

JUST A FLESH WOUND
Fencing Tactics

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MIHI MEUM PATRONUM ESSE EST

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INTRODUCTION

What is fencing? Fencing has often been described as many things it's not, by people searching for a parallel between fencing and other sports or games. One popular saying is that "Fencing is chess on the fencing strip." Or that a fencer is like a grandmaster in chess. This to me beckons the question, "What is chess?"

Chess is an open fixed state game that can be played with or without timing constraints. When most people think about chess they think of playing classical chess, with just a board and pieces. When people say fencing is chess on the fencing strip, they don't look at what the game looks like, but how it generally develops.

The development of a game of chess proceeds from the beginning, to the middle, to the end. The beginning features an opening, that should provide a proper setup to the development of the game. During the middle game, the chess player should acquire a favourable position to finish off the opponent during the endgame.

Within the game of chess, a player is always limited by the number of possible moves. The board has fixed states to it, where you can see exactly what your opponent has. The only thing invisible is the opponent's intention. The development of the game may serve as a nice metaphor, but chess also introduces many misconceptions.

Fencing is a stateless game, that's at least partially blinded to the participants. We may identify what happened in hindsight, but one single fencing phrase varies widely in its interpretation. The size of a fencing action, and the time it costs to execute it, varies. Fencing is a game that develops continuously over time.

Chess is a game that develops in fixed steps, with time between every step. One player has to wait for the other player to make a move, whereas in fencing the initiative is always with the fencer that takes it. With fencing you're fighting every muscle of your opponent. With chess every possible move is set.

Perhaps some people seek a cleaner form in fencing. Chess has always been advocated as a game of kings to learn warfare. As in warfare, this has mainly resulted

in people complaining and claiming victory should be theirs, when the opponent did not respond within the bounds of the game of chess.

Before I continue, let me make one thing clear: fencing is fencing. There is no game better equipped to approximate fencing than fencing. Fencing has its own rules, and its own peculiarities, even varying from weapon to weapon. Even within fencing, people agree that foil isn't épée, isn't sabre. So why say fencing is chess?

If you want to draw a parallel between sports, it needs to be clear what can and can't be translated from the one game to the other. Chess merely serves as an example to the development of the ideal game, and the conventional rules to judge fencing: the way to fence in order to "guarantee" a single hit.

In practice, fencing is far from ideal. Fencing is an imperfect blind stateless game, often resulting in double hits, where no fencer is the real winner of that hit. To worsen things, fencing is a game that's won by scoring a number of hits, rather than one. Where you hit is of limited concern. The only thing that counts is that you hit validly.

What makes fencing possible as a sport is that on top of the fencing conventions, there are additional rules to make sure there always is a winner in the end. The game of fencing is fixed to always produce a winner, and as such seems to be a perfect game. When looking at the way hits are scored, we should not always regard it as such.

The nature of this thesis is to apply game theory to the game of fencing. Fencing largely is a game of the senses, helping you determine your move, and whether or not you should continue with a specific action. You don't have to be a mathematician in order to fence, so you might wonder whether game theory applies here.

GAME THEORY

The branch of mathematics concerned with the analysis of strategies for dealing with competitive situations where the outcome of a participant's choice of action depends critically on the actions of other participants. Game theory has been applied to contexts in war, business, and biology. (*New Oxford American Dictionary, 2nd edition*)

You don't have to be a mathematician in order to apply principles based on game theory. These principles will be clearly illustrated in this text, and if you choose to follow my advise, you will apply them accordingly. Game theory is what's used to determine these principles.

Expectation in case of game theory is the result of the actions chosen. You don't have to know calculus to come up with the actions. You have to determine what actions are possible, and based on those determine the highest expectation. Game theory for fencing deduces, rather than calculates, the highest likelihood.

Instead of deducing all of this all over again for fencing, this thesis takes a different game and sport, and draws a parallel. To come up with proper game theoretical principles, some of the constraints of this game and sport need to be loosened to match those of fencing. As you'll see, this doesn't provide any real problems.

The game used as a parallel to fencing is poker. Poker, although essentially a fixed state perfect game, closely mimics fencing under certain conditions. The game needs to have three or more players, with a dealer button that changes from person to person with every new round, and each player has some cards invisible to the others.

Fencing is a game where your opponent may try to precede you with an action, may sometimes act at the same time, and may act in response to your action. In poker, you don't play one opponent, you play the table. By having three players, the table may both precede you, and follow you up.

Sometimes in fencing, you may find yourself in a position, where the opponent can no longer precede you, or follow you up. This is mimicked by the dealer button. When you are the dealer, you will always be the last to act. When the person before you is the dealer, you will always be the first to act.

It's impossible within poker to act at the same time. The game itself through it's form determines whether a player is preceded and followed-up, or just one of those two. Nonetheless these situations in themselves provide certain questions that need to be answered. These questions can be translated to fencing questions.

These questions need to be answered knowing that you cannot see what your opponent has, and as such there is no sure way to determine what your opponent is thinking. There is no sure way of coming up with a certain action, that will in all cases lead to the maximum profit. Fencing, like poker, is a game that involves best estimates.

Before going further into the strategic principles of fencing, we need to come up with the right questions, to as closely as possible approximate ideal fencing. But what is ideal fencing? The F.I.E.-rules describe an ideal of fencing-practice, but also clearly note that they aren't a guide to fencing. How do you ideally interpret these rules?

The interpretation varies on the intent. From a master poker player's point of view, a bluff isn't the same as a raise. From the point of view of the rules, it is. When you raise, according to the rules, you add more money to your opponent's previous bet. This can tactically be used as a bluff, when you don't have the cards to back this up.

As will later be discussed in more detail, fencing isn't the same as poker, but it can learn from poker, by matching its intent. Poker can be used as a shortcut, mending the theory of poker to fencing. Mending of course means altering, but this happens within the limits of the intent of the action.

Outside of tactical game play, with each action having its own character, opponents as fencers also have a general character that guides their actions. Not only the actions themselves, but the underlying character of the person executing these actions, determines how effective they are against certain opponents.

A sport that has borrowed from fencing is boxing. Boxing in turn has a lot to teach to fencing in terms of different fighting styles. You see these styles in fencing also, with their own interpretation, taking into account that we don't fight with fists, but with swords. This thesis illustrates what fencing can learn from poker and boxing.

CHAPTER I. IDEALS OF FENCING

The method is the result of an ideal, as well as the end of it. There is no one way of fencing that is right. Some fencing teachers say you should never use a specific action, because doing so results in suicide. What they mean to say is, it's very difficult. Only the top 5% in fencing can execute this action.

Essentially this means that if your pupil wants to belong to the top 5% in fencing, you need to teach this action. There isn't a single action in fencing that shouldn't be taught. What you teach doesn't limit itself to how to execute an action, but also when and why. This partially needs to be determined based on the ideals in fencing.

In fencing, people often ask what they should do in a specific situation. A lot of people fence according to dominant methods that specifically prescribe what to do in any given situation. What this really does, is make you predictable as a fencer, because you always react in the same way. This way the opponent can read you as a book.

What you should ask, is what to consider given any situation. You should always be fencing your game, but this doesn't mean it should be easy to read. Fencing your game means that you have to fence in such a way that your opponent is not in control. You need to be in control of the whole game, even when they have the initiative.

Being in control of the game means, that you determine the actions that follow. In order to do so, you need to somehow conquer the initiative at the right time. But how do you do this? What is the ideal way of fencing? How do you make sure you fence as closely as possible to this ideal?

AN IDEAL HIT

A hit fenced as if you knew exactly when and how your opponent was going to act, matching your opponent's action with your own in such a way that you are the only one to hit.

If fencing were just about one hit, this were all a fencer needs. It's usually the first thing taught to a fencer: "To fence, such as to hit, but not to be hit." With a grand total of fifteen hits to be made, this is bound to go wrong somewhere. Everybody gets hit sooner or later, there's no way of avoiding that.

Fencing as a sport has changed swordplay dramatically relatively speaking to, let's say, the Middle Ages, or even the beginning of the Renaissance. In real life swordplay, there is no coming back from the dead and making up for past mistakes. In fencing there is: you can adapt your tactics to those of your opponent.

When you're hit with a straight thrust, you could for instance choose to be the first to attack the next time around, or parry. Maybe you'll find yourself parrying thrice before you actually manage to catch your opponent's blade the next time around. Or maybe you can use as many parries as you like, but still somehow fail.

You get as many chances as there are hits in the game. This in itself dramatically changes the math you have to do, in order to come up with a proper strategy in fencing. This is also why the theory of an ideal hit should be abandoned. Instead we should look at what secures victory at any given time.

IDEAL FENCING

Fencing as if you knew exactly when and how your opponents were going to act, matching your opponents' actions with your own in such a way that you secure victory.

From this ideal of fencing, you can come up with the proper considerations for all fencing games. It doesn't matter whether you're a duelling fanatic, or a competition fencer. The ideal counts for every type of fencing. Yet, you can't generalise from one specific game of fencing, to all the other games of fencing.

Ideals have long been noted worthy striving for, but impossible to reach, safe in a moment in time. So what use is this ideal in fencing? The ideal of fencing is solely a measure to see how well you're actually doing (in game theory: your fitness function). Whether you're gaining or losing should be determined based on this ideal.

Judging your fencing according to this ideal can be formulated in a theorem, based on *Sklansky's fundamental theorem of Poker*. The theorem tells you how to judge whether you are gaining or losing. As such it helps you determine whether you need to change your game. It should lead to fencing becoming more dynamic.

THE FUNDAMENTAL THEOREM OF FENCING

Every time you fence a hit differently from the way you would have fenced it, if you read your opponents like a book, they gain; and every time you fence a hit the way you would have fenced it, if you read your opponents like a book, they lose. Conversely, every time opponents fence a hit differently from the way they would have, if they could read you like a book, you gain; and every time they fence their hit the way they would have, if they could read you as a book, you lose.

How to interpret this fundamental theorem greatly differs based on how you interpret fencing as a game. Do you fence to just one hit? Do you fence multiple hits? Will there be more bouts after you have lost your bout? Even in sport fencing alone, these are all questions worth considering.

This thesis mostly concerns itself with sport fencing, because that's what I teach. Through this thesis you can now also more clearly discern what the major differences are between sport fencing, and fencing a duel. In duelling we feel hit when the opponent strikes blood. In sport fencing, we feel hit when we get a hit against.

CHAPTER II. CONSIDERING FORMS OF FENCING

Much like with any other group of games, like for instance chess and poker, fencing knows different forms as well. In order to determine a proper strategy, first you need to determine what and how you stand to gain or lose. The kind of game you're fencing naturally entails the way victory is achieved.

