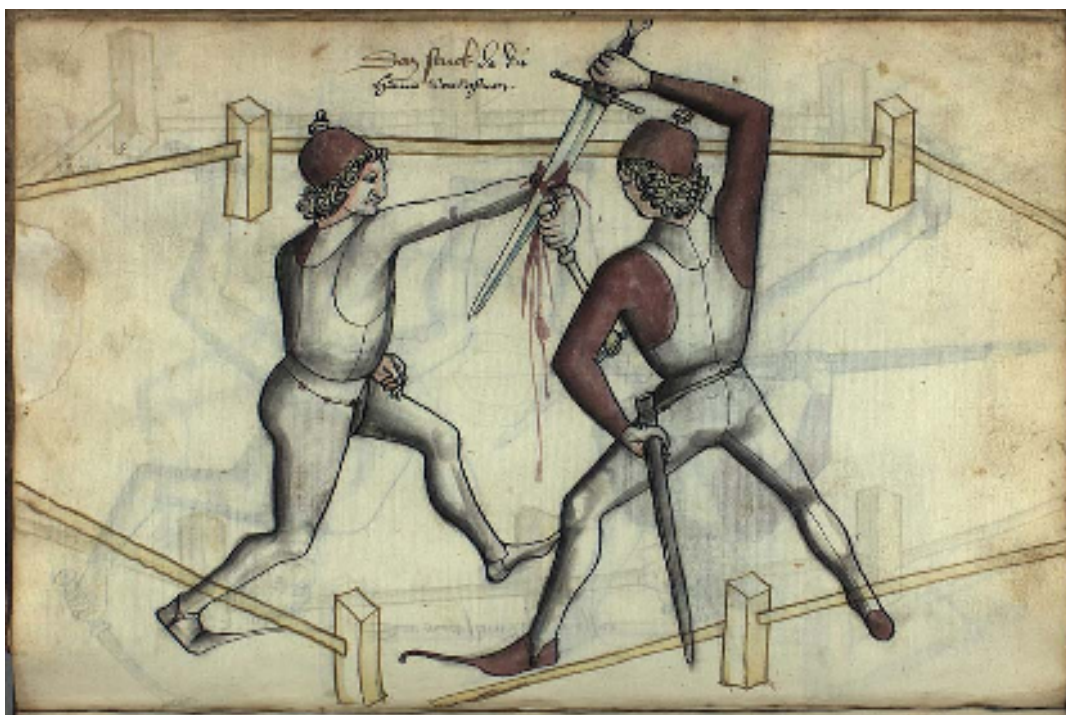


# Western Martial Arts Bouting: Recognizing and Dealing with Artifacts in Free Play



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## Introduction

Two combatants face each other, swords drawn, across a dirt road that winds away behind a copse of trees. The morning light glints off of sharpened steel as they approach, wary, each alert to the slightest movement from the other. They take their guards and one leaps forth to strike while his opponent attempts to counter. Swords clash, leverage is applied, pressure sensed and an opening reached. A man falls, mortally wounded, while the other steps back and beholds his handiwork, panting and thankful to be alive.

This is a sword fight. Take those men, put them in a training hall or a park, take away their sharp swords and give them blunts or other simulators, cover them in protective gear, and what you end up with is a simulation, and a poor one at that. In this article, I will attempt to explain my theories on the elements that comprise this division between earnest combat and free play, elements that I call “artifacts”.

The most appropriate dictionary definition of the word artifact is, “any feature that is not naturally present but is a product of an extrinsic agent, method, or the like.” It is these extrinsic agents and methods that I will attempt to identify, for in understanding them and what causes them, we can learn not only to put bouting/free play in the proper perspective, but also learn more from each engagement.

This article will focus on unarmored longsword bouting in the German tradition, but the lessons herein can be applied to any weapon and any system.

Before I begin, I’d like to say that the goal of this article is not to express a preference for a specific type of bouting sword, or to denigrate bouting. Every simulator is a compromise, no exception, and bouting is an extremely beneficial, and I dare say essential, aspect of training. My goal is to expose the various artifacts I believe are involved in bouting and to share my ideas on how address them, and thereby increase the effectiveness of bouting as a learning tool.

