

Using the Speaking-Window

A class delivered by Tea Kew at the May Melee, 2017

Target audience: Some fundamental longsword experience (basic cutting, parrying, distance, some fuhlen), expertise not required. Drills can be approached more tactically or choreographically depending on the level of practitioners.

Class summary

Using the Speaking-Window.

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, throat protector, and longsword simulator. Additional gear recommended to allow working at higher intensity.

Intro - 10 mins

Introduction, hand fencing game as light warmup, working in the bind to feel and follow, and then nachreissen when the coach pulls away.

Entry - 10 mins

*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).

Post-class addition: the speaking-window is literally that little window in a castle door that you use to ask someone for the password through.

Ways to enter sprechfenster:

- Parry with the point as online as possible (potentially make a step back etc as required for range) - e.g. zornhaw
- Aggressively place the point in their face to force a bind.
- Cut and be parried.

Once you're there:

- Probe - apply a bit of pressure, and feel/see what the opponent is planning to execute.
- React to the action they execute (*indes*)
- Or attack yourself - thrust through the bind.

Drills - practice entry and probing.

Wind into the face - 15 mins

[103] 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. Stepping in is good - slice instead of thrust. But either works.

A common setup is they cut, you parry in sprechfenster, and they're already cutting again. Another common setup is you cut, they parry,

and they try and cut round as a riposte.

Post-class addition: Note that the second cut will tend to come with a step out to your right. Counter still works fine.

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 from one of these situations, coach does nothing, fencer thrusts home.
2. Enter sprechfenster as before, coach cuts round with a nice oberhaw.
3. Enter, coach cuts round, and fencer executes the counter.

Slice the arms - 15 mins

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

(Note this works best on a proper umbschlagen style zwerhaw)

General setup here is an example of nachreissen - we're just going to ride on their blade as it goes away, and that leads us onto their arms.

Good setups: 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.

Post-class addition: the setup notes here weren't mentioned at the time, for which my apologies.

Three step drill:

1. Bind with one of the two setups, fencer thrusts home.
2. Enter as before, coach sweeps round with zwerhaw.
3. Execute the arm slice.

Set on with the point - 15 mins

[105] 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.

This is obviously very closely related to our warmup drills.

Good setups - bind on 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)
3. Bind, coach pulls back, fencer rides on their blade to maintain control and hits.

Choice game - 15 mins

One partner attacks, the other defends into the speaking window with a nice firm bind and the point in the centre.

First partner leaves the bind to deliver one of the three demonstrated attacks.

Second partner counters the attack given.

Five 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.

The bind - 15 mins

[106] 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 beat (and act during it if they leave the bind) while feeling, and then 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 there are countless options, but auswinden (or duplieren - same thing just about range) is quite a nice one since they will probably go hard by pushing in response to our feeling/probing. So we can set that up, and expect it to happen, which allows countering super quickly.

Three step drill:

1. Bind on, probe. Coach is soft, fencer has line and thrusts.
2. Bind on, probe. Coach goes hard.
3. Bind on, probe. Coach goes hard, fencer uses auswinden.

Conclusion - 10 mins

Recap: sprechfenster is a firm bind with the point central (ideally towards the face)

From this we feel (put a little pressure in and get the idea of where their sword is), 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 they leave the bind, we counter - demonstrate the three counters.

If they stay in the bind, we work from hard and soft - direct thrust, auswinden, anything else as desired.

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