The classical duel could be fought in any number of ways: first blood, death, individuals fighting each other, army regiments battling out their feuds, on the ground, on a boat, in the ropes, on a high beam, in a circle, and on a strip. These are but a handful of interpretations of the game of fencing for blood.

Sometimes, in a fencing hall situation, the master may fence the students. With beginners, the master might very well assume certain handicaps. For instance, the master may not move and is three hits behind on the student, with the student only having one hit to go. You won't see this at a tournament, but it's a valid exercise.

Especially in team training, it's important that fencers learn what to do when they start off being already behind on the opponent. In case of team training, every team is one player, but all the same, every fencer is dependent on the rest of the team. How do you cope with your losses, when you haven't made them as an individual?

A single fencer may also fall behind, or gain the advantage during an individual bout. These are all situations a fencer can be in that need different approaches, that require a different mode of thinking. How do you regain the advantage? How do you keep the advantage? How much of your advantage are you willing to give up?

In the end, what you're after is victory, but you have to work with the cards you're dealt. You have to minimise your losses, and maximise your winnings. In order to come out on top, you have to consider the road to get there. This means considering not just where you're going, but also where you've been.

Whenever you consider your situation, you keep an eye out towards what should still happen to secure victory, and what may secure victory for your opponent. You

need to consider what the current damage on your part is, and on your opponent. This is the room you have for play to secure victory during the rest of the game.

VICTORY

The moment the damage the defeated party has suffered outweighs that of the victorious party, based on the chosen conventions, without a possibility to continue.

In the end, damage determines who won the bout. Within the duel this might be determined by who lives and who dies, but also by first blood. In some cases it may not have been the actual physical damage that counted, but the fact that one of both fencers begged for mercy.

Mentality and perseverance were important factors within the duel. At the beginning of the duel it wasn't always so that either one of the fencers had the intention to kill the other. Maybe this resembled sport fencing the most. The first to become physically or mentally incapable of fencing lost, and the other won.

In modern sport fencing, the individual fencer or team that gains the most points, within the time the bout lasts, wins. The number of hits that can be achieved is limited, as well as the total amount of time the bout may take. Sometimes the end time is reached before the maximum number of hits is. The party with the most hits wins.

When the maximum amount of time is reached in a bout between individuals, and both fencers have come to a draw, one of the fencers receives the advantage by chance. Within a set period determining the prolongation, the other has to prove that the advantage was given to the wrong person, by scoring one hit, and one hit only.

At a draw in case of épée, the last hits, when double, will always be annulled. A score of 17-16 will never occur. Only a score of 15-14 may be reached after a draw on 14-14. The first person to score just one hit, wins. When there's a prolongation of time that has passed, the fencer with the advantage is awarded this hit.

Because fencers fence based on points, fencing changes drastically from a strategic perspective. The valid target area largely is to blame for this, and as such the character

of each weapon changes drastically according to the valid target area. This translates itself to the conventions of the specific weapons.

The foil with its limited target area tries to reflect that someone that's stabbed on the arm ten times may still win, by just hitting the opponent through the heart once. It used to be the lesson weapon of choice, functioning as some sort of practice épée. The conventions were invented to bring back the number of double deaths in duels.

Épée and sabre both have a much bigger target area. Someone who has been stabbed through the heart twice, may as such win from someone that's been hit on the wrist thrice, when time is up. The kind of damage you suffer is something that needs to be considered for any fight or fighting sport, when determining your strategy.

Fencing resembles a sport the most when you're ahead with 14-10 on épée. You have just been parried by your opponent and got a hit against. This may be a mental turning point for your opponent, that may well turn into your defeat. If you adapt too quickly, your opponent may adapt to you, and you lose.

Sometimes it's a better idea to make a mistake again, making your opponent believe that you're unable to adapt. This will result in you being hit in the very same way as before. Now your opponent will most probably not adapt when you do, and you can secure your final hit.

Damage is necessary to determine who the winner is. The winner follows from relative damage. To acquire hits and victory, as always the fencer needs to consider what complements, but does not complete the opponent. To complement means that you actions need to match your opponent's. To complete means they score the hit.

GAINING THE ADVANTAGE

The advantage is gained over your opponent by complementing their actions, matching them with your own, but rather than completing them, obstructing them, so you can score the hit. As such you never seek to make your opponent complete.

Any fencer will be hit at times. To teach people that they should fence in such a way that they hit, but won't be hit, will make them freeze up as soon as they are hit. In the end the only thing that counts is who was hit more. This, in sport fencing, is also what we perceive as damage.

CHAPTER III. CHARACTER OF THE ACTION

Fencing has often been used as a metaphor for storytelling, for music, for improvisation in acting, for business negotiations, and much more. Fencing at times is considered highly important to build character. Fencing reflects character. By learning to compose attacks, or when to come directly, you build a multi-dimensional character.

Since every action reflects part of your character, what is character should be a part of that action. Action follows naturally from character, that what we are, and context, the situation we find ourselves in. The context is the opposite of character in disguise. Some fencers are easy to read, but more experienced fencers aren't.

When you analyse the different actions, you need to take into account the three key dimensions to character: psychology, physiology, and sociology. Psychology illustrates the background and intent of the action. Physiology tells us what it's composed of. Sociology illustrates the context, and how it may change this context.

A different way of putting this, is saying that you look at the nature of the action, and how it relates to that of the opponent. The nature of the action is described by its innate properties: psychological and physiological. How it relates to the actions of the opponent is sociological.

The nature of an action is usually described by saying that it's an offensive or defensive action. This definition may suffice to judge fencing, but not to learn to fence. In the end every sequence of actions ends with an offensive action, that is the nature and intent of fencing. The fencer needs to learn how to compose these sequences.

Next to being offensive and defensive, the size, weight, timing, and speed of the actions are all determining factors in whether the action is successful or not. Sometimes it's better to fence big, sometimes to fence small. The same goes for fencing heavily or lightly, in broken rhythm or one tempo, and fast or slow.

A fencing action never stands on itself, but is always executed in relation to your opponent. This means that you always need to complement your opponent's actions

through your own, but not complete them. Your opponent should be the one falling short, not you. As long as your opponent falls short on average, you win.

What you need to do is find out what your opponent is likely to do, and upset your opponent by disguising what you're about to do. The more your opponent becomes upset, visibly or mentally, the more likely the opponent is to give things away. Before you can do that, you need to understand the basic tactical approaches to fencing.

Note that the actions described here are all actions that are meant to initiate the action in some way, either by doing something yourself, or by forcing the opponent to act. Since a parry is a reaction, there is no action, no offensive strategy, that's initiated by parrying. Rather, there are actions drawing the attack, that may in turn be parried.

III : I — THE CHECK

Checking in poker is the action of not betting when it's your turn. You stay put without adding any additional money to the pot. A check as such isn't the same as a call, because in a call you accept your opponent's raise. Checking is a waiting game, allowing others to play first.

Psychologically, when you check, you don't want to be the first to act. Instead you await your opponent's action, and respond accordingly. This means that you expect that you'll be able to tell what to do, based on what your opponent does. Checking is meant to force your opponent to take the initiative.

Physiologically, when you check, you stay put. You don't advance, you don't retreat, you keep still, but you need to be sufficiently relaxed in order to be able to react properly. When you check, you can't freeze up, lock up, or panic. Checking means being ready for action, while keeping your head cool.

Sociologically you're not giving away any game. You remain still until you have no other choice but to act. Checking is an old man's game: in fencing old fencers are feared for their patience and their cool. All the same, as a twenty year old you cannot afford to be hot headed, and need to be able to fence like an eighty year old.

Opponents that check in fencing, get in as late as possible with their fencing actions. They parry or thrust in the latest possible moment. Either way they wait for the opponent to make their attack, or run into their blade. You don't raise, as in alter the distance, but stay put. Checking doesn't involve footwork.

Checking can only happen when the opponent's actions aren't masked. The proper way to respond to someone that's checking all the time, is by masking your actions. Play around, take the opponent's blade, alter the cadence. The keyword here is 'vary'. Vary when, where, and how you're going to attack, with sufficient preparations.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. Fencer parries late, with a single parry, without footwork.
- ii. Fencer straight thrusts late, without footwork.
- iii. Choice between i and ii, based on the presence or absence of a proper beginning of an attack.
- iv. Response: Now the fencer has to play with the distance, with small steps backward and forward, with the timing, and with the taking of the blade, to mask the actual attack and make sure the straight thrust or parry fails. The opponent may not use footwork.

III : II — THE CALL

To call in poker, means to say you match the bet, but don't go over it. You need to have outdrawn the opponent with your cards in order to win. You don't believe that your opponent truly has the hand that matches the raise, nor that the hand will outdraw yours. You don't value your own hand higher than the pot, thus don't raise.

Psychologically, to call is to question, the intent is to find out whether your opponent really has the upper hand. Calling as such means, you go along with what your opponent has to say. Calling is only an option when you know that you, both technically as well as mentally, outweigh your opponent.

Physiologically, you accept the action of the opponent, with your action taking it one step further, as such assuring you the hit. On an invitation to attack, you attack. On an

attack, you parry. When your opponent seeks your blade, you evade it, if you can't hit directly hit on the invitation. Fence economically: don't evade too much.

Sociologically, your opponent says "I'm going to hit you.", and your response is "No, you're not." You allow your opponent to create the context, and you deal with it. Your opponent leads, and you counter with one action on top of the actions of the opponent, that are immediately clear.

Note that you only respond to actions that are clear. This means that you attack early, or you parry late. In between you don't enter into any actions, you only draw the action of your opponent, saying "Show me what you've got." In calling, you leave the initiative to the opponent.

If your opponents are easy to read, you play your opponents as you read them, but always taking what they offer you. When your opponent always comes with a lot of feints, learn to parry late. A call isn't a counter-attack. If your opponent freezes up, you do attack. They don't do anything, so you follow up with one more action.

The way to deceive a call is to make your opponent call either too late, or too early. This means you have to play with your cadence, the rhythm of your attack. By varying the rhythm of the attack, the opponent will have to guess when the finale will come. This in turn will make it harder to parry. Learn to draw the parry, or precede it.

To draw or precede a parry, you need to respectively prolong the beat before the finale, or take out a beat. Prolonging the beat means that you keep your feint out there as long as possible, before you evade the parry. To take one out, a step lunge, allowing yourself to be parried on the third beat, retreat, and then a jump lunge is an option.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. Fencer parries late, while moving backward, optionally while following the opponent with half parries, and only taking the last parry as a full parry.
- ii. Fencer attacks on the preparation of the opponent.
- iii. Choice between i and ii, based on the advance of the opponent.