## The Goal of Free Play

No two WMA groups are the same. Each has slightly different goals, ideas and ways of doing things. Likewise, each group's free play/bouting will occupy a different place in the hierarchy of their training. Some groups place a tremendous emphasis on bouting and make it the goal of their training, while others consider it to be just one of many tools to improve their technique.

This article is written with the latter in mind. The goal of understanding artifacts is to better understand how medieval martial arts worked in actual combat, not to improve one's bouting performance. In fact it can have the opposite effect. Recognizing and working to eliminate artifacts can actually make you less effective when bouting against someone who doesn't bother to practice the same diligence, or someone who is not as concerned with realism. Ultimately, whether you choose to heed the advice in this article is up to you and will reflect your training philosophies and goals.

The first thing about bouting that needs to be understood is that bouting is not sword fighting, and skill at one has questionable correlation to skill at the other. There are many reasons for this, some of which will be discussed here, but the primary division is one of intent.

As a mental exercise, picture yourself bouting with minimal protection and approaching your opponent. You seize the initiative and strike. Picture the speed, control and precision with which you would execute such a strike. Now picture yourself standing before a cutting target, three tatami mats rolled into one, covered in three layers of linen and two of wool (typical medieval clothing). A crowd gathers, watching you. You are nervous, but confident. You approach your target, concentrate and put your entire body into motion, coordinating the strike from the smallest muscle of your little finger to the large muscles of your legs, using gravity, momentum, geometry and any other force you can muster to penetrate those textiles and bite deeply into the simulated flesh underneath. The control you practice here is different; it limits overcommitment without reducing force or velocity.

If you turn your attention back to the first scenario, you will quickly realize that you are doing two completely different things. This is more than just a question of force, it is a question of body mechanics and blade dynamics. In bouting, we have the luxury of striking our opponents with our swords without worrying about what that strike will achieve.

That difference is the very definition of an artifact, and a prime example of how such an artifact changes a fight into what is at best a simplified simulation. Everything about that bout is different because of the fundamental change in the way you strike at your opponent. Without needing to bother with proper cutting technique or generating maximum force, you can be quicker. Without having to deal with such force from your opponent, you can be lax in your body mechanics. Without fearing for your life you can take chances. This is the first artifact, but it is not the last.

## Reset Button Mentality

I think that it is most appropriate to start with what is, for many, the most glaring artifact of all—the suicidal fencer.

Fighting a suicidal fencer, that is a fencer willing to give his life to kill you—or in the case of bouting someone without sufficient training and/or understanding to react appropriately to an attack—is like fighting someone armed with a sword when you yourself are unarmed. That is, in theory you should be able to handle it, but in practice you're probably going to get creamed.

To best understand this, challenge the best swordsman (or swordswoman) you know to a bout. Wait for them to attack, and regardless of how they strike, completely ignore that strike and either over or undercut their attack. Once you understand how easy this is to do when you are consciously trying, you will begin to understand the potential impact this can have on bouting.

The problem with suicidal fencing, or what some call the “reset button mentality”, is that it is so common among the poorly trained. If you try to adapt your training to deal with it so that you can be a well rounded fencer, your bouting will become one giant festering artifact.

For a period swordsman, the idea that he should allow himself to get hit, allow his flesh to be torn and his bones cleaved, so that he could also hit his opponent would be like a modern person jumping in front of a fast moving train to retrieve a winning lottery ticket. Sure, you'd be rich...for about .5 seconds. There is literally not one iota of supporting evidence in any medieval fencing treatise that a period fencer should expect to encounter such a person, nor is there a single tactic or technique for dealing with such. In fact, German texts go to great lengths to explain that there is great protection in attacking, as it forces your opponent to defend himself.

When bouting, you should take great care to treat the sword, whether it is blunt steel or a padded simulator, as though it were the real thing. If your opponent is treating it like a game, stop and explain why this is wrong, and if he or she continues to fight with the reset button mentality, find someone else to train with. This is one artifact you cannot overcome unless everyone you bout with is on board.

## Equipment Based Artifacts

Aside from the reset button mentality and the issue of intent, the most common artifacts come from the equipment used to safely simulate a sword fight. Here I will briefly talk about most of the various types of sword simulators and how they, and the protective equipment used with them, create the artifacts that separate them from the real thing.

