Advanced Creative Enquiry (M6X01795)

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Major Project Development
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The purpose of this paper is to document any ideas and research I have with regard to my Major Project in my final year of this course. I have chosen to dedicate the majority of my focus to a subject I have been investing in since 2015: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. It is my goal throughout my experimentation to depict this sport from a perspective that will not only display the intensity of the sport, but also show the beauty of the expression of movement. First and foremost I will begin with an introduction of how this sport came into my life in the first place.

Martial Arts didn't enter my life until I was 24 years old. I had shown interest in local Muay Thai and Wrestling clubs, which were readily available in the rural parts of the Rhineland Palatinate in Germany, although instead I joined the more readily available local Football club, which I could not seem to find a passion for.

I was never bullied at school, nor did I experience any form of domestic violence whilst growing up, which is often the reason someone would take up a martial art. Admittedly I started Martial Arts as a form of life-management practice after hearing people whom I often listened to via the platform of podcasting mention Brazilian Jiu Jitsu as 'The best thing I've ever done in my life'. There are two figures that stand out primarily here, the first being a man by the name of Jocko Willink, a retired American officer of the US Navy, the second being Anthony Bourdain, a man whom I looked up to for his inquisitive nature in relation to international culture and cuisine. Both individuals would repeatedly mention something called Jiu-Jitsu and claimed it had improved their overall life satisfaction dramatically.

Myself being 24, I was working as a Bar Manager in a small, yet busy, Hotel in Swansea. I would spend 10 months of the year working every weekend, bank holiday, birthday, wedding and other special occasion I could think of, looking forward to the quiet months after Christmas where I would be allowed to travel to a destination of my choice for anywhere between four to eight weeks.

Upon returning from one of these trips, which had taken me to Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, I decided to make the call to a local MMA and BJJ (Brazilian Jiu Jitsu) Gym named the Chris Rees Academy. I asked what would be required of me to join in for a taster session and I was advised to wear joggers and a T-shirt, or a Gi (Kimono) if I had one available. I arrived at class and was teamed up with a man in what looked like his early to mid-thirties. Classes would begin with a light warm-up and ensue with a technique being shown which myself and my partner would practice on each other whilst alternating positions, with little to no resistance. The final 15 minutes of the class were reserved for pressure-testing and positional sparring. Pressure testing consists of practicing the displayed technique on your partner with full resistance, whereas positional sparring consists of beginning in the position demonstrated throughout the class and then continuing in what is referred to as a 'roll', essentially an exchange which requires you to submit your opponent with the use of strangles, chokes and joint manipulation.

Suffice it to say my training partner beat me up for the entire 15 minutes. I had the sudden realisation that I had no Idea how to defend myself, even against an opponent I was confident I could beat with ease. I went home feeling helpless and was determined to learn how to manipulate someone with the ease that my training partner had me.

So started what would become a long-time obsession with this sport.

<u>A brief introduction to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu:</u>

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is a martial art of Japanese origin, Jiu (Ju) roughly translating to '*gentle*' and Jitsu (Jutsu) translating to '*art*' or '*technique*'. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, or BJJ for short, is a form of ground fighting in which by principle the force of the opponent is used against him. The goal of BJJ is to use leverage and technique to submit your opponent, a action which is signified with a 'tap' a physical or verbal indication of capitulation.

My Coach Ashley Williams and I after I received my Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (July, 2017)

Jiu Jitsu developed originally as a form of self-defence for soldiers in ancient battle whom had been disarmed of their swords, as blunt trauma was often inefficient when used against an armoured opponent.

Jiu Jitsu came to Brazil via a Japanese migrant named Mitsuyo Maeda. Mitsuyo Maeda was a Judoka (expert in Judo) who emigrated to Brazil and influenced a man by the name of Carlos Gracie with his teachings. Carlos Gracie, along with his younger brother Helio Gracie, created his own form of Jiu Jitsu and named it Gracie Jiu Jitsu (now referred to as Brazilian Jiu Jitsu).

Mitsuyo Maeda (died 1941)

Carlos Gracie (died 1994)

My own lineage dating back to Mitsuyo Maeda dates as follows:

Mitsuyo Maeda (1878-1941) – Carlos Gracie (1902-1994) – Helio Gracie (1913-2009) – Carlos Gracie Jr. (born 1956) – Braulio Estima (born 1980) – Chris Rees (head of Chris Rees Academy) – Ashley Williams – Christopher Treseder

During my time studying Photojournalism & Documentary Photography I have often resorted to using my Teammates as 'models'. It has been a bit of a two-way system over the years, myself becoming used to photographing people rather than landscapes and pretty objects, and my teammates having images of themselves to post on social media.

