



**From Many Masters to Many Students:  
YouTube, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu,  
and communities of practice**

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## Abstract

Prior to the last two decades, martial arts practice in Western countries was shrouded by secrecy and esoteric philosophies and there was very little transmission of techniques between practitioners outside of individual martial arts clubs. Techniques were passed down from one master to many students. With the increase in popularity of mixed martial arts, there has been a greater exposure to and transmission of martial arts techniques between practitioners across the globe. Now, anyone with access to television or the Internet can watch and analyze martial arts techniques. In relation to one prominent martial art, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, the Internet has come to serve as the means by which practitioners transmit Brazilian Jiu Jitsu techniques, profess the philosophies of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and reflect on the current state of the art. Based on reflections on the last five years of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu practice and analysis of video posts by martial arts practitioners and comments by viewers, this article probes the nexus between 'offline' communities of practice and 'virtual' communities of practice that are centered on Brazilian Jiu Jitsu technique acquisition. Specifically, focus is on the use of YouTube as a tool for disseminating and learning Brazilian Jiu Jitsu techniques. Drawing from theories of communities of practice and skill acquisition, this article examines how the exhibition of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu techniques on YouTube has become integrated into practice of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu across the globe. With this mediatization of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and other martial arts, it is no longer viable to conceive of pure internet-based and offline social networks. The transmission of martial art techniques now consists of many masters and many students.

## Contributor Note

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I have participated in the 'arte suave' – the gentle art of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) – since late 2006. My involvement began as part of an ethnography of mixed martial arts (aka cage fighting), but I have maintained my participation in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu long after the summation of this ethnography.<sup>1</sup> BJJ maintains a central place in my life. When I started BJJ, the mats and positions felt hard and unfamiliar. I now inhabit the world as a BJJ practitioner. I now feel and move across the mats in ways that have been learned through continuous repetition. In stepping on the tatamis, I train my senses in ways that only the intersection of sport and art can (Sparkes 2009). BJJ vitalizes my life and gives me tools to deal with day-to-day struggles. I now possess a BJJ habitus (cf. Hogeveen 2013).

None of what constitutes BJJ is natural. Inverting along the shoulders, fighting off one's back, or relying on leverage and flexibility rather than strength and brute force, all run against doxa in Western culture. This is to say that everything involved in BJJ is learned. A practitioner must break with old habits and create new ones (Spencer 2011). Becoming an adept BJJ practitioner involves absorbing all the complex processes and improvisation that Alfred Schutz (1951) associated with jazz musicians. While BJJ was first introduced to North America in the early 1980s in a club in Torrance, California, the 'arte suave' has since spread with clubs popping up in cities across the world, housing BJJ black belts. It is widely recognized that BJJ remains one of the few martial arts where it is extremely difficult to get a black belt, demanding over a decade of training and dedication.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the details of this ethnography, see Spencer (2011).

BJJ consists of a practical self-defense side and a sport, competition side. In relation to the latter, thousands of videos of BJJ matches have found their way on the Internet via YouTube. But this is not the only form of content related to BJJ that is on YouTube. While Hogeveen (2013) has been somewhat skeptical of what BJJ techniques can actually be learned from YouTube, in this article I explore how YouTube is utilized for learning, creative, and imaginative purposes. Analyzing YouTube as a community of practice, I show how the medium is used as a stage for BJJ practitioner identity-formation.

This article is structured in four main sections. In the first section, I offer a brief overview of YouTube and previous literature on its use for creative production, learning and communication. In the second section, I define communities of practice and stages of learning and mastery. In the third section, I elucidate BJJ, its development and the contours of this martial art. In the last main section, I describe where YouTube fits in the development of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and how BJJ practitioners are using YouTube as a tool for communication, expression and identity formation.

### **YouTube, Participatory Culture and Learning**

YouTube symbolizes the difference between old-style TV and new. Since its inception in 2005, there has been a massive upscale of people publishing TV 'content' and number of videos available to be watched. YouTube offers a 'bottom-up' model storytelling system that is ubiquitous, populated, and relatively cheap. While both commercial and community based, YouTube is posited as

ushering in a participatory culture (Bloom and Johnston 2010) that is defined by having relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship where experienced participants pass along knowledge to neophytes. In this process, YouTube is both easy to use and accessible.