- iv. Response: Now the fencer leads, playing with the distance, with small steps backward and forward, broken rhythm advances and retreats, with the timing, and with the taking of the blade, to mask the actual attack, and make sure the point in line, attack, or parry fails. The opponent follows.

III : III — THE BET AND THE RAISE

A bet in poker is the first to add more money to the pot. A raise bets more after an opponent's bet. The bet and raise match the worth of the cards. You expect your cards to be worth more than what's already on the table. You don't expect your opponent to have higher cards than yours.

Psychologically the intent of the action matches exactly that what the action executes. When you do this, your opponent will see exactly what you have up your sleeve. You're really saying: "This is what I have, now you look whether you're capable of dealing with that."

Physiologically, the size and weight of the action will be economical. When you bet or raise, you work efficiently, giving your opponent exactly what you have, without playing it too weakly. Your actions should be clear and straightforward, without falling short in any way. What you do is exactly what it is.

Sociologically you should be able to trust that there's no reason for you to mask your action in any way, simply because your opponent will not respond properly to it. You need to be sure that you're always a step ahead of your opponent's intentions. To the opponent it should feel like you took, or took over, the initiative.

Practically, a bet or raise matches an advance, since you're gaining. When you advance more, closing the distance, you're also on the attack. The hand actions should match the actions of the feet. All the same, when you don't have anything up your sleeve yet, you may still advance, but only when keeping sufficient distance.

A bet, when you're the first to come forward, is a proper attack, whereas a raise means you attack, or counter-attack. When you raise against a bluff, you're the attacker.

When your raise against a bet, you're the counter-attacker. Either way you expect your opponent to fold the attack.

A bet, under all conditions, is an attack. Otherwise it isn't a proper bet. The idea of the bet is that you believe you will outdraw the opponent's hand. This also means that when your opponent launches a counter-attack, you should be able to follow through properly with the attack.

Someone that bets properly can't be upset by a counter-attack, because they know they get the priority of the hit. An opponent that believes to advance and follow through with an attack properly, but that's caught by a stop-hit, miscalculated, and was either unknowingly bluffing or plain out-raised.

The only way to counter a bet or raise, is by playing it as you read it. Parry the attack and riposte, or follow through with your attack properly, regardless of the counter-attack. Although you may start your attack weakly, basically begging for a counter-attack, when you follow through properly it's still your attack.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer closes the distance, and needs to attack, before the opponent can initiate an attack. The opponent can't go backward, and may only come forward with an attack.
- ii. The fencer needs to attack on the preparation of the opponent, before the opponent has launched an attack, but may not parry. Both may come forward from the beginning.
- iii. The opponent attacks weakly, and the fencer counter-attacks, causing the opponent to miss.
- iv. Combine i, ii, and iii, alternating them.
- v. Response to i and ii: The fencer needs to draw the attack, and parry-riposte.

- vi. Response to iii: The fencer initiates the attack weakly in the step, drawing a counter-attack by the opponent, but continues strongly in the lunge.
- vii. Combine v and vi: The fencer initiates the attack weakly, and follows up by either continuing strongly, or by parry-riposte of the counter-attack.

III : IV — THE FOLD

In poker people sometimes fold their hand. This means they give up the pot. They can do this for a variety of reasons: to minimise their losses, because they do not want to show their cards to their opponent, sometimes because the pressure is too high. Either way you stand to lose in the short run, but may have options for the long run.

Psychologically, the intent of the fold is to acknowledge that if you pursue with further action, there's no way you're going to win. Folding as such is really something you can only use when you see no further option, not even a blind attack. The fold in itself should somehow become a preparation for further action.

Physiologically the fold means you allow your opponents to take the pot, either with or without showing your hand. You can fold at any time, even at the very end of the pot, when you have already seen that your opponent has the upper hand. You don't pursue, even can't pursue, with further action in that very same moment.

Sociologically, you can either specifically choose to negotiate your intentions to the opponent, or you can decide to conceal them. When you negotiate your intentions, you execute all of your actions, and allow them to fail on the finale. When you conceal them, you allow yourself to be caught before the finale, possibly on the preparation.

The more your actions develop, the more you give away, the more the fold is open. The earlier you allow yourself to be caught, the less your opponent sees, the more the fold is closed. Fencing doesn't really have a folding action, but sometimes you may want to consider giving away a hit, or at least stopping the attack.

A fold doesn't always mean your opponent automatically gets a hit. When you relinquish your priority, by halting the attack, you temporarily fold in fencing. You might compare this to a position in poker, where your position doesn't have to come out betting, and as such by folding, you don't lose any of your money.

Suppose you're ahead 14 to 9 on épée. Your opponent scores a hit, it becomes 14 to 10. If you change your strategy too quickly, in case of some opponents, this may lead them to adapt equally fast, and this may give them the upper hand. What you do instead, is give away another hit in exactly the same way. It's now 14 to 11.

When you manage to make your opponent believe you're stuck on one strategy, you can then finally adapt, and score the final hit. In case of this example the score will be either 15 to 11, or 15 to 12 in case of a double hit. Either way, you secure the fifteenth hit, and win. Giving away a hit did not result in your loss.

You can do this in any number of ways. At 14 to 10, you could bluff once more, and allow yourself to be stop-hit again. Then you switch to the semi-bluff, and parry riposte, or maybe even try a direct attack. You could also allow yourself to be parried again. Then you evade the parry, or fall short on the attack and counter-parry riposte.

As an opponent, you need to learn to see when people fold or not. When you're capable of seeing that they give up a hit with premeditated intent, take it, then vary. That way you score an easy hit. If you cannot discern between a fold, or a failure of the opponent, vary all the time. That way your opponent cannot make use of the fold.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer initiates an attack, sharpening the opponent's senses, but then lets it fall short. The fencer gives the opponent a little time to relax, and then attacks and hits.
- ii. The fencer advances with an attack while the opponent retreats, then holds back, advances with an attack, holds back, etc. until the fencer senses an opening to follow through with the attack.

- iii. Response to i and ii: On the advance of the opponent, the fencer has to retreat in a broken tempo while drawing the attack, followed by a parry-riposte, or take over the initiative by attacking before the opponent can start a new attack.
- iv. Stage a situation where the fencer only has to make one hit, versus three of the opponent. The fencer attacks without a preparation, the opponent parries. The opponent adapts when the fencer immediately adapts, otherwise the opponent fences as if suckered into expecting the same thing for the third time around.
- v. Same as iv, but the fencer allows for the opponent's attack on the preparation, giving away a hit. Next hit the fencer is supposed to parry the attack on the preparation.
- vi. Response to iv and v: The fencer needs to score three, the opponent one. Reverse the roles. The fencer takes the first hit, then varies to take the second. Now both opponents are at an equal score, and fence accordingly.

III : V — THE BLUFF

When you bluff in poker, you indicate that you have a high hand, even though you really haven't. You take the initiative by throwing a lot of money on the table, but when you look at the actual hand, it's never going to get the priority over that of the opponent. In case of a bluff raise, you do so after the opponent has already betted.

Psychologically the intent is to make your opponent believe you have something, you do not, and as such make the opponent fold. Folding in fencing means giving up. This means you need to put so much pressure on your opponent, that your opponent is unable to act.

Physiologically your actions will be more pressing than what you can really back up through further action. These pressing actions should feel overwhelming to your

opponent, and make your opponent back down. Although there is plenty of room to act, to your opponent it should feel like there isn't.

Sociologically, you need to make sure that it looks like you can do anything, your opportunities are limitless and open, whereas your opponent needs to be completely closed off. Essentially you need to be extremely cocky and pressing in the way you come forward, without running into your opponent.

In order to score the hit, you would normally have to gain the priority. When you're bluffing you rarely do, because you are trying to make sure through pressure that your opponent doesn't hit back. The hit that will result in the end, in most cases will not be strong and forceful, but will be small, since you don't need more than that.

When you're bluffing and you end with a small hit, to your opponent it will feel like you could do much more, but you didn't feel the need to. As such, to fencers that are inexperienced with fencers that bluff, the bluff will feel very strong and overwhelming. Not all fencers are inexperienced with the bluff.

Everything that leads up to the hit is not an attack. A direct attack on a bluff hits, because there's nothing to back this bluff up with. The simple bluff is an invitation, while keeping pressure on the opponent from your footwork, and physique. The bluff raise does the same, after the opponent was already coming forward.

The simple bluff can be countered by the stop-hit. The bluff doesn't make use of feints, it's just an invitation, followed-up by a single stab that doesn't have to be a full straight thrust. Any attack on the bluff as such will receive the priority, as long as the beginning of the attack precedes the touch of the bluff.

The bluff raise can be countered by doing the same while coming forward. In case of the bluff raise against your raise, your proper attack, trust that the beginning of your attack should also be parried. Don't break off your attack because of a lack of distance. The bluff raise, like the bluff, can never get the priority of the hit.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer advances putting the opponent under pressure, and follows through with a touch. The opponent may, or may not retreat.
- ii. The fencer advances in the same way on the advance or weak attack of the opponent, causing the opponent to break off any forthcoming attack, and follows through with a touch.
- iii. Response to i: The opponent advances with pressure, and the fencer has to attack before the touch hits, without retreating.
- iv. Response to ii: The fencer comes forward with an attack to the nearest target area, and continues with the attack when the opponent comes forward, or comes forward with an invitation and attacks on advance by the opponent, when the opponent doesn't.

III : VI — THE SEMI-BLUFF

Contrary to a bluff, a semi-bluff in poker may develop into a proper hand. At first the player has little, but as more open cards are dealt on the table, or players exchange some of the cards they had for new ones, their chances may increase. In case of your bluff, when called, you will always lose. In case of your semi-bluff, you may win.

Psychologically, you want to scare the players with strong actions you normally cannot beat out of the game, but keep the players with weaker actions you can oppose in. The intent still is to make your opponent believe that you have something you have not, but it may actually still develop into enough of that what you are suggesting.

Physiologically the semi-bluff is more controlled than the bluff, because you need to be able to follow your opponent's actions up with proper actions of your own. As such it needs to feel it may develop into something as pressing as the bluff, but you need to be able to change to a different course of action at the same time.

Sociologically the stronger opponents should feel pressured enough to feel you can do what you want, while they can't do what they want, and as such await the attack; to

the weaker ones it needs to feel like a bluff. You should make the opponent fold, hitting with a straight thrust, or parry the opponent's weak stop-hit.

The semi-bluff is an action that makes your opponent feel like you're always in charge of the game. It's a clearly premeditated action, with multiple different options for a follow-up plan. The semi-bluff should be psychologically overwhelming, resulting in badly timed direct attacks or parries.