As more elaborately summarized in the Professional Promotion (ADAD6002) module, I eventually began photographing my subjects more closely, getting to know individual athletes of the sport. Among these individuals I encountered hobbyists, like myself, who enjoyed the sport of BJJ as a strenuous workout they would take part in 3-4 times a week, with no serious intention of competing. Another partition consisted of MMA-Athletes, who would mix BJJ-classes into a schedule of daily exercises including Strength and Conditioning, Striking (Boxing, Kickboxing, Muay Thai) and grappling (Wrestling and BJJ). These individuals would compete regularly at local and international

tournaments in Mixed Martial Arts matches. And finally, we had a handful of dedicated Brazilian Jiu Jitsu competitors, who would compete almost weekly on international levels.

The equipment I am using to photograph the athletes is primarily a Canon 6D with a Sigma 35mm f1.4 lens, as it allows me to photograph my subjects using primarily natural light.
I shoot all of my images in colour and edit them in post, some of which I have experimented with as black and white images, as this reduces the vibrant colours worn by the athletes. I would like my images to give a strict depiction of the physicality of the sport with as few distractions as possible (e.g. sports bags and speakers in the background, patches from sponsors on uniform etc.).

The lighting in my local gym is a horrible white fluorescent light coming directly from the ceiling, with grey walls causing a equally miserable backdrop. The 35mm lens allows me to get quite close to the subject whilst maintaining a decent image composition. As a part of my project I have been focusing primarily on the variety of shapes that the competitors manage to get themselves into during training.

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The lens not only allows me to capture sharp images which I hope show the intensity of the various action they are performing, but it also allows me to blur the majority of the background thanks to it’s depth of field. I attempted to play with these images in order to eliminate the distracting background, one of my first methods was to crop images I had already taken, in an attempt to find better compositions within them. The results looking something like this:

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In order to explore this topic further, I have been researching the role of combat sports within society. Asking myself in the process what it is that makes the recreational use of combat in a controlled environment so captivating for certain individuals. Whether it be as a stress relief or an ambitious journey to be the best.

Inspiring Photographers

Due to the intense physicality of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (as it is a full-contact sport), I began researching other works by artists in relation to capturing the human body in motion. It is primarily something I am trying to capture in my images, focusing on details such as a grimace, blood drained fingers gripping extremities, sweat on foreheads, prominent veins on muscles.

I stumbled upon some images by Moscow-based photographer Alexander Yakovlev (500px.com/alexanderyakovlev), who takes fantastic images of a variety of dancers in motion. Most of his images are shot in black and white, often with a black backdrop. This effect reveals only the shapes of the moving body, sometimes with an added powdery substance to emphasise the movement.

Manuel Cafini

Another photographer I discovered, who uses similar photography methods is Italian photographer Manuel Cafini. Manuel mentions in an interview with molempire.com, that he aims to capture the dynamic movements of the athletes who model for him. He does so by implementing burst-shots and thus capturing an entire action, creating dreamy looking images of complex movements. Though I like the overall aesthetic of his photography, I would prefer my own images to be slightly less 'staged'. Hopefully I will be able to take some spectacular images of some of the BJJ-athletes in a heated sparring match using similar methods.

I am currently visiting the competition class of my local MMA/BJJ gyms on a monthly basis and hope to experiment with more alternative techniques allowing me to take more studio-quality images without taking away any authenticity that comes with the intensity of the 'rolls' I am documenting.

Other keywords I have been exploring within the parameters of my project:

Intimacy

BJJ is a full-contact martial art, this implies that the moves performed within the sport are not choreographed but performed with full force. Though there are no strikes thrown in BJJ, the joint-locks and strangles performed can cause permanent damage such as fractures, dislocation and asphyxiation. It is due to these serious consequences that the individuals practicing the sport develop an intimate bond with one another. This is where the implementation of the 'tap' comes into play. A tap from your partner indicates that you have presented him with a problem which seems unsolvable, thus re-setting your 'roll' or sparring session.

Masculinity

Though there is an ever-increasing number of female BJJ practitioners, it remains a male-dominated sport. In the western world, masculinity is defined by traits such as strength, courage, leadership and

assertiveness. I personally recognise these traits within my coaches and all of the higher-ranking, more experienced athletes at the gym.

Keywords:
Masculinity, Shape, Body-in-motion, dynamism, self-defence, self-control, competence, aesthetic, discipline, bullying, camaraderie, bloodsport, human-cockfighting, martial-arts, aggression, struggle, intensity, physique,