

The Speaking Window

FNY 2018, Friday

A common frustration in sparring is trying to make one's opponent stay in the bind, when they instead want to constantly cut round. When somebody does this, it can be very difficult to find opportunities for the more interesting plays from the manuals.

Tucked away at the end of Liechtenauer's recital is a short section about a position known as 'sprechfenster' - the speaking-window. The plays here are particularly good for punishing an opponent who leaves the bind to attack again, so can be used to make them play our game. This class will examine the sprechfenster plays given by Ringeck and pseudo-Danzig, with a focus on applying them in sparring. We will look at ways to set up these techniques, how to execute them effectively, and consider options to use if the opponent counters them.

Required knowledge: basic longsword cuts, thrusting and parrying in longpoint. Familiarity with the zwerhaw and experience in sparring will both be useful.

Necessary equipment: mask and longsword simulator. Additional gear recommended to allow working at higher intensity.

Opening the window

Light warmup: hand fencing bind game. Partners start with arms extended and in contact, giving light pressure. One leads distance, the other follows. At some point of their choosing, the leader pulls their hand away - follower strikes in with a touch to the lead shoulder.

*98 Make the speaking-window;
Stand freely, seek out his thing [action],*

Gloss. Note, this called the speaking-window: when he binds you on the sword with cuts or with parrying, so remain strong from extended arms with the long edge upon the sword, with the point

in front of the face, and stand freely and seek out his thing (whatever he will execute against you).

The speaking window is this extended firm bind, able to probe out what the opponent does

Bind game with swords:

- Enter blade contact
 - Provide gentle pressure for easy feeling
- The coach draws their sword back
- Fencer follows in with a thrust.

Wind into the face

Item. If he strikes-around from the sword with an over-cut to the other side, so bind-after with the long edge against his cut with strength, above into the head.

This is simple and effective, but needs good timing. It drives into the head as a slice/bind, not as a full twerhaw.

Common setups could include: they cut, you parry in sprechfenster, and they're already cutting again; you cut, they parry, and they try and cut round as a riposte.

Note they need to make a proper oberhaw from the other side, so that hands and everything come over from the left. This tends to mean they step forwards and to your right. Otherwise you run into their arms - see the next play.

Three step drill (do step 1, then step 1/2, then step 1/2/3 - that's one rep. 3 reps then switch fencer/coach):

1. Bind in sprechfenster, coach does nothing, fencer thrusts home.
2. Enter sprechfenster as before, coach cuts round with a nice oberhaw (remember to pass out as the coach).
3. Enter, coach cuts round, and fencer executes the counter.

Slice the arms

Or if he strikes-around from the sword with the thwart, so fall into his arms with the over-slice.

General setup here is an example of nachreissen. Just ride on their blade as it goes away, and that leads us onto their arms. Note this works best on a proper umbschlagen style zwerhaw.

It's particularly effective if their opening action was a twer - then you break their zwerhaw with the long edge and the point towards the face, bind and push their blade a bit to encourage them to try umbschlagen.

Three step drill:

1. Enter the sprechfenster by any means, fencer thrusts home.
2. Enter as before, coach sweeps round with zwerhaw.
 - Remember, the twer is a shorter cut, so you need to step in as the coach to make it land
 - As the fencer, be sure to provide some pressure
3. Execute the arm slice.

Set on with the point

Or if he pulls his sword to himself and wishes to thrust you below, so travel-after him upon the sword with the point, and set-upon him above

Simple and effective. Note that you are staying on their blade and overbinding it - this controls their sword and stops them from thrusting up into you. You do need extremely precise timing to follow with your thrust while they are moving, instead of after they have moved.

This is obviously very closely related to our warmup drills.

Good setups for this one include: bind on their sword and apparently pause; parry someone who likes durchwechseln.

Three step drill:

1. Bind, coach does nothing, fencer steps through with the thrust.
2. Bind, coach pulls back and thrusts up (clearing the blade/with opposition - think zucken/durchwechseln)
3. Bind, coach pulls back, fencer rides on their blade to maintain control and hits.

Fuhlen

Item. Note, if he does not wish to withdraw nor strike-around from the sword, so work upon the sword with the doubling (or otherwise with other plays) as you thereafter perceive the soft and the hard upon the sword.

Obviously if you stay in the bind there are absolutely loads of things which might happen. All the windings and so on can be executed from this setup. So we're not going to cover all of them - we're just going to quickly look at a couple.

The key feature here is we don't stay in the bind for ages. We bind on in sprechfenster, wait one for a moment (and act during it if they leave the bind) while feeling, or strike them otherwise.

When we feel in the bind, we should thrust pretty much immediately if we have the line - if the opponent is soft. If they go hard, duplieren is a good option, since we can expect them to be pushing back against our pressure. That predictability makes it much easier to react in time to land the duplieren.

Three step drill:

1. Bind on in sprechfenster. Coach is soft, fencer has line and thrusts.
2. Bind on in sprechfenster. Coach goes hard to clear the fencer's sword well out of line, then hits back in.
3. Bind on in sprechfenster. Coach goes hard, fencer uses duplieren to hit during the pressure.

Choice game

This is to practice reading the bind and replying correctly.

Pick who will be coach and fencer. Enter the speaking window by whatever means preferred.

The coach gives one of the five signals, fencer responds:

- Freeze
 - Thrust

- Umbschlagen
 - Bind into face
- Twerhaw
 - Slice the arms
- Pull back
 - Thrust over
- Go hard
 - Duplieren

Ten reps than change coach. Two times each then change partners.

Build up intensity as a pair - fencer should mostly succeed but have to work for it. 7-8 out of 10 is a good success rate.

Summary

- Sprechfenster is a firm bind with the point central (ideally towards the face)
- In this we are feeling for their action, and react or act as appropriate.
- Feel for about one beat - that's long enough to get their action, but short enough you aren't becoming passive.
 - If we feel them leave the bind, we counter with our three counters.
 - If we feel them stay in the bind, we work from hard and soft - direct thrust, duplieren, anything else as desired.

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