Each type of sword has a different degree of inherent safety. Some, such as padded swords, can be used with minimal protection (e.g. nothing but a fencing mask), while others, such as steel blunts and wasters, require extensive protection coupled with the ability to control one's level of force.

Aside from whatever characteristics of the simulator itself that are responsible for creating artifacts, the safety gear that it requires is yet another source of artifacts, potentially greater than the weapon itself.

## Steel Blunts and Protective Gear

As steel swords require the highest degree of protection, I have lumped together the steel blunt and protective gear section of this article. What is said regarding safety equipment in this section applies not only to blunts but to all the other simulators.

Steel blunts are, in and of themselves, the most realistic boutings simulators you can use. However, they are not without their problems, and many of those stem from that very realism.

The artifacts inherent in the swords themselves can range from minimal to extreme, depending on the quality of blunt trainers used, but that is beyond the scope of this article. Here I will discuss only high quality trainers. The issues involved with such swords have to do with the difference in behavior between sharp steel and blunt steel in the bind.

For the most part, this difference is minimal. If two sharp swords meet edge to edge at an oblique angle, they slide past each other in a manner almost identical to blunts. They are a bit stickier, but the difference is more academic than practical. After all, if sharp swords did not behave this way, about half of the techniques that exist in period sources would never have made it to print. The degree of difference can change drastically, however, with the angle of impact.

If the edges meet dead on, sharp swords will bite into each other and stick, each lodged in the nick it created in the other. Blunt swords do not do this, regardless of the angle.

It is difficult to be aware of the angle of impact in the middle of a bout, but fortunately swords rarely meet directly edge to edge. Still, it is important to be aware of your angles and avoid direct edge to edge contact if possible.

As far as safety related artifacts, the combatants ride a delicate sliding scale between protection and control. On one extreme, combatants square off with full plate harness or the equivalent and give minimal thought to limiting their power and speed (though they still must do so to some extent). The other extreme involves absolute freedom of movement through minimalistic protection, relying on control of force to prevent injury.

Since artifacts change depending on the position of the scale, I will focus on the two extremes and their associated issues. As the slider moves from one side of the scale to the other, artifacts will come and go. Once the extremes are understood, knowing which artifacts you will face in your own boutng becomes a matter of common sense.

On the side of extreme protection, the artifacts are obvious, and mostly have to do with limited movement. Each piece of armor that you put on limits your mobility in some way, either through limited articulation or through physical interference. By the latter I mean that armor takes up physical space, whether it be the flared profile of hourglass gauntlets that prevent your wrists from making contact or your helmet that keeps your arms a certain distance from your head.

Even a single piece of armor, be it gauntlets or a breastplate, introduces movement artifacts for most people. As each additional piece of armor is added, yet more limitations are created. Even 15th century couters, which by themselves do not limit mobility, introduce movement artifacts. They take up space, and once you have them on you cannot, for example, press your arms flat to your sides or press your forearms together. Also, the kind of helmets typically deemed safe for high intensity steel boutng often limit not only direct visibility but also peripheral vision and sometimes breathing.

Aside from articulation and space limitations, there is also the power and endurance factor. Holding your sword over your head becomes much more difficult when 10lbs of steel are added to the mix.

When boutng in full harness, you need to be aware of the differences in the way you move with and without armor, and how those limitations affect the outcome of your techniques. The more you accept and understand such limitations, the more you will learn from each encounter. Did the *duplieren* from *zwerchhau* that you just tried fail because you did something wrong or because you were too slow in your armor? Or perhaps your limited mobility prevented you from getting your point exactly where you needed it to be? Knowing the answer to even such a simple question can have tremendous influence on your training.

On the minimalistic side of things, there are no movement artifacts induced by external forces, but there are indeed movement artifacts, and in some ways these can be even worse than those created by armor. A minimalistic kit typically involves a fencing mask or light helmet, gambeson or similar body

protection and, from least to most protective, padded, mail or steel gauntlets. With such token defenses, combatants must limit their force or the bout could result in grave injury or even death. Such bouting is best left to advanced practitioners, those who can strike quickly and stop their sword on a dime if need be. Even so, injuries are common, and must be accepted as a very real possibility.

