necessary, and only jointly they are sufficient. This means, that an activity already then belongs no more to the activity-field „art“, if only one of the defining elements is not given. This is a figure of thinking, that allows clear delimitation, and this finally is the meaning of the word defining. There are, however, some defining elements of my art-definition I don't understand as logically clear, binary, as given or not, but as calibrating elements with gradings, about whome one can and must argue, where to draw the limit.

These limits have to be discussed concerning my definition-elements „abilities and skills“ as well as „strive“. The higher I estimate the claim with these definition-elements, the less belongs to „art“ for me. At the moment, after my observation, a tendency is prevailing to claim very little to „abilities and skills“ as well as „strive“.

Now, I want to introduce also my sport-concept to you in order to discuss the relationship between sport and art afterwards. My definition of „sport“ is as follows:

"Sport" is a cultural field of activity, in which human beings voluntarily engage in a real or merely imagined relationship with other people, with the conscious intention to develop both their skills and abilities, particularly in the area of skilled motion and to enter into a competition with fellow human beings within a negotiated or borrowed set of rules without intending to cause harm to either them or themselves.²⁹

The conceptual levels are important at this definition, too: Sport is not an activity but an abstract concept for a field of activities. Running or swimming may - according to the conditions of my definition - be part of the activity-field „sport“, but in other cases for example part of the activity-field everyday-life.

Since, with this definition, I draw considerably narrower lines than usual, many activities which may sensibly be object of sport-scientific consideration, for example jogging, health-gymnastics, nordic walking etc., are excluded of my sport-concept. For such activities I use the broader concept „culture of human motion“, which I define as follows:

"Culture of human motion" is a field of activity, in which people come to terms with their nature and environment and consciously develop, form and represent their particularly physical skills and abilities for to experience a meaningful individual or also common benefit and pleasure.³⁰

On the Internet, you can find more explanations, steadily updated, to these two definitions, that I, by the way, introduced already 2004 during the CESH-Congress in Crotone as well as 2005 during the ISHPES-Congress in Cologne³¹. For time-reasons, I now do not go further into them. Both concepts together for me are the object of sport-science, also object of sport-history, of course.

Also in the international sport-science, there is a discussion between „Wittgensteinians“, who deny both the significance and even the possibility to define sport, and others, who regard this to be possible and - the more - necessary. Unfortunately there is not enough time to discuss every - quite different - position; only few of them I can mention exemplarily.

²⁹ Cf. my steadily updated internet-publication: <<http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/sportdefinition.html>>.

³⁰ Cf. my steadily updated internet-publication: <<http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/bewegungskulturdefinition.html>>.

³¹ Tiedemann (2004), (2005) und (2007).

Graham McFee³² is among the „Wittgensteinians“ in the Anglo-American area; in the German-speaking area, primarily Gunnar Drexel³³ and Klaus Willimczik³⁴ represent this position.

There also exist, though, theorists who have put up own definitions of sport for discussion, among them the sport historians Richard D. Mandell³⁵, Michael B. Poliakoff³⁶, and - last, but not least - Allen Guttmann³⁷. In the German-speaking area I would like to mention Meinhard Volkamer³⁸ and Sven Güldenpfennig³⁹.

In principle, the same points of criticism, which I have already mentioned to the topic „art“, apply to the discussion of the positions orientated to Wittgenstein for me. I still want to add another fundamental aspect of the criticism: If the „Wittgensteinians“ demand, the scientists should not try to get definitions of the central concepts but pay attention to the real everyday-usage of language, still linguistic problems remain: where from does an infant or child know or learn, what is art or sport, what it means, what can be named so and what not? „Wittgensteinians“ and also the aesthetically oriented theorists must implicitly relate to a pre-knowledge of language for their „re-constructions“ or „interpretations“. ⁴⁰ However, they argue as if there were not this problem.

Allen Guttmann in his newest book „Sports. The First Five Millennia“ (2004) has put in front his definition of „sports“, on which I would like to comment briefly. He follows the essentialistic approach as introduced by Bernard Suits (for example). He defines „sports“ - please pay attention to the plural! - broadly as „autotelic physical contests“. ⁴¹ As distinguished from this, he lists as a „definition“ for „modern sport“ „a set of seven interrelated formal-structural characteristics“. ⁴² The first general definition of „sports“ contains important elements, which I also regard as essential; however, it appears incomplete and too broad to me. The second definition of the „modern sport“ is not precise; as a listing of connected characteristics, it is not a definition.

When I now come to Güldenpfennigs sport-concept, I build the bridge from discussing the sport-concept to the question, whether sport is one of the arts or a part of art. ⁴³ Güldenpfennig understands sport as an art; he assumes that every sporting competition „makes the pro-

³² McFee (2004).

³³ Drexel (2003)

³⁴ Willimczik (2007)

³⁵ Mandell (1984).

³⁶ Poliakoff (1989).

³⁷ Guttmann (2004).

³⁸ Volkamer (1984).

³⁹ Güldenpfennig (2000)

⁴⁰ Cf. Pawlenka (2003), p. 101.

⁴¹ Guttmann (2004), p. 2.

⁴² Guttmann (2004), pp. 4 - 6.