Social network enterprises and various kinds of user-created content have undermined modes of creative self-expression that existed prior to the advent of the network society (Barney 2004). As Hartley has observed, prior to the emergence of digital online media, creative self-expression was provided rather than produced (Hartley 2008). The content of creative self-expression was 'pushed' onto audiences. Now, there is almost infinite scope for 'do-it-yourself' and 'do-it-with-others' creative content to be produced by consumers and users, without the need for institutional filtering or corporate control. Information, learning and creative self-expression is now 'pulled' from multiple sources. This has resulted in a democratization of creative content production, where potentially anyone can publish content. Accordingly, YouTube (and other Web 2.0) creates opportunities for intellectual growth and socialization through skill building, learning and social networking (Bloom and Johnston 2010).

Open innovation networks like YouTube benefit from harnessing the creative energies of almost the whole population, not just the inputs of isolated expert elites (2008). These networks offer a means by which 'bottom-up' (DIY, consumer-based) and 'top-down' (industrial, expert-based) knowledge-generation connects and interacts (Hartley 2008). In addition, individual

users can move seamlessly between the traditional mass communication activity of watching mediated content, and the interpersonal or social connection activity of sharing content with others (Haridakis and Hanson 2009). It is the intersection of expert and neophyte BJJ practitioners on YouTube that I am interested in in this article and how this constitutes a community of practice for the transmission of BJJ philosophies and techniques.

### **Communities of Practice and Learning**

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is practiced in groups and can be considered what Etienne Wenger (Wenger 2000a, 2000b, 1999) calls 'communities of practice'. According to Wenger, they are formed by people with a common or shared interest dedicated to a process of collective learning. Communities of practice are comprised of people that have a common interest or passion for something they participate in and learn how to do it better as they interact frequently. Communities of practice are marked by three characteristics. First, a community of practice is a domain, meaning that it is not merely a network or a club but an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Communities of practice are created and sustained by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor. The second characteristic is the notion of community. In pursuing their shared activity of interest in their domain, participants are involved in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build and maintain relationships that allow them to learn from each other. The third characteristic is in regards to practice. Members are practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources



including experiences, stories, tools and techniques for addressing recurring problems. This shared practice takes time and sustained interaction. It is the fusion of these three elements that makes up a community of practice.

How is this learning of techniques and skills learned exactly? Stuart Dreyfus and Hubert Dreyfus (1980) aver that when acquiring a new skill or technique, a person has two choices. The first is through mimesis and trial-and-error. The second is through an instructor or an instructional guide. They assert that the latter is more efficient and, in cases of dangerous activities, is essential. The Dreyfus model operates with five levels in the human learning process including: 1) Novice; 2) Advanced beginner; 3) Competent performer; 4) Proficient performer; 5) Expert. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, these stages designate recognizable, qualitatively different ways of acting and performing in the process of learning a given skill (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980; Flyvbjerg 2001).

As a novice, the practitioner or learner is presented with a problem and a given situation in a task area for the first time. In relation to martial arts, this is when a neophyte joins the first day and steps on the mats and is presented with a situation-specific technique. During the instruction the novice learns the objective facts and characteristics of the situation that are relevant for the performance of the skill. The novice assimilates to recognize these facts and characteristics when they appear and therefore, learns the rules for actions. In order for the novice to be able to recognize the facts, characteristics, and rules, they are defined in simple terms and performed without reference to the concrete situation in which they might

occur. The facts, characteristics and rules are context independent (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980; Flyvbjerg 2001). In the context of martial arts, this is the 'white belt' practitioner. All complex situations are overwhelming.

The advanced beginner differs from the novice insofar as she or he advances through the learning process by achieving live experience in contrast to the primarily deliberative and protected learning situations of the novice level. The advanced beginner learns to identify relevant elements in relevant situations. Through experience recognition occurs because the advanced beginner sees similarities in relation to prior examples of the same situation. For the competent performer, with more experience, the number of recognizable elements, which an individual sees in a concrete situation, becomes overwhelming. At this stage, practitioners learn from themselves and from others to apply a hierarchical, prioritizing procedure for decision-making. By selecting a goal and a plan with which to organize information pertaining to a concrete situation, and then processing only those factors relevant to achieving the goal and plan, the practitioner can simplify her or his task and obtain improved results (Flyvbjerg 2001).

The proficient performer is deeply involved in their activity and has evolved their perspective on the basis of prior actions and experiences. The proficient performer comprehends and organizes her or his tasks intuitively, but intermittently continues to reflect analytically over what will happen. Elements and plans from the practitioner's experiences, which appear as intuitively important, are evaluated and combined analytically with the help of rules for reaching decisions about the most apposite line of action.