This necessary control, or limit of force, is the source of most of the artifacts involved in this type of bouting. The primary way in which limiting your force makes bouting unrealistic is that you are neither dishing out full power strikes nor are you responding to them. Liechtenauer's verses are quite clear on this issue: "fight with the entire body, what you powerfully want to do."<sup>1</sup> The glossa expand on this verse by saying, "...use the entire strength of your body for whatever you intend to execute."<sup>2</sup>

Whether you interpret that verse to mean strength based on muscles, body structure or both, by its very definition the exercise of control eliminates any possibility of complying with these instructions.

The second source of artifacts related to control is much more insidious in that it is difficult to detect and can have a profound effect on the outcome of the bout. I am speaking of calibration, or more specifically the matching of force levels between you and your opponent.

Picture, if you will, two opponents who can generate equal force. Let's call that force 100 units strong. To create safety, each dials down the force to what he or she thinks is 20 percent of normal. Fighter A is good at this, and manages to strike with 20 units of force, while fighter B is not as good at such control and strikes with 45 units of force. Had they been fighting instead of bouting, they would each have struck with one hundred units, and the result of the bind would have been determined by position and leverage. However, in this particular bout, fighter B seems always to have the advantage in the bind, due to his superior force. This will always happen to some extent when using control.

This force discrepancy is very difficult to recognize, because it is often impossible to tell, due to the excitement and stress of the bout, what actually happened, who is using how much force and why a certain bind went a certain way. Even if fighter A does somehow manage to figure out what's going on, he has three choices, aside from stopping the bout and walking away. He can pause and attempt to explain to B what he is doing wrong, he can increase his own force and compromise the safety of both fighters, or he can accept B's mistake and try to work around it, creating yet more artifacts.

People who bout often with one another develop a sense of the force used by their opponent, and thus this type of artifact is limited. When facing off against a new opponent, one you've never faced before, it is important to be aware of force levels, not only for safety's sake, but to make sure you or your opponent don't slip into increased and disparate levels.

## Shinai

The Japanese bamboo kendo sword, or shinai, is one of the most common WMA bouting simulators in the world. These range from weighted shinai, which use inserts to approximate the weight of a real sword, to lightly modified versions whose only nod to their Western application is the addition of a crossguard.

The typical un-weighted shinai weighs about a pound, compared to the average longsword weight of three to three and a half pounds. However fast you can move with a longsword, you can pretty much double that speed with a shinai. If a fencer takes advantage of that characteristic, he or she will move at speeds beyond what a human being is capable of with a correctly weighted longsword. This speed is sorely tempting, and those who surrender to it are an impressive blur of constant motion, though when closely analyzed that motion is rarely appropriate to the situation. The sword is literally moving faster than the brain can make decisions.

Weighted shinai, contrary to logical expectations, are hardly better. To keep the bamboo slats flexible and retain the safety features of the shinai (indeed, why else would you use one?), the weights are typically added to the hilt and the portion of the blade near the hilt. This results in a correctly weighted sword handle attached to a nearly weightless blade. Whether this slows the shinai down or actually speeds it up is something about which I am not entirely certain—perhaps it is a bit of both.

It is possible to compensate for this speed, just as it is possible to control one's force when using blunt steel. However, just as with steel, such control will inevitably create disparity.

In the heat of a bout, controlling speed is substantially more difficult than controlling force. Even the best fencers can't keep their speed at a consistent level, and one fencer's speed increase can end up being coupled to the other's speed decrease. I have never seen anyone manage to effectively limit their speed when using shinai, though I have seen it done with single sticks in Highland broadsword by a skilled and dedicated fencer. While this particular young man stayed true to the idea that his half-pound bamboo stick was a three pound broadsword, his opponents usually did not, soundly thrashing him for his efforts. To his credit, he refused to stoop to their level.

Yet another source of artifacts is the shinai's behavior in the bind, which is best described as bouncy. If a fencer was to control his or her speed and power and enter a bind without much force, the shinai would behave in a fairly realistic manner. However, add speed and power to the mix and the shinai will bounce off each other like wooden leaf springs.

Medieval longsword fencing, like any other highly developed combat system, is very precise. The difference between over committing and keeping your point on line can be as little as a few inches. What may seem to be an insignificant bounce from a sword simulator can make the difference between

correctly executed technique that works and *correctly* executed technique that doesn't even come close to working.