The first option to counter the semi-bluff is to launch an attack with disengagement on the preparation, or work with a point-in-line and disengagement. The second option is to draw the semi-bluffer's attack, and parrying this attack. Either way, you need to make sure that the semi-bluffer responds to what you do, and cope with that.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer advances with an invitation, the opponent doesn't attack, and either stands still or retreats, hoping to parry. The fencer closes the distance and continues with a straight thrust when there's no more room to parry.
- ii. The fencer advances with an invitation, the opponent attacks too hastily. The fencer parry ripostes.
- iii. The fencer advances with an invitation, and follows through with an attack, the opponent counter-attacks. The fencer needs to continue with the attack properly.
- iv. Choice between i, ii, and iii based on the opponent's actions.
- v. Response: The opponent comes forward with an invitation. Either the fencer attacks with one or more disengagements, disengages with a point in line, or retreats, drawing the opponent's attack with a short thrust, parries it, and follows up with a riposte.

III : VII — THE CHECK-RAISE

To check-raise in poker, means that you first check, and when your opponent bets, you raise. As such you need to be sure your opponent will bet, when you don't. Other than

that, it's a game played without pressure, matching the actions of your opponent. You have a slightly better hand than your opponent, but not far better.

Check-raising in poker and in fencing is often considered to be foul play. The truth is, people just don't like to be sucker punched, but they will get sucker punched. You don't have to be the first to come forward to gain the priority. It's all a part of "the art and science of fencing". Learn it.

Psychologically, the intent is to draw a bet by your opponent, but then raise yourself. Your opponent needs to make the first move, and you match your opponent's move by your own raise. This way the move of the opponent should be cut short, and yours should continue.

Physiologically, at first you do nothing, and allow your opponent to take the initiative. Only after they have taken the initiative, do you close in on it. A check-raise is a simple action, that starts late. When you advance, you raise properly, you don't bluff. You make a simple attack, through a lunge or a step-lunge, and that's it.

Sociologically, opponents feel like they're closing the distance, but instead you close the distance. The anticipated room they had to attack disappears, and you overwhelm them with your attack. This means that either their attack can't have commenced before yours does, or it needs to be weak, or you need to close with an attack by opposition.

A proper raise says that you have the priority of the attack, or you need to take away the opponent's threat and take over. A check-raise using a direct counter-attack on a strong attack of your opponent will fail. A check-raise against a strong attack, must always be a counter-attack with opposition.

Because some opponents may start out with a weak attack, and develop it into a strong attack, a different way that's also a form of check-raising comes into play. The attack in time, making sure there is a fencing tempo between your hit, and the hit after that by the opponent, is also a check-raise with proper safety precautions.

When your opponent check-raises all the time, you still need to take the initiative, but you give it away immediately after that, in order to reclaim it once again. This means

you first advance, either with or without a threat, every time changing the cadence. Your opponent attacks, and the final parry-riposte should be yours.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. On the advance without a threat by the opponent, the fencer attacks on the preparation.
- ii. On the advance with a weak attack by the opponent, the fencer attacks strongly, making the opponent miss.
- iii. On the advance or weak attack by the opponent, the fencer thrusts or cuts in time, and retreats with a parry riposte to make a fencing tempo, while the opponent follows through strongly.
- iv. On the advance with a strong threat by the opponent, the fencer attacks through opposition.
- v. Choice between i, ii, iii, and iv.
- vi. Response to i, ii, and iv: In case of all options, the fencer parries the opponent's attack, and ripostes.
- vii. Response to iii: Like vi, but after parrying the attack in time, the fencer needs to come indirectly to evade the counter-parry.

III : VIII — TO PLAY SLOW

To play it slow in poker means, that you play your hand weakly at first to get as many opponents in there as you can, and make the pot as big as possible, when you know you have the upper hand over all of them. When you play strongly in the beginning, you may sometimes scare off opponents that you'd rather see in the game.

Psychologically, the intent of playing it slow is to maximise the pot, rather than close off opportunity by driving the opponent out. You don't want your opponent to be uncomfortable and retreat, or maybe change their game. Instead you want to lure them into the game you're playing, until there's no way for them to escape.

Physiologically playing it slow isn't a waiting game, but a game where you gradually add pressure. This means that when you come forward, your actions should develop in

such a way that they can always develop as the beginning of an attack. This way you're always sure to receive the first priority of the hit.

Sociologically your opponents should feel like nothing much is happening, but when something does happen it happens on such a short notice that they can only see that it happened. They need to know they are going to be attacked, but what will count as the beginning of the attack must be unclear to them, forcing them to counter-attack.

Playing it slow means that in the end there can be no doubt about the fact that you have the priority. This means you always need to follow through in time, not too late, but as late as possible. The opponent cannot take you on your preparation, because every part of the preparation can develop as the beginning of the attack.

Advance with your arm stretching all the time. When you see your opponent react through an offensive movement, you finish the stretching of the arm in the step, adjusting the tempo of the step to that of the arm, and follow through with the lunge on the closing of the step. Now you have priority from the beginning of the step.

You can't wait for someone that plays it slow. Make sure that you control the game, and don't bluff. Get the priority first, by being the first to attack. If you can't get the priority first, you need to draw the attack with a feint, and parry it. Make sure you determine the rhythm of the match, don't wait.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer comes forward while stretching the arm, and needs to follow through with the attack when in distance, or when the opponent closes the distance in any way.
- ii. Response: The fencer needs to learn to immediately attack on the referees signal to "Fence!", or draw the attack with one or more feints, possibly while going backward, and parrying the finale.

III : IX — TO PLAY TIGHT

To play it tight in poker means that you play fewer hands than you normally would. Based on the odds of having the highest ranking set of cards, a lot of the time, when

you fold, if you had called or raised, you would have taken home the pot. When you play it tight, and you do stay in the pot, people will expect you to have something.

Psychologically, the intent of playing it tight is to provoke as little action on your person as possible, and only provoke action when you're sure to win. In most cases this means that when you do enter into action, your opponent will somehow fold. When they don't fold, you more often than not will have the upper hand.

Physiologically, you hold back and hide all the time, trying not to be hit. When you do act, you act to win. This means that you don't just explode, but you aim for it. When you attack, you attack to hit. You don't bluff, and only come out betting with a winning hand. You need to have the upper hand if you want to be sure to win.

Sociologically, opponents will expect to land a hit when they attack and you don't, but when you attack, they'll always expect to be hit. This means that in a lot of cases they'll feel like giving up. The fact that they feel like giving up might actually be the key to your victory. To them, your actions determine the hit.

Playing it tight means that you play with the distance, continuously moving into attacking distance and out of it again. A lot of opportunities that you normally use to attack, you now abandon. It's not the question if you'll come, but when. When the opponent tries something, quickly get out of range.

The proper way to fence people that play it tight is to make sure that they misjudge the distance. They need to give away too many hits. Make sure you attack them when they are going forward. They won't follow through. When you go backward and they do attack, you can easily parry them, they won't give up the attack.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer plays with the distance, threatening with the advance, and attacks the opponent irregularly, while the opponent waits to parry.

- ii. Response: The fencer opposes the distance, and attacks on the advance of the opponent when advancing, parries and ripostes on the retreat when the opponent follows through.

III : X — TO PLAY LOOSE

To play it loose in poker means that you play more hands than you normally would. Based on the odds of having the highest ranking set of cards, a lot of the time, if people will call you, they will outrank you with their hand. When you play it loose, a lot of the time, people can just take the pot, with you in it.

Psychologically, the intent of playing it loose is acting more, because you don't expect your opponent to counter your actions sufficiently. This may mean that you expect your opponent to fold, and give away the hit. This may also mean that on average your opponents sometimes take more than they normally would.

Physiologically, this means that your attacks are executed carelessly varying. If they hit, they hit. When they don't, they don't. You don't keep your opponent in mind, you solely identify your attack by the fact that it is an attack, and you don't make sure it complements your opponents' movements in any way.

Sociologically, because you carelessly vary the attack, where or when they are launched will be hard to predict. The opponent will understand that when the attack comes, it comes. But it's hard for them to determine when your attack is actually backed up by a proper intention or not, what sometimes allows you to hit.

Loose play works best against nervous opponents that parry or attack aimlessly. It can also be a winning strategy when you're up ahead. Because you fence carelessly, it will cost you relatively little energy. Directed attacks, that aren't supposed to get parried, but do, cost the most energy. Loose play does not have this problem.

The best way to counter loose play, is to play according to what you have. When the opponent is in range and doesn't attack, attack. Otherwise, make distance to see where the finale goes. If they continue, parry-riposte, otherwise, attack. When you stay put and try to second guess your opponent, who chooses what to do illogically, you lose.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer lunges starting from a neutral line, choosing a line to end in before the attack, and disengages during the stretching of the arm. The opponent is only allowed to take one parry.
- ii. The opponent goes backward, with the fencer in pursuit from a neutral line. When in distance, the fencer executes the first exercise. The opponent stands still with the parry, and isn't allowed to retreat further as soon as the attack is launched.
- iii. First response: The fencer plays with the distance, while continuously threatening the opponent with half thrusts. The opponent advances as in exercise i and ii, and tries to follow through with an attack. When advancing, the fencer attacks the opponent on the preparation, with a stop-hit. Otherwise, make distance, parry-riposte when the attack continues, attack when the attack falls short.
- iv. Second response: As in iii, but now the fencer retreats while continuously threatening the opponent with half thrusts. Stretch on moving the hind foot, retract on the front foot. When in distance, and stretching the arm, follow through with a stop-hit when possible, before the opponent launches the attack. Otherwise, the fencer draws the attack, makes distance, and parries the follow-up attack.

III : XI — TIME

In poker you can sometimes sit back and relax, and think about the different options you have in the game. Sometimes there may be a limit to the time you get to think. If so, most probably you'll automatically call if this time has passed. Time doesn't change the order of the actions of a game of poker, it merely postpones the action.

Psychologically, the intent of taking your time is to have more time to react. There are many factors in a game that determine what needs to happen, and even an experienced fencer might sometimes be in a position, where more time is needed to consider everything. Sometimes you just don't have enough time to respond.

Physiologically, time equals distance. To be able to respond properly, you need to come up with a plan. If you don't have a plan, you can retreat. This will buy you more time to think things over. Even when you have a plan, sometimes you still have to take a step backward to buy more time, especially with fast opponents.

Sociologically, to your opponent you'll look harder to reach. This may either seem weak, or it may give off the impression that your opponent just has to put in more work. Either way, the increase of distance will upset the opponent's measure, and the opponent will find difficulty dealing with that.