⁴³ Güldenpfennig frequently, at last (2004), esp. p. 84 - 94.

duction ... of an aesthetic ‚work‘ possible“.⁴⁴ With his newer book of 2004, he supports the idea to see and acknowledge the olympic games as a „world cultural heritage“ according to the UNESCO.⁴⁵ In this book he prefers the form to enumerate 13 elements to determine sport, which constitute the „semantic content of the *code ‚sporting - not sporting‘ as the conducting difference of sport*“⁴⁶.

Güldenpfennig speaks of „stories made up freely“, which „can be observed in sport“.⁴⁷ With this, he takes the aesthetical perspective. Güldenpfennig expressly calls sport an art, that differs from the other arts, especially the interpretative ones, because „creation and performance ... here are *one* process“.⁴⁸

The discussion of the question, whether sport is a part of the art, already has a longer tradition. Pierre Frayssinet stated already in 1968 sport to be the eighth art besides the seven traditional arts (art of poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, dramatic art, music and dance), and to be more precise one of the „fine“ arts⁴⁹, not an interpretative one. The „work“, that an athlete is „creating“, „l'Œuvre athlétique“, is an artwork like each other of the fine arts. Frayssinet even grants a material (ontic) character to this „work“. Frayssinets in my eyes daring thesis also suffers, that he has not cleared his concept of „art“.

Another figure of speech is the „affinity“ of „sport“ to „art“, that is tended to be justified with the numerous works of the classic Greek art with sporting scenes as motives. Of course „affinity“ is not an adequate reason to talk about an equality of sport and art. Here, different areas are brought into a relationship, from which no identity of both areas can be concluded anyway. In this sense, Pierre de Coubertin had introduced art-competitions at olympic games, which, however, have not gained acceptance.

The identity of sport and art also sometimes is justified, because there are actually creative requirements in some sports, for example at figure skating and gymnastics. Not by chance, the German names of these „sports“ contain the German word „Kunst“: „Eis-*Kunst*Laufen“, „*Kunst*Turnen“. As a former gymnast, I remember well the challenge, which the „composition“ of a free floor exercise represented for me every time. I admittedly did not feel as an artist on that occasion, but maybe that was to severe modesty?

Indeed, in some sports something takes place, which is a general feature of artistic activity: aesthetic design. However, this is a phenomenon in only few areas of sporting action and with it not a general one, never mind an essential element of sport. Aesthetic design neither

⁴⁴ Güldenpfennig (2000), pp. 201 - 202.

⁴⁵ Güldenpfennig (2004).

⁴⁶ Güldenpfennig (2004), pp. 85 - 87; quotation p. 87.

⁴⁷ Güldenpfennig (2004), p. 84; cf. already (2000), p. 140.

⁴⁸ Güldenpfennig (2004), p. 89.

⁴⁹ Frayssinet (1968).

takes place when running a 100-m-dash nor in a rowing regatta. David Best has already pointed out this difference in 1978.⁵⁰

Therefore, I do not regard sport as a type of art, in principle. Güldenpfennig claims to have justified this, but in the sixth of his nine criteria for this thesis, I cannot agree to him, when he writes: „In this world reigns the primacy of aesthetic design.“⁵¹ This is applicable to the entire art, but not for the entire sport. Since all criteria must be given, his thesis, that sport is an art, fails on this point.⁵²

Another German philosopher, Hans Lenk, has come to an interesting variation looking at the relationship between sport and art. Lenk after detailed discussion comes to the result, there is no identity of both. However, one could understand „features of sport better ..., if one uses characteristics of art as an interpretation model“.⁵³ Lenk turns away from the classic catalog of the already mentioned seven „fine arts“ (poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, dramatic art, music and dance) to a somewhat younger, also classic catalog of the seven „liberal arts“.

These arts (*„septem artes liberales“*) have been summarized in Roman times as „trivium“ (grammar, rhetoric and philosophy) and as „quadrivium“ (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy). Before the Romans canonized these seven liberal arts, „gymnastic“ was also counted as such art, for example by Plato and Aristotle. This leads Lenk to the idea to understand „sporting and gymnastic skills ... as the eighth liberal art“⁵⁴. In this sense - and only in this sense! - one could call sport an art.

I have tried to show, that clear, defined concepts of „sport“ and „art“ are useful, necessary and possible. I have introduced my definitions to you and now want to summarize the results of my considerations on the basis of these clarified concepts in the following theses:

Sport is a cultural field of activity, and so is art. This identification emphasizes the view at the activities in sport and art, at the acting human beings. The perspective at the public underlying the theory of aesthetics does not cope with that.

Sport and art are not identical. Nevertheless there are intercommunities.

There is no hierarchical relation between sport and art. Art is not a superordinate concept for sport; therefore sport is not a subarea of art.

I thank you for your attention and hope, that now and during the congress we shall take the opportunities to get more clarity about our individual concepts of both „sport“ and „art“ by lively debates.

⁵⁰ Best (1978); cf. Lenk (1985), too.

⁵¹ Güldenpfennig (2004), p. 94.

⁵² Cf. Pawlenka (2004).

⁵³ Lenk (1985), p. 107.

⁵⁴ Lenk (1985), p. 114.

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