If you're not aware of the difference, you may end up changing the way you do things from the right way to the wrong way to fit your boutings tools. If your goal is to use boutings to learn how to fight with a real sword, this would actually make boutings detrimental to your training.

This brings me to a point that is common to all the various simulators. With most, it is possible to adapt your technique to make the boutings work almost as intended. The danger here is that changing a technique intended to work with a steel sharp in full force earnest combat to work with a quirky simulator in controlled free play takes what you are doing out of the realm of martial arts and puts it squarely in the realm of martial sports. If this is in line with your goals then it is not an issue. If it is not your goal, do not adapt your technique to work with your simulators. Instead work with your boutings partners to be aware of and to minimize these artifacts, and in turn be aware of the additional artifacts you will be creating by doing so.

The final problem with shinai is that they require a relatively substantial level of protection for such an unrealistic simulator. A shinai has minimal flex when thrusting, requiring some sort of throat and groin protection, and can easily break fingers, which means either accepting the possibility of broken bones or wearing bulky hand protection, which will influence movement. Joint protection is usually recommended as well, which will create additional movement artifacts.

If you decide to use shinai, then to avoid as many artifacts as possible you should work diligently to limit your speed and the force with which you enter a bind. Make sure that the people you bout with do the same, or you will share the fate of the aforementioned broadsword fencer.

## Padded Swords

To avoid unnecessary tangents, I will only discuss quality simulators, such as those made by Realistic Sparring Weapons.

A quality padded sword should weigh as much as the real thing and, perhaps more importantly, it should be similarly balanced, in both a static and dynamic sense (i.e. no weightless blades). It should also be minimally padded, just enough for safety, and preferably the padding should only be on the edges and point of the sword. It can get away with heavier construction, even on the blade end, because of the inherent safety characteristics of the padding. As such, it does not suffer from the excessive speed of the shinai. However, the bounce factor can be even more pronounced.

Like shinai, these swords bind and wind well when the force is minimal, but slam two of them together with any gusto and they will bounce like the oversized rubber bands that they are. This wreaks havoc

not only with point control, but with actions in *indes* (reactive bind work in the German system). A fencer calibrated for steel will have a very difficult time sensing his opponent's intentions through the sword. Padded sword boutng is usually light on bind work and heavy in other aspects of the fight, though those aspects that do not require blade contact are perhaps the closest to the real thing of all the simulators due to the safety factor and the weapon's realistic weight and balance.

Yet another saving grace of the padded sword is the minimal protective gear requirement. It is reasonably safe to bout with padded swords using only fencing masks or light helmets, and though broken fingers and hands are always a possibility, they are extremely unlikely with these simulators.

Combined with the realism of actions not involving sword contact, this minimal gear requirement makes for a simulator that provides unparalleled realism in some aspects of the fight. Once the swords cross, however, the padded sword goes from best to worst in a hurry.

If you chose this simulator, be aware of the contact related artifacts and how they will affect your fight. Controlling force when a bind is imminent will help tremendously, but as with other simulators it is important that your boutng partners do the same.

## Wasters

Wasters are probably the worst simulators for boutng. They are more dangerous than steel blunts due to their lack of flex, they don't behave accurately in the bind (though are better than *shinai* or padded swords) and are too light and incorrectly balanced to approximate a real sword's speed and agility.

Wasters require as much protective gear as steel blunts without delivering the benefits.

Wasters were used in period, but a period fencer didn't suffer from the same limitations we do. For starters, a period fencer knew in the core of his being what horrific damage a sword was capable of inflicting and would have feared it in the same way a modern person would fear a gun. I am not afraid of guns in general, in fact I am quite fond of them, yet when someone points one at me, even in jest (a poor jest!), I instantly feel a sense of dread. I *know* what will happen if that gun goes off. With swords, on the other hand, I feel no such dread when one is raised menacingly over my head, even though I have extensive cutting experience and have conducted numerous tests on the effects of swords on flesh. That is because like most of us, I have never seen anyone killed with a sword.

For a medieval person, this innate understanding of swords as terrible weapons would allow him to place boutng—with even the worst simulator—in the proper context.

## Plastic Swords

These swords have recently hit the market in droves, but at this point they are too different from one another to be able to properly analyze their potential for artifacts. Of the few that I have used, they were almost as bouncy as padded swords, though behaved better in the bind, and while lighter than steel swords were not as light or as fast as shinai. I do not have enough information to determine how hard they hit and what sort of protective gear they require.