Time works best against opponents that will grant you time, because they don't follow, or that always attack in the same way, giving you room to carefully compose your response. By moving backward, you know they aren't going to follow, or you get sufficient room to find the right parries to match the opponent's attack.

The best way to counter time for thinking is to pursue the opponent as quickly as possible. A lot of opponents don't expect you to do this, and in turn are sitting ducks. The best way to counter time for parries, is to vary the way you close the distance, and keep the pressure on. Alter your feints, change your cadence, and look for an opening.

POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXERCISES

- i. The fencer makes time late, with a single step backward and a parry-riposte.
- ii. The fencer retreats, and halts on the parry, immediately riposting.
- iii. Same as i and ii, but now the fencer makes two half-parries, and one full parry, covering the entire target area with all three. The fencer needs to have at least three combinations of three parries to vary.

- iv. The fencer retreats while continuously threatening the opponent with half thrusts. Stretch on moving the hind foot, retract on the front foot. When the fencer stretches the arm, and the opponent retracts the arm within distance, the fencer follows through with the stretching of the arm and the lunge. In all other cases, in distance, the fencer parries the finale and riposte, halting the retreat on the parry.
- v. Response to i and ii: Alter the cadence of every bit of your footwork.
- vi. Response to iii: Work outside of the usual lines using angulated thrusts, without making use of proper attacks. Don't hand your opponent the blade.
- vii. Response to iv: Don't pursue in one go, but steal the distance bit by bit, advancing more than you retreat, until there's no more room for your opponent to retreat.

III : XII — NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

All of these exercises can both be practiced as individual lessons, as well as group lessons. When setting up the lesson, there are two angles you may use. The first angle is the logical build-up of a sequence. The second angle is that of varying the tactics as employed in fencing, by exploring slightly similar, but different actions.

When you build a sequence, it's all about action-reaction-counteraction-counter reaction. For instance, start with a check, then the response to a check, then continue with the check-raise, and the response to a check-raise. This way you always have to choose one response, and divide the different responses over different lessons.

When you vary the tactics, you can focus on similar basic actions: raising vs. bluffing, check-raising vs. semi-bluffing, betting vs. playing it slow, etc. In case of multiple reactions to a single action, you can also vary the reactions, while just going through one action.

As a general rule, in one lesson, only vary one thing at a time as an options-game. Other than that, build in complexity. The general build-up of a lesson, as was finely imprinted on my heart during my training, is: simple to complex, easy to difficult, and slow to fast; all three at the same time.

CHAPTER IV. DETERMINING STRATEGY

The reason poker can be used as a metaphor for fencing, is because you encounter similar situations. Yet poker is a game with fixed states, whereas fencing is a game without fixed states. The state of fencing changes continuously. In poker, when you're in a situation and don't do anything, it's going to stay there. In fencing, it's not.

In fencing, you don't have a bunker, where you can sit down, and rethink your strategy. In fencing, you're on the battlefield, with only momentary pauses in between. Preferably you use these pauses to think, but who says you are going to get a pause when you need it the most?

Ideally, before the game starts you have a strategy. Then between "Halt!" and "Fence!", you have time to think, and alter your strategy. Ideally this means that you always know what to do, when you fence. Good fencers know what to do when they fence, or create time through distance to think while fencing.

The two things you consider are: what has just happened, and what do I expect to happen next. What has just happened, includes the type of opponent you're facing, and matching their actions to the intent of their actions. Then you seek to counter this intent, also taking into account what your opponent might expect you to do.

You cannot always think your way logically through all of this. Guessing your opponent's intentions is often a feelings game, so learn to trust your gut. You do also need to consider what your opponent usually does, based on previous experience, and whether the opponent has changed tactics or not.

This particular chapter assumes fencers have had some basic training, and solely regards the actions as they execute them. The difference between beginning fencers and experienced fencers, young fencers and old fencers, big fencers and small fencers, etc. is important, but will be treated in the next chapter.

When considering all of the above, expected actions warrant some kind of a reaction. Based on the previous theory it's possible to come up with a list of different characters

of action, and how to fence these characters. It will not tell you what action to execute, but what kind of action is appropriate.

PROPER KIND OF REACTION IN FENCING WHEN YOUR OPPONENT...

- i. *comes forward with an invitation too much*: Attack on the invitation.
- ii. *never comes forward with an invitation*: Come forward with an invitation yourself. If the opponent attacks, parry, otherwise continue with the attack.
- iii. *always follows through properly with the attack*: Don't invite. Be the first to attack, or draw the attack through a feint and parry.
- iv. *always attacks when provided with an opening*: Work with short and quick actions in order to keep your guard as closed as possible, and keep the pressure on. Draw the attack and parry, or attack yourself.
- v. *never finishes the attack*: Invite more than you normally would, and finally continue with the attack. Don't attack without an invitation or any other kind of preparation. When your attack stands by itself, it will most probably be parried.
- vi. *plays it tight before you move, but responds to anything after you move*: Make sure you move. When you invite and your opponent attacks, parry-riposte. When you start with a proper attack, follow through and see how it develops.
- vii. *never awaits your first move, to attack or counter-attack on that move*: Follow through with an attack against this type of an opponent more often when you're the first to move than with someone who does await your action.
- viii. *never advances after you initiate the attack*: When the opponent does come forward, make sure you parry. Don't worry about your attacks being weak, use them to read your opponent.

- ix. *never plays it slow*: When you don't have a set plan, wait for this opponent's action. If the opponent waits for you, your advance with a pressing invitation, and follow through with a touch will most probably work.
- x. *attacks and parries too carelessly*: Fence properly, and don't invite as much as you normally would.
- xi. *attacks and parries too carelessly at first, to follow it up with aggressive fencing*: Fence properly, but weakly, making it look like you are easy to run over.
- xii. *invites too often, hoping to continue based on your reaction*: Respond with an invitation, and continue based on the opponent's reaction.
- xiii. *fences weakly and signals every action*: Fence it as you read it, and make use of every opportunity the opponent hands to you.

CHAPTER V. CHARACTERS IN FENCING

Character is an important aspect of fencing. Some part of character is trained. Part of it is innate. Character will in ways have been reflected in the previous chapter. Next to tactical characteristics, there are also more personal characteristics, that add to personal fencing style. These characteristics weren't broadly featured in the previous chapter.

Where, for instance, is the fencer that fences using the same hand you do in the previous chapter? Where is the fencer that fences using the opposite hand? Where is the heavy fencer? The sensitive fencer? The young fencer? And the old fencer? Fencers come in different shapes and sizes, each with their own peculiarities and challenges.

Character, as always, can be analysed using the three perspectives: psychology, physiology, and sociology. Every fencer has innate properties and is placed in a certain context. The whole of the game of fencing, disregarding the referee, consists of you, your opponent, and your positions on the strip. You have to fence accordingly.

To determine character, you have to look at a fencer's psychomotor skills, given the context the fencer is placed in. A heavy bodybuilder will not fare well in a fencing match. A basketball player, although possessing excellent footwork, may be too jumpy. A technical fencer is easily upset by those fencers that fence using a different style.

Boxing and fencing are typically classical gentleman's sports and as such borrowed a lot from each other. They have also been very keen to discern the differences between the two sports: fighting with the sword or bare hands. Keeping these differences in mind, it's possible to adapt characters from boxing to fencing.

One of the problems boxers encounter, is that the decrease of staying power sooner hinders them. In fencing it's not unheard of people over forty becoming world champions. Some fencers fence competitively well into their eighties, maybe nineties. We have the protective clothing to thank for that.

Most fencers are at their peak between their thirtieth and fortieth year of age. The world has known world champions in their twenties and in their forties. With age

comes experience and ease: older winners train to refine their technique, younger winners tend to favour athleticism. On average, experience outweighs age.

When considering the character of the opponent, you should never forget about the considerations of the previous chapters. Fencing is a highly complex game. Although you will grow a feel for fencing, reducing thinking to a minimum, you cannot step onto the strip without a single thought stirring in your mind somewhere.

It's important that you learn to act based on what you think, and let your actions acknowledge the thought. It's only afterwards that you consider whether what you did was right or not. Don't hesitate. By doing this you'll have plenty of time to consider everything you need to consider, without leaving anything out.

The following considerations aren't placeholders that act like an alternative to the previous chapters. The character of the opponent just delimitates the range of actions you and your opponent can use. Consider the whole of the opponent, psychologically, physically, and sociologically; rather than just one of those parts.

The last piece of advice I offer before going into all the different characters is this: don't consider the opponent as an absolute, but consider them relatively speaking to yourself. There is only one fencer in the world that will not run into a bigger opponent, and only one fencer that will not run into a smaller opponent.

V : I — SIZE

Measures really are relative and not absolute. Some people would say that when you're a 6'2" fencer, you're a relatively long fencer. This means relatively speaking to the average fencer. This is really measuring in absolutes in disguise. The first time you encounter even just a 6'3" fencer, you'll know.

Small distances in fencing count. You only have to miss by a hairbreadth, and you lose a point. Size measures for a large part in distance, and as such in time. When you consider time, you automatically consider speed. This in turn is influenced by the size of the target area: small changes by a small target area may make a big difference.

Smaller opponents are both known for being stuck at the end of your blade, as well as for being fierce fighters, that refuse to give up. Two sides of the coin: being a small person, and having to deal with one. At a larger distance, smaller opponents are at a disadvantage. At a smaller distance bigger ones are.

Bigger fencers are known to be far reaching, but also slow and cumbersome fencers. Some would even call them clumsy. Bigger fencers can more easily breach larger distances, but are quicker to pass someone by as well. A minor inaccuracy by a larger fencer is quickly magnified, whereas a smaller fencer can more easily correct it.

Psychologically the smaller opponent may get stuck on the fact that you are just out of reach for them to hit. It's very easy to counter-attack on an advancing smaller opponent, and get away with it. They simply don't have the reach to finalise their attack properly, and as such will fall short.

The same way the bigger opponent will find it difficult to touch on a smaller target area. A smaller opponent can more easily evade the point of the opponent with the body. When a larger opponent does make a nice long attack, it takes little practice for the smaller opponent to evade it physically.

Physiologically the smaller opponent will have to take more steps to breach the same distance a bigger one does. This means that on average a smaller opponent will have to do more work. A bigger opponent that likes to move a lot may very well wear a smaller opponent out.

The bigger opponent physically may need less effort to move, but needs more effort to change directions. Mass is rigorous to change. When bigger opponents need to adjust to the movement of smaller ones, they are prone to error. As such a bigger opponent is more likely to get stuck on the smaller opponent with no possibility to hit.