Deep intuitive involvement in performance interacts with analytical decision-making. Experts or 'masters' operate from a mature, holistic well-trying understanding that comes primarily from experiences with their own bodies. Masters do not see problems as separate from solutions. They do not become anxious about future actions while they act and do not orchestrate future plans. Their skills have become so inscribed in themselves that they are no longer aware of these skills as they are part of their bodies. Their intuitive capacities become a property of their bodies and are used in their everyday life. Their level of experience cannot be verbalized, intellectualized, and made into absolute rules.

This process of progression from neophyte to master is facilitated, but not replaced, by the communities of practice formed on YouTube. BJJ practitioners not only form identities through practice in local clubs, but also through the coming together (virtually) on YouTube to share and discuss techniques and philosophies. The meanings of BJJ and *how* to progress from neophyte to expert are shared on YouTube. The concatenation formed between the online provision of BJJ technique and the practice and learning of technique in the club environment effaces the purity of virtual and 'real' worlds.

### **Case Study: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu**

In contemporary North American sport culture, BJJ has been somewhat overshadowed by MMA. This is due, in part, to the rise of the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* (UFC) and the process of blending martial arts that inheres to mixed martial arts. This has not always been the case: in the introduction of the

UFC, BJJ dominated the competitions, as few had been exposed to this effective ground fighting style before, and succumbed to its chokes and joint-locks. Consequently, many North Americans were inspired to learn the art in 1993 when the 78-kilogram Royce Gracie (Helio's son) readily defeated three opponents in a single night on his way to winning the inaugural UFC (then referred to as *Ultimate Fighting Challenge*). The initial UFC events pitted martial artists from various fighting styles against each other in an ostensibly no-holds barred event that was broadcast to the world via pay-per-view television. On November 12, 1993 the Gracie family effectively turned traditional self-defence and fighting wisdom on its head when Royce Gracie took his much bigger opponents down to the mats and forced them to submit (Hogeveen 2013).

According to one history of BJJ, the art emerged in the opening years of the 20th century when Helio and Carlos Gracie refined the ground techniques associated with Judo (*ne-waza*) for the purposes of self-defence on the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Peligro 2003).<sup>2</sup> Referred to as Gracie Jiu Jitsu, 'Arte Suave' or the 'game of human chess', BJJ is a martial art of balance, leverage and movement. Practitioners gain touch sensitivity and struggle for control of opponents' bodies and create opportunities for locks and chokeholds. For Helio Gracie, the art was to be for all ages, genders, classes, and body types. He also wanted BJJ to be amenable to those with physical and visual impairments. As such, he placed emphasis on leverage and balance over strength and force. While the core of BJJ

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<sup>2</sup> For a history of BJJ see also, Green and Svinth (2003). An alternative history has been proposed that is connected to Oswaldo Fadda ('Brazilian Jiu Jitsu', 2013).

began and continues to be self-defence, it has branched off into a combat sport with competitions taking place across the globe. BJJ is treated as a way of life – almost a ‘religion’ – by many of its practitioners.

BJJ classes customarily involve a short warm-up, instruction of two to three techniques and then drilling of these movements. The techniques are usually followed by 30 to 40 minutes of sparring or ‘rolling’, where practitioners try to submit each other in real time at a high level of intensity (Downey 2007; Hogeveen 2013). BJJ is practiced in a gi or kimono – a woven cotton jacket and pants with a thick lapel and tapered sleeves. To withstand the rigorous grabbing, twisting and pulling that is characteristic of the training, BJJ gis are typically manufactured of thicker cotton material than traditional martial arts uniforms (see Hogeveen 2013).

In traditional martial arts, artists often practice their techniques through throwing punches and kicks at imaginary opponents (kata) or hitting heavy bags. There is no ‘kata’ in BJJ. Techniques are practiced against live humans. The rolling portion of the art is practiced at close to 100% of strength, speed and effort. But as Hogeveen states, a ‘great number of injuries could legitimately be expected from this manner of training. Allowing practitioners to “tap out” or otherwise signal submission (i.e. verbally) whenever they feel uncomfortable from a choke or lock mitigates risk’ (Hogeveen 2013: 81) When a practitioner taps out, she or he signals surrender and that means that the opponent should instantly release the submission technique. This allows the practice (and perfection) of the technique without injury, but also the practice of techniques against opponents of differing body types and

aptitudes who, in turn, furnish diverse levels of resistance.