In general, you can effectively analyze their potential artifacts by examining their characteristics. Are they very light? If so, they will have serious speed related artifacts in the manner of shinai. Are they bouncy in a bind? If so, they will either distort technique or require control and adjustment, leading to further artifacts. Do they hit hard, are they dangerous? If so, additional artifacts will be created by the required protective gear.

## General Artifacts

There are some artifacts that stem not from the weapons or the restrictions of the protective equipment used with them, but from the simple fact that boutng simulators do not cleave, pierce or otherwise destroy what they hit.

### Thrusts

The easiest to understand of all of these is the thrust artifact. Imagine that you are in a bout and you score a thrust right into your opponent's chest as he is approaching. Your simulator, whatever it is, will stop your opponent from moving forward after it is done flexing.

Now imagine the same scenario with a sharp. Your sword, with minimal effort, will go through your opponent's body, hardly hindering his forward movement. If you manage to pierce a vital organ, he may drop dead instantly. Otherwise, he may be very much alive, in close range and perhaps completely unaware that you have just killed him.

The potential for artifacts here is self explanatory. You should train to thrust safely, which may consist of thrusting and retreating, closing the line, or whatever else you think is appropriate.

### Hand Strikes

Hand strikes are both more and less effective in boutng than they would be in an actual fight. Hand strikes are less effective in a bout because a hand struck in boutng is never(hopefully!) severed or otherwise seriously cut, and therefore it is difficult to determine what the actual effect of that strike would be. However, hand strikes are also more effective in a bout than in a real fight because striking an armored hand with a dull sword will deflect that hand to a far greater degree than would a sharp sword striking an unprotected hand. This is similar in concept to the thrust artifact mentioned above.

Fencers who have experienced cuts to the hands or feet often report conflicting results. Some say they were stopped cold, others say they were hardly aware they had been injured.

In my experience, even debilitating cuts to the hands or feet would not stop you, at least not initially. I have had an axe strike my foot with sufficient force to penetrate the shoe, sever muscle and tendons and bite into the bone. I was hardly aware of the seriousness of the wound until I looked at it. Even

then, I was able to walk to the car that took me to the emergency room for surgery. Shortly thereafter, however, I couldn't even stand. In a second related incident, I was struck with a large bowie knife on my right index finger's knuckle. This was a serious wound that required minor surgery and a ton of stitches, yet once again I was hardly aware of the impact and my hand was almost fully functional for quite a while. On the other hand, my broken finger, which happened in a bout with blunt steel, stopped me cold. I froze in mid swing, and though I could have continued to fight, I would have given my opponent a pretty substantial tempo to exploit.

Due to the conflicting nature of opinions and accounts regarding hand strikes, it is not practical to form a firm conclusion about the nature of hand strike artifacts, save the degree of deflection of armored hands vs. unarmored hands. It will have to be enough just to be aware of them, and perhaps to judge each hand strike on its own merits when trying to figure out what would have happened.

In my own school, I treat hand strikes as fight enders that do not stop the attacking sword nor alter its trajectory. So if a sword was coming at someone's head, and that person struck the hand but did not otherwise deal with the attack, I treat it as a double kill, even if the attacker's sword missed its mark. My reason for this is that I believe a hand strike *may* alter the trajectory or stop the strike, but it also may not. Therefore, it is not something I want to teach people to rely on.

How you treat hand strikes is up to you, but hopefully being aware of some of the associated artifacts will make that decision easier.

## Forceful Body Displacement

Take a tatami mat or similar target, hang it from a rope, and cut it. If your strike is clean, the bottom half of the mat will fall and top half will swing a little bit from the force of the impact. Now take that same mat, wrap it in a few layers of linen, and cut it again. Even if you manage to sever it, the remaining upper half will swing violently because the linen will absorb a good deal of your cut and transform it into blunt force. If you only cut halfway into it, the degree of blunt force will be even greater.

Before getting to forceful body displacement, let's try one more thought experiment. Take yet another tatami mat and place it this time on a cutting stand. Strike the mat in such a way that you do not sever it completely but cut about half way through. You will notice that the mat no longer stands up straight but is now bent, with part of it tilting at an angle as a result of the cut. It may also begin to unravel, dropping bits of itself onto the floor. You have broken the mat's structure and it is no longer capable of holding its shape.