Sociologically, the bigger opponent is at a disadvantage when fighting a smaller one at a shorter distance. The bigger opponent will be limited in its actions relatively speaking to the smaller one. The smaller opponent at a short distance has a full arsenal of actions. The bigger one has to fight with a retracted arm.

The smaller opponent is at a disadvantage when fighting a bigger one at a long distance. The smaller opponent will be limited in its actions relatively speaking to the bigger one. The bigger opponent at a long distance has a full arsenal of actions. The smaller one has to close the distance first to be able to even attack directly.

The bigger opponent needs to focus on keeping the smaller opponent at the end of the blade. This means aiming for a terribly small target, even when it constantly moves around. This means mostly working from a relatively stationary position, only approaching the shorter opponent cautiously, when approaching at all.

The smaller opponent needs to focus on working a way into attacking range, by ducking and hiding behind the blade. Quick evasive manoeuvres with the body, while constantly seeking the opponent's blade, need to prevent the opponent from finding a line of offence. If you can lure the bigger opponent into making a long attack, do.

The bigger opponent needs to shy away from long attacks. From long attacks it's near impossible to recover against a smaller opponent. Although it's undeniably harder, it's not impossible to hit the shorter opponent in a close-in fight. A bigger opponent can angle the weapon around the smaller opponent's parry in a close-in fight.

The smaller opponent needs to shy away from advances without cover. When the smaller opponent advances without cover, the taller opponent can easily make a stop-hit. The smaller opponent as such always needs to attack over the blade of the bigger opponent, or at least hiding behind its own.

V : II — SIZE OF THE ACTION

Any fencer can make a big fencing action, and a lot of more experienced fencers would identify a beginning fencer as such. Some of them will even feel they shouldn't be dealing with this type of fencer. As soon as you fail to acknowledge your opponent as an opponent, you lose.

Big fencing isn't necessarily bad fencing. Big fencing is good fencing when it works against your opponent. A lot of fencers don't know how to handle big fencing, so why

put in more effort to keep it small? Save your strength for the rest of the match. Big fencing is good fencing when your opponent doesn't respond properly.

The size of your action should really match your opponent's in such a way that you complement, but don't complete their actions. This means that if you want to evade or parry, the size of your evasion or parry will need to match that of your opponent. A small fourth parry won't hold back angulated thrusts. A relatively vertical fourth will.

The psychology of a bigger fencing action is that you want to cover a larger target area. Bigger fencing actions make us feel like we are both strong, impressive, and wearing a shield. We don't expect anyone to be able to break through that shield, otherwise we would practice different actions.

The smaller fencing action seeks to be efficient, taking as little movement as necessary. It makes us feel fast, cunning, and difficult to catch. We don't expect anyone to catch us in the act, but if they do we feel we're quick to recover. With smaller actions there's more room for a follow-up.

Physiologically, the bigger action is heavier, slower to start, and harder to reverse. This means that when it hits, the opponent will have an awful lot of pressure to deal with, over a longer period of time. Yet, when it doesn't hit, it's nearly impossible to choose a follow-up action and respond to the opponent's actions.

The smaller action is lighter and shorter, only covering a small piece of target area. When you've chosen the wrong target relatively speaking to the opponent's weapon, there's no way to evade the opponent. A small action can only evade a small action. As such it can't evade the middle of a bigger action, but only the beginning.

Sociologically, the bigger action has to impress the opponent with strength. Bigger actions mean to disturb the opponent's game, and make sure they are mentally unbalanced. Against opponents that know how to deal with bigger actions, this only works when they don't expect the action in itself.

The smaller action expresses cunning, taking advantage of opponents that signal their actions, or those that don't think far enough ahead. The smaller actions are most

beautiful when they deceive multiple intentions of the opponent. They are most pretentious when they fail to deceive intentions that weren't even there.

Use small fencing to evade the beginning of an action, or to evade actions by another fencer that fences small. Use big fencing against fencers that are easy to impress, or to match the actions of another fencer that fences big. Against fencers that know how to deal with both, alternate the size of the action to surprise the opponent.

When a fencer fences small against you, you can also try to make them think too far ahead and take one evasion too many to the outside of your weapon. When a fencer fences big and catches your blade, the best you can do is to switch the focus from your blade to your hand and the guard. Don't worry about where your point is at.

V : III — POSITION

Fencing position, or where you stand on the strip, almost literally determines your room for action. When you're at the end of the strip, you cannot move further back. When your opponent is at the end of the strip, you can go anywhere, they can't go but forward. To both fencers this may be to an advantage or a disadvantage.

Psychologically the intent of the fencing strip is to be limited in your actions. The end of the fencing strip makes us feel trapped, and we need to break free. We can't go off the fencing strip, so we learn to fence within confined conditions, like on a mountain ridge that drops straight down on all sides.

Physiologically there is limited room to fence. Most of the action takes place back and forth, and little sideways. How much room you have determines the size of the actions you can use. With little room, large actions will fail. With a lot of room, you might wear yourself out with smaller actions.

Sociologically the amount of room you have is determined by where you stand on the strip and where your opponent stands. When a fencer refuses to go backward at any point on the fencing strip, this is no different from being at the actual end of it. This means the oppressor is trapped as much as the oppressed.

With little room, both fencers are limited to small actions, either to fight them out of the position they're in, or to remain in the oppressive position they're in. If you're unwilling to give, either forced by the strip, or your own stubbornness, you are greatly limited in your action, as is your opponent.

Either fencer may be lured into making an attack that is too direct. They both need to play with the distance without giving it. Just by stretching and retracting the arm little bits to different lines, and shifting the weight forward and backward without moving the feet, you can vary the distance, and plan the attack.

When no one takes up the position of being at the end of the fencing strip, a full arsenal of actions will open up. This may seem to be a good thing, but it does take the pressure of the match in a lot of ways. When you're fencing someone that knows how to handle the pressure, this doesn't matter. Otherwise, it does.

Position in terms of distance should also determine how calm your fencing is. The greater the distance, the more calm your fencing should be. The closer-by you get, the shorter the actions, and the more likely you are to just follow up the attack with another attack. While close-in fighting, you hit, and hit, and hit.

To keep your opponent at a distance, make short attacks, or take the blade of your opponent, when coming forward. Advance and retreat quickly. Every advance needs to say you're in control, so you either take the blade or threaten. When you just come forward, you're inviting your opponent to take the initiative.

V : IV — CADENCE

Altering not just the starting point of the action, but also the rhythm of the action is a good way to surprise your opponent. Take too long, as in alter the rhythm without working up to a finale, and your opponent may cut your rhythm short with a stop-hit. You need to understand when to change in cadence, and when to follow through.

Psychologically, altering the cadence is meant to disguise when the finale will come. When you always attack with a straightforward step-lunge, the finale will always be on

the three. Change to a jump-lunge, and the finale will already be there on the two. Making the steps, jumps, and lunges longer or shorter will further upset the timing.

Physiologically, the cadence can be alternated by the subdivision of the movements, both forward and backward. This can be done using different steps, jumps, and lunges, making them shorter and longer, and even using different hand actions. The cadence of the attack, to be an attack, should always be concluded by the finale.

Sociologically, while moving backward you can alter the cadence to make it hard to time the finale by the opponent. Forward you can make it hard to time the parry, or the stop-hit by your opponent. Altering the cadence is used in fencing to gain the initiative in guiding the opponent's actions.

Beginning fencers are at a relative advantage to mediocre fencers: beginning fencers have a naturally broken rhythm, whereas mediocre fencers fence in a straightforward rhythm. You can meet the beginning fencers by making your movements big enough and clear enough, or run over them. Mediocre fencers can be met by parrying late.

When you alternate the cadence you should always be decisive in when you execute the finale. When the finale comes should be based on distance, the opponent freezing up after any number of actions, or the fact that the opponent launched an attempted stop-hit that you parried.

Indecisiveness leads to you closing in too far and actually getting hit by a stop-hit, or you focusing too much on the opponent's blade's unpredictability. In either case you need to watch the distance, and launch the finale in time. Don't worry too much about the blade of the opponent. Worry about the finale first. What follows, follows.

V : V — STRETCHING THE ARM WITH A THREAT

In fencing the fact that you need to stretch the arm with a threat to gain the priority is the first thing taught to all fencers. It's typically the last thing fencers do. When you look at a fencing match, most fencers refrain from stretching their arm, because they are afraid their opponent will take the blade.

Whether your opponent will take your blade isn't much a question of your arm being stretched. It's a question of distance. Fencers sometimes take up a position with their blade lowered in eighth, rather than on guard in sixth. They fear their opponent will take their blade, regardless of whether their arm is stretched or not.

Psychologically, the intent of the stretching of the arm with a threat either reads, "I'm going to hit you!", or, "If you get too close to my point, it will hit you!" The first intention is often called offensive, whereas the second is called a defensive form of offence. Either way it reads: "You need to take my blade, or stay away from it!"

Physiologically, the act of stretching the arm with a threat enlarges the distance between the point and your target area as much as possible. The intent is to increase the chances of you hitting, without being hit. If opponents were to just lunge against it, only stretching the arm in the lunge, more often than not they'd be the only ones hit.

Sociologically, you threaten the valid target area, possibly while closing the distance, and offer the blade to your opponent. Whether you hit with the stretching of the arm depends on the distance before stretching the arm, and after stretching your arm. Whether your opponent parries depends on the feel of an actual threat.

The intent of the stretching the arm isn't to close the distance. It's meant to open up the distance the opponent needs to breach before being able to make a touch. You can also put your point-in-line while moving backward. This way the opponent can only come moderately close before having to start the action.

Generally, fencers in fencing matches don't like to stretch their arm, because their opponent might take the blade. Fencers in duels usually preferred to stretch their arm, and get as far away from the fighting with the rest of their body as possible. In duels they often made the mistake of shifting their lower body forward while doing this.

When you consider the conventions of fencing, the stretched arm is always a part of the best line of defence. It's the closing position to any purely conventional fencing phrase. In order to score a hit conventionally, when the apparatus indicates a double hit, the scoring party at some point in time stretches the arm, and keeps it there.

When you stretch your arm in the wrong moment, the opponent will take your blade and riposte. You won't be able to evade their blade seizure, and it will cost you a hit. Fencers that signal their blade seizure are easy to evade, but fencers that mask their attacks, are often near impossible to evade.

Fencers need to learn to stretch their arm as late as possible, but as soon as necessary. Too often do fencers just lunge into one another, hoping to win based on timing, even forgetting to begin the stretching of the arm on time. When someone finally forgets about not sticking to the conventions, all hell breaks loose.

If the stretching of the arm results in your opponent taking your blade, you need to learn to fence on the counter, as well as to evade the blade. If you always stretch your arm in the last moment, the only thing your opponent needs to do is precede you with a proper direct attack. Stretching as late as possible isn't the same as playing it slow.