One of the primary differences of the BJJ style from other grappling arts is the emphasis on the guard. The Gracie family, primarily Helio, radically altered the guard that was evident in Judo and made it the focal point of BJJ. The guard is considered the true ‘essence of Jiu Jitsu’. When Helio Gracie fought the Japanese grandmaster Masahiko Kimura (who considerably outweighed Helio), Japanese onlookers stated that they had never seen such techniques and that they were foreign to Judo (Hogeveen 2013). Guard is a position where a practitioner has his/her back to the mat with their legs wrapped around their opponent. It is versatile as it can be an advantageous position from which to launch submissions and sweeps. Guard can also be a defensive position in the face of an aggressive assailant. In addition to the traditional closed guard described above, throughout the history of BJJ additional guard positions have been created including the spider guard, De La Riva guard, butterfly guard, and X-guard, to name but a few. It is the development of various guards and the complexity of the style that makes learning BJJ a (life) long process.

This continuous development of guards and techniques does not come without its problems. A local club at my end of the earth wears t-shirts to tournaments and fight events that state ‘Death to the Creonte’ emblazoned across the back. On the one hand, it makes outsiders ask: ‘Who is the creonte?’, ‘To whom are they referring?’ Here I want to illustrate the importance of the creonte for the development of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

In a recent online article entitled ‘Loyalty and Friendship and the Creonte Question’, written by BJJ black belt and

author Kid Peligro (2011), Peligro indicates that 'creonte' was the name of a character in a popular TV Soap opera in Brazil. The persona had many allegiances and changed his mind and allegiances routinely. Accordingly, the term was adapted to BJJ by Grandmaster Carlson Gracie to describe a 'traitor'. In Brazil, a student that changed schools to another 'Team' was widely ostracized by friends and foes alike and received the tag of 'creonte'. Peligro is careful to point to the specific cultural history of Brazil and that what should be acknowledged is that the term emerged prior to the spread of techniques through video, when particular schools were known for particular styles of Jiu Jitsu. He suggests that there are no more secrets. Nevertheless, what Peligro overlooks is the importance of the creonte for the development of Jiu Jitsu and the way in which school owners use the term as a way of marshaling loyalty.

There have been objections to traitors from the inception of BJJ. If Mitsuyu Mayeda had not left the Kodokan in Japan and go to Brazil to teach his particular style of Judo, we would not have Brazilian Jiu Jitsu as it is practiced today. In fact, members of the Kodokan already disapproved of Mayeda's combat centered and ground-based version of Judo. What is fundamental about Mayeda is that he was transferring techniques, not only to the Gracies but also to Oswaldo Fadda and others. These are techniques, the evidence of his deeds shows, that Mayeda clearly believed no one can or should 'own'. He spread them freely and to anyone who would learn.

That being said, his way of approaching martial arts is very much how Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is practiced and approached today. There are no secrets. Schools can

only claim ownership over techniques for fleeting moments. The creonte is the rule rather than the exception. While practitioners may be loyal to their black belt teachers, the notion of keeping techniques in the club is, at best, anachronistic. This is infinitely more the case since the advent of YouTube.

As a form of new social media, YouTube effectively democratizes the art of BJJ, making it available to anyone who has an Internet connection and computer. YouTube disseminates the display of techniques and users can encounter them, experiment with them and reflect on their usefulness in the art.

### **Communities of Practice and Learning Brazilian Jiu Jitsu On and Through YouTube**

#### *Stories, YouTube and Philosophies of BJJ*

YouTube operates as a basis for people to narrate how they came to BJJ. One such story is that of Ed O'Neill, famous for his television show roles on *Married with Children* and *The Modern Family*. He tells the story of himself coming to the Gracie Academy in Torrance, California, an overconfident former American football player, and not thinking much of the art. Urged to stay by Rorion Gracie and his invitee, he tarries for the rest of the class, a decision that will lead to another 18 years of BJJ practice. He explains that he was instructed by being mounted by Rorion Gracie and told to try to extricate himself from the position. Despite dwarfing Rorion by at least 50 pounds, he admits his inability to buck the much smaller opponent off. He then explained that Rorion asked Ed to mount him and to try to keep him down. Within seconds Rorion has him off. Ed became hooked (GracieAcademy 2011). It is the



efficacy of BJJ that brings practitioners in, but it is the camaraderie that keeps practitioners in the art.

