

10,001 Techniques

Aikido has a figurative 10,000 techniques precisely because those techniques are “a large, undetermined number”, and because their delineations are difficult to define.

As difficult as techniques are to define, they are the lifeblood of martial arts, styles, and training methods. Can you imagine a martial art without a set of techniques? Even kyudo, whose method is as limited as any martial art, breaks its draw and release into several technically discrete parts, each of which can be refined and corrected by a master. In other words, even if you consider drawing and releasing an arrow nothing more than a single technique, technical niceties comprise that technique. Without techniques, martial arts are conceptual, not physical. Is there no wonder why some kempo and ju-jitsu stylists measure their status by the number of techniques they can perform?

Even traditional styles with set curricula can be supplemented with modifications or wholly original techniques. In 1953, an Austrian judoka by the name of Hubert Klinger-Klingerdorff, nidan, published a book called *Judo and Judo-do*. As schmaltzy as the title sounds today, his was an attempt to release to the public some of the variations and modifications that his instructor, a Julius Fleck, godan, had developed. With romantic names (at least in the English versions), Judo-do offered what I would consider not new techniques, but variations that tournament judo players have discovered over the years in trying to apply their standard waza. The Blessed Earth, for example, is clearly a kneeling *kata-guruma* (shoulder wheel). The Balancing Fish is a kneeling *tai-otoshi* (body drop) with the top of the thigh rather than the back of the thigh blocking uke's leg. The Closed Road is cross between an *o-soto-guruma* (major outer wheel) and an *o-guruma* (major wheel) performed on the rear of uke's hip. However, there are also several throws in this book that are not illustrated and because words can be deceptive in describing a physical art, these throws may well have been completely unique.

I tried to create variations like this early in my judo career so that I could surprise my opponent with an unexpected entry. In one creation, I released my right arm from gripping his lapel and cupped my hand over the elbow of his left arm, which was attached to my own left lapel. This way I could apply a momentary arm-bar and, pivoting on my left leg clockwise, a simultaneous *sasae-tsurikomi-ashi* (lift-pull foot prop). I found out, in short order that standing arm-bars were illegal (even though they were in the old Kito-ryu kata that comprised upper level judo), so my creativity (at least for the moment) was squelched.

But the spirit of technique-creation lives on. Consider the following modern-day judo creation shared on Facebook: [The Dojo - The Dojo shar#55BC36](#) . Sure, it is just a wrong-side *ippon seoinage* (one-point back-carry throw) turned into a rolling *makikomi* (winding wrap), so technically, you can call it a variation, but this variation would require completely different timing and execution skills than

would either a regular ippon seoinage or a makikomi. I vote for its being a new technique or, at the very least, a technique modified so severely it deserves a new name—how about *gyaku ippon makikomi*?

Exactly where we draw the line between technique and modification is, as suggested in my previous article (*10,000 Techniques*), a poorly defined area, but that we constant seek new ways to apply the old skills (which in fact turn into new skills) is one of the methods by which skill sets within a specific martial art, and traditional budo in general, are enriched. Just because there are 10,000 techniques in aikido, for example—that doesn't mean we don't look for 10,001.