To make a proper attack on foil, the arm needs to be stretched before the lunge. In case of a step-lunge, it stretches during the whole step. In sabre the stretching needs to begin even before the attack, for just the attack to receive the priority. The attack can be made using the lunge or step-lunge, with the arm being stretched fully at the end of it.

An attack needs to be parried at every level. Any fencer, to truly be a fencer, should fence within the framework of the rules. You can't say, "I don't have to parry your attack on my preparation, because they will." I'm ashamed to say, in a competitive bout, with me, no one ever did parry. The jury refused to explain what they saw.

Too many people feel they don't have to parry a proper attack, because you are not up to their level. Why then is it, conventionally, my hit? And what the hell else should I do to score a hit, if proper fencing conventions don't do it anymore? A match is organised to find out who the winner is, not merely to confirm it.

V : VI — THE OFF-HANDER

Left handed fencers have often been considered an abomination in fencing. They were far too structural at taking care of the right handed fencers. That could not be. Ancient rules of the fencing hall sometimes forbade fencing left handed, much like left handed

writing was at times forbidden. Today, thankfully, we acknowledge their existence.

One of the things you need to understand when fencing an off-handed opponent, is that an evasion is still an evasion, a bind still a bind, and a circle a circle. When the weapon of the opponent moves from left to right, you can always evade it from right to left. Nonetheless, off-handers, right or left, have strong points and weaknesses.

In fencing there is very little intent to fence right-handed or left-handed. People in general are just right or left-handed. There are forms of fencing, where the main weapon was accompanied by a smaller weapon in the other hand. As such the fencer could change sides offensively, and defensively. We can't without asking.

Psychologically, the intent of changing hands is to vary the action. An opponent willingly or unwillingly visualised certain strategies and actions before the game. These usually are directed towards one type of fencer. To suddenly have to cope with the off-handed fencer will greatly upset the opponent's game.

Physiologically, all the offensive and defensive lines, relatively speaking to hand positions, are suddenly reversed. What was an open line becomes a closed line. What was an attack in a straightforward line may become an attack that seems angled in there. Attacks that used to be big to hit in a specific line become small, and vice versa.

Sociologically, the opponent will have to parry and riposte using the opposite parries and evasions normally employed. All these parries and ripostes under some circumstances could have been executed against a same-handed fencer also. The problem largely lies in the range of actions that are used against the opponent.

A good strategy against an off-handed opponent is to work in the outside line. Rather than focusing on going to the inside line all the time, focus on hitting high and low. They are most vulnerable in their outside line. Keep your leading foot outside the opponent's outside line, so you can reach their back.

When one fencer encounters an off-handed fencer, the other one is automatically off-handed too. This means that they are both fighting for control over the outside line. They both try to close off their outside line, by keeping their point inside, but stay ready to attack on the outside line, by keeping their leading foot outside.

V : VII — THE WILD FIGHTER

The wild-fighter fences with big uncontrolled actions. They are very energetic, and rather than overpowering their opponents with force, they like to run them over with great velocity. They go so fast, that they make you feel like it's impossible to evade them, being the speeding bullets they are.

The wild fighter jumps back and forth with big jumps, crossing a lot of distance in relatively little time. They parry big, covering a large part of their target area, making it seemingly impossible to penetrate them. When they thrust, they explode with their feet, only to thrust their arm forward in the very last moment.

Psychologically, the intent of the wild fighter is to hit with every attack, and parry with every parry. The wild fighter sticks very close to our innate fighting reactions. The fighter either fights or flights: the intent is to hit the opponent, no matter what, or to get away as fast and as far as possible. The wild fighter is usually very confident.

Physiologically, the wild fighter works in a very direct and explosive manner, and is always on the move. All the actions are big, and within their size as fast as possible. The wild fighter is very athletic, and has great stamina. Because their technique is very natural, it more closely resembles barehanded fighting, like lions do.

Sociologically, the wild fighter aims more for relative physical prowess, than tactical cunning. The wild fighter doesn't believe it's necessary to fence in a controlled manner. It's all about overrunning the opponent. As long as you hit the opponent it isn't all that interesting whether or how they hit you.

The conventions of fencing have been specifically designed to outdo these kinds of opponents. When the wild fighter advances, there is no threat with the weapon. Even with the lunge, the thrust is delayed an instant. This way the wild fighter won't gain priority over you. An attack on their advance will often result in only you hitting.

When the wild fighter does parry, the parry covers the entire target area. A circular disengagement and a lunge, basically an explosive screw-attack, works miracles here. Because the wild fighter expects the parry to work because of its explosiveness, in most cases there will be no follow-up parry. If there is, it's just too big, and too late.

Minor changes in distance make a big difference, especially when someone fences with a set tempo like the wild fighter. Make wild fighters search for you, creating the opportunity to attack on their preparation. Don't allow yourself to be lured into their wildness, stay calm and collected, but be sure to act when the opportunity arises.

Because they are very wild and uncontrolled in their actions, you can make them miss by playing with the distance, also moving sideways so they pass you by. As soon as the attack has passed you by, counter-attack. If the initial attack falls short, you may still want to parry to counter any follow-up action, before you attack yourself.

Because their movements are very big, they'll have problems with smaller target areas, so hide behind your weapon. Make your attack as long as possible. Attack towards the shoulder area and, when allowed, their arm. This gives you the greatest distance, and cuts your opponent short.

At some point in time wild fighters may not know what to do. They don't move their feet, and start taking irregular parries. Feint-disengage with the attack. They need time to respond to the feint. Contrary to what this might suggest, you don't have to stretch your arm fully with the feint. When they parry is partially a matter of distance.

If you feint too often, they'll see through this, and counter-attack in time. The wild fighter doesn't like to wait, so if they don't have to, they'll attack and cut you short. If you're hit, remain calm. Everybody's hit every now and then. Keep fencing your game, and just occasionally feint.

V : VIII — THE CROUCHER

The croucher does not like to fight, but does fight when provoked. A croucher is the fencer's equivalent of a time-bomb. They like to keep small, and hide, but when the opening presents itself, they'll explode, and ram forward full force, almost kamikaze-like. They fence with hit or miss actions.

Psychologically, the croucher is afraid as soon as fencing turns into a match. It's fun for exercise, but when they have to fight, their parries turn primordial, as do their

lunges. The croucher's sole intention is to hide as long as possible, and only fight when necessary.

Physiologically, the croucher tends to keep the attacks short, but sometimes comes out of the crouched position to make a long explosive attack. They sit in a crouched position, slightly bent forward, hiding behind the point of the weapon, rather than the guard. Their parries are heavy and too wide. Their footwork is heavy too.

Sociologically, they like to keep their distance, but will immediately close the distance when the opportunity arises. Everything is aimed at telling you that they don't like to fight, but they'll fight when they have to. There is no backing out of fencing, so you cannot just stay calm so nothing will happen. You have to fight them.

When a croucher does advance, you're best off taking them on their preparation with a direct attack, possibly in opposition of their blade. Close the distance as much as possible, and keep the initiative by making short attacks. They'll do anything to prevent being hit. They'll try to parry repeatedly, or stay as far away as possible.

They aren't light footed, so search for an opening by working in the breadth, rather than just for- and backward. On *épée* and *sabre*, because they are slightly bent forward, their head makes for a nice target area as well. On *foil*, stay close to their shoulder with your attacks. Use your shortest most direct attack, leaving no room for them to parry.

In case of longer fencers, when they push forward with their bodies to prevent a hit, making a bit of distance, and immediately scoring may work. In case of shorter fencers, they'll be the ones with the advantage when you back up. Try to pass by shorter fencers under cover of your weapon, or make the fight get stuck.

V : IX — THE SLUGGER

Sluggers like to hang around, and not move, but when they move, they do so explosively, with grand forceful actions. Sluggers seek to overpower, forcing you in a subordinate position. Sluggers are oppressors, that like to make use of their apparent weight. To them, fencing like that seems like good tactics.

Psychologically, the intent of the slugger is to fence strongly. Strong fencing to a slugger is good fencing, because fencing is a fighting sport, and fighting takes force. Fighting isn't about being subtle, it's the end result that counts, and the only proper end result is a hit. The main aim of the slugger as such is to hit, and parry, but then, hit.

Physiologically, the slugger fences big, with big attacks and big parries, and lots of force, exploding time and time again after moments of rest. Being a slugger actually takes a lot of energy, so the slugger can only fence short bursts. After every burst the slugger likes to retreat and take up a strong position.

Sociologically, the slugger likes to explode on the action of the opponent. Only on prolonged inaction by the opponent, may the slugger actually be the first to attack. Even then, in most cases, the slugger will wait to counter-attack in such a way that the opponent can't but give up the attack.

The opponent should crumple on the mere sight of the slugger and as such be unable to act. As long as the opponent is so terrified that the slugger is the only one that actually does anything, there's no way the slugger will lose. The reason sluggers can overpower their opponents, is because the opponents allow them to do so.

The proper way to counter the slugger is to attack them in such a way they can't use force. Don't retreat when they want you to retreat. Don't give them room to be powerful by either retreating, or attacking in a line where they are powerful. Finish your attack in a line where their limited technical repertoire fails.

Sluggers need to move themselves to move, and when they move, they move forward in a straight line. They attack with lots of force, and lots of power, launching massive attacks. They seek to overpower, rather than to deceive. Their actions are easy to predict, and they make full use of the fact that you see exactly what is coming.

Massive attacks, like any kind of mass, are rigorous to change. When the attack has been launched, there's no stopping it. When they haven't started a full attack, they are open to attacks, even when their arm is stretched. When they have started their attacks, move out of line physically, and counter-attack while they pass you by.

They need time and space to get ready for the offensive or defensive action they have in mind. As long as you keep moving and don't give them time to get ready, they won't have room to use force. Don't just move forward and backward, but move sideways as well. Keep the slugger guessing where you're going to be, then be somewhere else.

The best attack against a same-handed slugger goes to the unarmed side. Because their parries are big, they will force their point out of line, and won't be able to riposte. Angle inwards around their parry. When off-handed sluggers thrust, thrust through opposition in either line. Offensively, stick to their outside line when possible.

The slugger is prone to attack on your action, so they are susceptible to the feint. Draw their attack with the feint, then parry or evade their attack, and counter attack. You could also use the straight thrust on their advance, diving behind your weapon for cover. This works especially well at the end of the fencing strip.

V : X — THE FENCER

The fencer fences varied, calculating, cool, and collected; and waits for the opportune moment, but also likes to keep moving. The fencer aims to attack on the preparation when possible, and doesn't like being hit. The fencer keeps the attacks as simple as possible, but can make them as complex as necessary.