While not stated in O'Neill's narrative, one of the dominant experiential dimensions of the entrance into and journey through BJJ is humility. For neophytes, stepping on the mats is the most humbling experience. Joe Rogan, actor, fight commentator, and BJJ black belt, tells the story of starting BJJ in 1996. He begins with this assertion: 'It's good for you, its good for you to get your ass kicked... It's good for you to get destroyed' (Ninjabeatz 2011a). He is referring to the unavoidable humility-inducing element of BJJ. He continues, telling the story of his initial matches against a purple belt stable mate of equal size while he was a white belt:

Your ego gets squashed real early because you get tapped out a lot. When you learn jiu jitsu, especially in the early years, you have to have a healthy ego or you will never get through being a white belt. Being a white belt is demeaning; men manhandle you. I remember the first time I was training at Carlson Gracie's on Hawthorne street, it was 1996, when I started doing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. There was this kid, he was a purple belt, this Brazilian kid... he would just crush me! Every time we would roll and it drove me nuts because he was not bigger than me, he was my size and my age. We were the same. And he would just fucking manhandle me. Dude would just toss me around and strangle me. I remember thinking that I cannot believe that it is so easy for someone to do this to me... That feeling is not a good feeling... but

the only way to get good is to get used to that. (Ninjabeatz 2011b)

Rogan and his interlocutor, Eddie Bravo, go on to discuss how the only way to get better in BJJ is to compete against practitioners that are at the same level or better than you. Respondents to YouTube Vlogs replicate this sentiment. In response to the Immortal BJJ Vlog (Wheeler 2013) asking why practitioners study BJJ, Kevin Hooks comments:

Competing in BJJ is a humbling experience. There is always somebody better that you can strive to be like. It makes you want to be a better person. The camaraderie at Immortal is second to none and makes it that much better. It is truly a family atmosphere and I am happy to say I'm a part of it.

Rogan and Bravo go on to assert that one should never trust a martial art or martial artist that has not been tested, as is so common in BJJ. They compare such un-tested martial artists to a car that has not been pushed past fifty miles per hour. This has been the general philosophy of BJJ since its inception, as there has always been an emphasis on proving the art against other martial arts. The reasoning behind the first *Ultimate Fighting Challenge* was to prove BJJ or Gracie Jiu Jitsu as the superior art. Royce Gracie dispatched Karate and Kung Fu artists, Judo black belts, and kick boxers, all much heavier than he. Rogan's comment serves as a reflection of this disposition of BJJ and a testament to its fundamental role in the art.

Rogan and Bravo go on to contend that this humility leads to a better understanding of one's body. Lastly, they contend that this humbling element works as a 'douchebag' filter. This is a

filter against the dominant forms of masculinity (Connell 2005) that are common in many sports. They contend that BJJ confronts (male) participants with reality: 'Every dickhead wants to think that he is the fucking man... Those guys cannot handle jiu jitsu, because some little ... dude will choke their fucking lights out' (Ninjabeatz 2011c). They end with the assertion that anyone can do BJJ as long as one is humble, and that it serves as a means of developing the practitioner's whole life. (On a personal level, this is perhaps what has had the greatest impact on my life.)

In a recent YouTube post by Ryron Gracie, Helio Gracie's grandson, he discusses what he calls the 'Universal Misunderstanding' of BJJ (Ryron Gracie 2013). Here he expounds on how the fear of being submitted in a given position and losing in BJJ can impede the practitioner's ability to observe (both in terms of sight and feel) his or her opponent's actions and learning to know when to react to the opponent. Ryron advocates the need to 'keep it playful' and learn ways that a practitioner can be submitted and as such, learn how to be comfortable in all positions and gain knowledge of all possible attacks of one's opponent. This is, in Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1980) model of learning, particularly salient in the progression of beginner to expert, as knowing the possible actions in any given situation reduces the perceived level of complexity.

YouTube is also a site where members of the community comment on the state of the art. In a video segment BJJ black belt Lloyd Irvin engages with the distinctions between BJJ as a sport and BJJ as self-defense (Irvin 2012). Within online forums and on YouTube some practitioners lament over the relatively recent turn of BJJ to sport rather than remaining a self-

defense style. BJJ teams, like Lloyd Irvin's elite competition team, are criticized for fixating too much on developing sport specific BJJ. In recalling how he was a victim of a home invasion and was able to fight off his assailant, Irvin argues that every martial art was created for a particular situation, a self-defense scenario. He wants to break down the frequently made distinction between sport BJJ and BJJ for self-defense.

All of these self-defense instructors are only teaching you theory. They haven't been in any real fights, they haven't been attacked with knives, they haven't been attacked with guns... they haven't experienced things... They have not been in a home invasion, they cannot even give you an experience of self defense... they are guessing, theory!