Why all this talk of mats? Previously, I discussed suicidal double kills, yet the reset button mentality is not the only possible reason why double kills might occur. They can also take place purely by accident,

despite the best intentions of the fencers involved. For example, if an attacker does not close the line as he or she strikes, then what was intended as a counter on the part of the defender may end up as a double kill. Unless, that is, the attacker struck first and we take the forceful body displacement artifact into account.

Considering what happened to the mats, the fencer whose cut landed second would be struck, knocked back and have his structure broken—muscles severed, bones cleaved, tendons and ligaments cut—before delivering his counter. Depending on which point in the arc of his strike he was interrupted, his sword may or may not complete its swing. More likely it would not.

This idea, I believe, further reinforces the extent to which it is the defender's responsibility to deal with an attack, which just happens to be in line with what we are repeatedly told in the medieval German treatises.

## Incidental Strikes

As most bouts tend to take place between people who generally like each other, there is a tendency to quickly step forth and identify incidental strikes in the interest of honor and good will. That is, instances where in the course of bind play, one person's sword happened to have made contact, usually unintentionally.

This is nearly ubiquitous in bouting, and odds are you have seen it many times. There is a bind, some sloppy interaction and then one of the combatants steps back and pats his arm, elbow or shoulder to indicate a hit.

Honor and good will are wonderful things, but applied in this manner they create not only a serious bouting artifact, but also condition the fencers involved to stop fighting after the slightest contact.

While there is no such thing as light penetration of the brain, a glancing strike to nearly any part of the body other than the head is not only unlikely to cause any serious harm, it is not likely to be noticed at all in the adrenaline rush of real combat. Unless, that is, you are trained to notice it, in which case it might as well be a killing blow.

A good rule that will help to avoid this artifact is to ignore glancing blows and only count those struck with intent.

## Fear

Of the general artifacts, I have saved the best for last. Short of the reset button mentality, no artifact has a greater detrimental impact on boutings that does fear.

Manifestations of fear in free play are, unfortunately, all too common. It is, however, easy to identify, which also makes it easy to correct. Such boutings take place almost entirely out of measure, where opponents snipe away at each other without closing, hoping to score yet afraid to commit to a genuine attack.

There are several reasons for this aside from general cowardice, and the greatest of these has to do with suicidal fencers. If a fencer is not aware of the reset button artifact, then he may believe it is his fault that he was hit every time he tried to close to attack, even though he followed his training to the letter. This unfortunate fencer may then adapt his boutings style to reflect this, staying as far away from his opponents as possible, striking out of measure hoping to get lucky, ready to retreat at the slightest indication that the other party intends to close.

Yet another reason is lack of training in a genuine system; those who do not know that an attack is supposed to provide cover, and understand why, are unlikely to figure this out for themselves in a world devoid of genuine sword combat and populated by legions of suicidal and cowardly fencers.

Regardless of why this happens, this is an artifact of our modern mindsets, lack of understanding and fear. “If you are easily intimidated, no fencing should you learn.”<sup>3</sup>

Although this type of fencer can be quite simple to deal with if this is his only issue (his constant out of measure strikes leave him vulnerable), he is likely to exhibit additional artifacts, such as the reset button mentality. It is best to address this issue through training and correction.

## Conclusion

It may seem that this article paints an overly grim picture of boutings and its effects on training. This was not my intention. If the reader is to walk away with anything, I hope it is the understanding that boutings can be of great benefit if its flaws are better understood and if it is put in the proper context. Most of the artifacts of boutings come from our general inability to understand the realities of something we have never experienced. Accepting that flaw in ourselves is the first and most difficult step we must take.

Furthermore, no one simulator is adequate to the task of reproducing bladed combat. To allow for a broader picture of how one's skills truly translate to a fully dynamic environment, it would be best to use more than one type of simulator and see what lessons each one offers.

In closing, I will offer a final caution. Be aware that though we try to practice the same art that our ancestors practiced, we are not our ancestors. We have neither their strengths nor their weaknesses, and that is one artifact we can never overcome.

## References

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2. Glossa, Von Danzig Fechtbuch, translation by Christian Henry Tobler
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