Psychologically, the intent of the fencer is to deliver attacks that are as economic as possible. The fencer likes to act rationally, within the framework the rules of fencing provide. The fencer consider fencing to be an art and a science. Out of respect for fencing the fencer trains to fence properly, and conventionally.

Physiologically, the fencer is well trained, flexible, and relaxed. Fencers support their weight and fencing actions well with their legs, aiming for seemingly independent movement of the limbs to co ordinate the attack. When it comes to movement, they easily reverse and alter between slow and quick. They make use of subtle finger play.

Sociologically, the fencer likes to play the game on an intellectual level, without force, making use of your mistakes. The fencer hides any intentions from the opponent,

making it impossible to see what comes next. The fencer sizes the opponent up in a split second, when possible, or will engage in actions to read the opponent.

Because a fencer not only defends, but also attacks, you can't allow yourself to take up an on guard position that's too high on the legs. You need to sit in a semi-crouched position, because this is the position that facilitates ease of movement, as well as proper defensive and offensive techniques.

The counter-attack through opposition is very off-putting to most fencers, and when applied properly can be highly effective. Pure blunt fencing will upset a fencer too, but this is against the rules, because it creates dangerous situations, and because a blunt counter-attack doesn't counter a sharp point.

The fencer in turn needs to learn not to be upset, and alter the cadence of the attack, drawing the counter-attack while maintaining distance. This way you can evade it, and continue. Make sure you vary the beginning, the middle, and the end of the attack, choosing three different ways to open it, develop it, and end it.

If the attack through opposition fails against the fencer, the only thing you have left is to fence the fencer as variedly as possible. Fencers that can't be upset by the crude fencing of "non-fencers", need to be countered tactically. This means you really need to become a fencer yourself.

Keep sufficient pressure on your opponent, when fencing a fencer, but allow them to lead as well. Force them to move backward, as well as forward. By allowing them to lead from time to time, you create openings, because they relax. When they lead, make sure you draw their attack with subtle feints, to parry it when you want it to come.

A fencer is a subtle fighter that responds to feints, so make use of them, but don't make use of them all the time. Vary the number of feints to keep the fencer guessing. Feint all the time, and the fencer will counter-attack. You'll hit in lost time. Use this against fencers when they feint too much, and counter-attack every now and then.

An attack that doesn't require a lot of force, but can be mentally overwhelming, is a circular attack, by a single full disengagement. It's very hard for a lot of fencers to

predict where it's going to land, and as such it's hard to parry. Don't always use this attack. The fencer may see how to parry, or just counter-attack, causing you to miss.

Don't haste, because a fencer makes use of every mistake you make. Remain balanced, so you're capable of executing follow-up actions when earlier actions don't score a hit. In case of good fencers you'll need to follow up more often than not, and you need distance to do so. Distance equals time, so a hasty fencer loses distance.

V : XI — THE VETERAN

The veteran possesses all the qualities of a fencer, but is very hard to move. Instead, veterans like to focus on hand technique combined with no more than one step backward, or a step forward lunge. The veteran has cut down on all fencing technique, reducing it to its bare essentials.

Psychologically, the intent of the veteran fencer is to use minimal effort to score a hit. Veteran fencers don't like to move, and fence as economically as possible, making sure they don't wear themselves out. They wait, and will not stir, unless absolutely necessary. They are strongly grounded fencers, with authoritative actions.

Physiologically, the veteran fencer is well trained, flexible, and relaxed. Reassuming the posture of a twenty year old for a single hit is a matter of choice. Veteran fencers are usually older fencers, that seek to restrain themselves and refine their technical abilities. Some younger fencers from time to time wisely copy their pose.

Sociologically, the veteran fencer lets you wear yourself out, and waits for your mistake. Subtle movements with their point mean to draw your attack, immobility means to wait for any action you choose. They will only move backward when a simple parry won't do, and attack when you come to close with unclear actions.

A couple of favourite actions by veteran fencers are: the half step backward with a parry, the parry of eighth or fourth, repeated eighth-sixth or fourth-sixth parry-combinations, alternating combinations of three parries, the point-in-line, the evasion of your taking the blade followed by a straight thrust, and the straight lunge.

The most important weapon a veteran fencer has, is the ability to wait for the very last moment to take a parry. The hand should not stir, trying to grab the opponent's blade too early, when you go for this action. By not signalling the parry the veteran fencer maintains a mentally superior position towards the attacker.

The veteran fencer can only be fenced by masking your actions. As such the veteran needs to guess when, where, and how the attack will be delivered. This can only be achieved by varying the cadence and the line of attack continuously, sometimes also making use of the direct attack.

When you always come forward with a preparation that's too elaborate, the veteran fencer will make use of the direct attack. As such you can also opt to draw this attack, and parry it. When the veteran fencer moves backward to parry, don't always attack, but sometimes do. When you can get them to move, they'll wear themselves out easily.

Don't aim for every hit to be a hit. Fencing a veteran fencer may very well be a gambling game. Make sure you receive the majority of the hits, and when you are hit, acknowledge it and why you were hit, and move on. Much like you need to make them gamble when, where, and how you will come; they will sometimes guess right.

V : XII — NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

Your fencers aren't going to encounter perfect fencing when they go to a fencing match. When you only fence them perfectly, perfect fencing is what they'll expect. To counter this, they need to fence each other, they need to fence different kinds of fencers on tournaments, and they need to mimic the different types of fencers.

If you're physically capable, mimic different types of fencers yourself. If not, pair the fencers, and instruct them on the different types of fencers there are. Make sure they know it's just for practice, and show them how they can subtly incorporate basic characteristics of the above fencing types in their actions.

VI. READING THE FENCER

Fencers seek to mask their actions. Being able to read the fencer either means you're facing a beginner, or that they mean for you to read them. Fencing is an uncertain game, where you need to be sure of your actions for them to succeed. Fencing is full of contradictions, without universal truths that will assure you every hit.

Reading the fencer means reading their character, matching it with the context, to estimate the character of the action you might expect. Learning to read the fencer is a matter of experience. Only by having seen the different types of fencers can you learn to counter them.

The ideas laid out in this thesis seek to help you recognise different types of fencers sooner, reducing the time it costs you to gain experience maybe up to as much as 25% of the time it would have cost you before. Much of experience still can't be taught from a book, so you still need to go out there and fence.

One of the strengths a Master fencer may possess is to emulate different types of fencers. The best way to learn to recognise different types of fencers, is to emulate their techniques, and learn their strengths and weaknesses by the way people counter you. Practice being a slugger, a smaller fencer, a bigger fencer, and watch fencing on t.v.

The previous chapter showed different characteristics of fencers, using the basic threefold of psychology, physiology, and sociology. When it comes to "fencing" problems, please reference the action character list. The following list contains minor additions of solutions you can be reasonably sure of, based on mistakes of character.

REACTION WITH HIGH EXPECTATION WHEN YOUR OPPONENTS...

- i. *don't know what to do*: Overrun them, don't give them time to come up with a plan.
- ii. *prepare without a development in mind*: Attack on their preparation.
- iii. *attack with force*: Evade with your body and/or parry through opposition.

- iv. *take the blade forcefully, with their point being way out of line:* Hold back and feint disengage, or relax your hand and remise quickly when they assume a line for the riposte.
- v. *attack in the same rhythm:* Wait to the last moment, and only parry the finale. When they beat your blade just before the finale, it's still possible to parry with a minimal parry, but you need to visualize this first, parrying right when you feel the beat.
- vi. *only use direct ripostes:* Allow yourself to be parried, counter-parry riposte in front of you, possibly even while lunging.
- vii. *have playful footwork, until they actually have to act:* Make them attack, or force them to parry with a strong feint and disengage, but mind your distance, and don't get caught up in play.
- viii. *try to read your actions:* Signal one action, but when provoked take the opposite.

IN RETROSPECT

Maître André Ligthart, after I successfully completed an exercise, once said, “Easy, isn’t it?” It felt easy, but that’s only when disregarding the years it took me to learn the separate steps, and combining them into one single fencing phrase. Fencing is never easy, until you get to execute something you’ve finally mastered.

Some people say it takes two lifetimes to master fencing, but that’s mostly due to people obscuring fencing, and keeping things secret. Instead of sticking to the same old development of the fencer, we need to further develop how we develop fencers. We need to carefully study all the known basic principles, and not exclude anything.

What I’ve tried to do, is structure a lifetime of tactical experience, as gained by André, using basic outlines provided by a game and sport that had already been developed more fully. I’ve been kind enough to add a bit of presumably “foul” fencing of my own. I’m pretty sure my master’s thesis is complete, but maybe there’s a bigger theory.

Psychologically, my intent is to help either the student or the master distil a lifetime of tactical experience in about 25% of the time it would normally take to learn all of this. This will not only provide 75% to further your own craft as a fencer, but it should also provide 75% to further the sport of fencing as a whole.

Physically, I’ve had everything that’s in here, and quite a bit more. Applying it is sometimes still a different matter, but whether it’s solely mine or the referee’s also, I dare not say. I hope people will understand the merits of complex tactical considerations, forcing referees to stick to the conventions.

Sociologically, this thesis gives something to you: the way I think. You can use it to your advantage, any way you like. Use it against me, by analysing my actions, and countering them any way you please. Find flaws, and write your own thesis. I’d be honoured to be surpassed by any of you.

One thing I hope to have brought forth, is how to fence your opponent. In fencing it’s not allowed to give tactical advice to the fencer at a tournament. There’s a very good

reason for this: it's impossible for the fencer to judge the opponent when it's impossible to see who the opponent is.

A lot of the fencing actions that are featured in this thesis are sometimes considered foul play, even though they fall within the limits of the conventions. Whatever falls outside of your own technical repertoire and hits you, tends to feel unpleasant. That doesn't mean it's a foul action. It really only means you have more studying to do.

Too many fencers limit themselves by calling proper fencing "foul". Foul play in fencing only exists in terms of breaking with the rules, including antisocial actions. According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, these would be actions that illustrate you don't want the company of others, or are against the written conventions.

Foul tactics within the limits of the fencing piste, as punished by the conventions, don't acknowledge your opponent as a proper opponent. Any action that says that you don't care about the opponent as such isn't allowed. But as long as the entirety of the actions you undertake clearly meet those of the opponent, they're not antisocial.

I hope my character is clear, as is the character of fencing. I wish you, as a fencing aficionado, all the best, not to mention a lot of fun. Fencing isn't poker. Fencing isn't chess. Fencing isn't boxing. Fencing is just plain old fencing, but all are gentlemen's and genteel ladies' games.

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