He contends that the emphasis on self-defense BJJ is overstated and that the essence of BJJ and of being a martial artist is embracing all techniques. While this remains endlessly debatable, the point here is that YouTube is used as a basis to comment on the art and to respond to assertions made by other BJJ masters and commentators. Here, the meaning of BJJ is being contested on YouTube.

### *Learning Techniques on YouTube*

Recent research on YouTube suggests that individuals that use the site engage in post-viewing activity related to specific content. People have co-viewing motives insofar as they watch share, and discuss videos they appreciate with family and friends (Haridakis and Hanson 2009). In relation to BJJ, YouTube offers the basis for sharing videos that outline specific techniques and orientations to the practicing of techniques, but also reveal

training regimes of various clubs and teams. In clubs that I frequent, practitioners constantly refer to technique videos and matches that they saw on YouTube and in turn, practice techniques found online.

As the reader may know, YouTube allows users to subscribe to various channels and receive regular updates both on their 'What to Watch' newsfeed on YouTube but also have their YouTube digest emailed to them. BJJ practitioners have the option to subscribe to any number of channels showcasing different techniques and BJJ experts. These include such channels as 'BJJ weekly', 'Robson Moura', 'Art of Jiu Jitsu Academy', and 'Ultimatebjj'. These channels and their respective videos are often set up in such a way that the user knows what technique or what series of techniques will be shown.

The 'Art of Jiu Jitsu Academy' channel is dedicated to the Mendes brothers, Rafael and Gui (BJJ world champions), and their academy by the same name. This channel works both as an advertisement for their Mendesbros.com website that gives a tutorial of BJJ techniques and also advertises their gym in Costa Mesa, California. The Mendes brothers are known for their cutting edge aggressive style of BJJ. They are considered to be one of the primary developers of the berimbolo and 50/50 guard styles. YouTube gives a glimpse into classes at their club and the level of detail they show in relation to BJJ techniques. Rafael asserts the salience of drilling techniques to achieve mastery. In a video entitled 'Delariva Guard Drills, Mendes Bros Jiu Jitsu, at Art of Jiu Jitsu Academy', he shows several De La Riva guard related sweeps. What is particular about his instruction is that he bases the demonstration of his technique on the

potential reactions of an opponent (Mendes Brothers 2012). This captures the essence of BJJ practice, which underscores the importance of continual drilling (repetition) of technique with a constant awareness of the potential actions and reactions of an active-live opponent (Spencer 2011).

Because of the continuous development of BJJ, involving the emergence of new guards and techniques and the competition-base of BJJ, practitioners are continuously faced with learning how to counter the newly developing techniques. This is the pragmatic element of BJJ culture and is a central preoccupation of this community of practice. The solving of problems involves a highly experimental and iterative process. On the channel 'ultimatebjj', practitioners from the Sacramento BJJ academy show techniques ranging from guard positions to guard counters. One such example is a video entitled 'Berimbolo Counter' which showcases how to counter the berimbolo guard (ultimatebjj 2012). What is salient in this demonstration is that the authors qua practitioners show possible pitfalls of the position and ways to pass the guard. The instructor suggests a series of 'if' statements that are predicated on how the opponent could potentially react.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the process of progression from neophyte to master is facilitated, and not replaced, by the communities of practice formed on YouTube. BJJ practitioners not only create BJJ identities through practice in local clubs, but also through the coming together (virtually) on YouTube to share and discuss techniques and

philosophies. The meanings of BJJ and *how* to progress from neophyte to expert are shared on YouTube. The chains formed between the online provision of BJJ technique and the practice and learning of technique in the club environment effaces the purity of virtual and 'real' worlds. It is not that YouTube removes the distinctions and hierarchies between masters and neophytes or the role of black belts in teaching techniques, but rather that there is more of a cross-fertilization of techniques and philosophies across the world of BJJ.

What emerges on YouTube is the declaration of philosophies regarding BJJ and martial arts more broadly. These philosophies not only offer a way of seeing arte suave spread, but also ways of living as a BJJ practitioner. This community of practice contradicts long held assumptions regarding who 'owns' technique and that it is actually the

process of growth through transmission that leads to the emergence of new techniques and philosophies. Future research on martial arts and YouTube may involve in-depth engagement with how practitioners in other martial arts pass on what historically has been limited to individual clubs. In addition user-based research could be conducted to examine how uploaders and users perceive their relationships to other users and their motivations for sharing techniques and philosophies on YouTube.

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