

"I've been listening to a lot of rock and black metal vinyls from the late 60's and early 70's. I've been listening to that kind of music for so long that I feel like it's now part of my DNA!"

OSAMU SATO

OSAMU SATO IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THE WACKIEST GAME DESIGNER-CUM-MUSICIANS IN THE PLAYSTATION'S HISTORY. WHILE HIS MOST WELL-KNOWN TITLE *LSD* MAY NOT BE THE BEST GAME ON THE CONSOLE, IT'S STILL A CREATIVELY INSPIRED PIECE OF WORK, THE EXPERIENCE OF WHICH WAS ETCHED INTO THE MEMORY OF MANY A GAMER. A WAKING DREAM? A LUCID NIGHTMARE? AN ABSTRACT JOURNEY THROUGH PSYCHEDELIA? OSAMU SATO EXPLAINS THE INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION BEHIND THIS EXTRAORDINARY TITLE, WHICH BROKE ALL THE RULES AND CHALLENGED THE VERY DEFINITION OF A VIDEO GAME.

Hi there. First of all, when and where did you begin working in the video game industry?

Early on, I was a graphic designer, which consisted of drawing something, making it 3D, animating it and adding a soundtrack. When we had something that resembled an animated movie, we made it interactive. By the end, it made for something quite similar to a video game. I had absolutely no interest in games when I started making them though. I just saw it as a way to express my artistic creativity at the time. For example, the slogan for the launch of *LSD* was: "This is not a video game!" The games console was a means of creating a modern work of art.

What had you made before you worked for Asmik, seeing as actual games weren't a passion of yours?

When I was in charge of a label called Outside Director Company. The first thing I produced wasn't a video game, it was an interactive CD-ROM that I made for Sony Music, called *Eastern Mind*.

In terms of video gaming, you built a reputation for yourself with the most unconventional of games. How did you come up with the idea?

I think one of the most important factors was the freedom that came with knowing nothing about video games. When I was shown the PlayStation and what it could do for the first time, I immediately thought to myself: "What if, in a racing game, smashing your car into a wall at full speed could transport you to another dimension?" That's when I had the idea to use this 'imaginary world' as a basis. I wanted to portray the irrationality of dreams, the way no rules apply, and the way you forget almost everything that

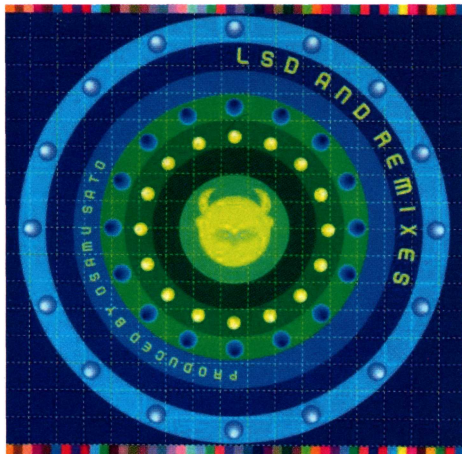
happened when you wake up. That was the kind of experience I wanted to offer.

All dreams come to an end, you have to wake up at some point. But there is no 'game over' in *LSD*, because there are no objectives. Why did you make that choice, not to have a goal?

I don't think it's essential for a video game to have one. After all, human existence can't be reduced to the simple completion of a final objective; we all die in the end, so it can't be that. The way I see it, the 'goal' can be any number of things, depending on the circumstances. Right now I may have a certain goal to accomplish, like going for a stroll in my neighborhood.

Was your work inspired by a surrealist movement, from an artistic or literary point of view?





LSD and Remixes is a compilation that came out in 1998. As the title suggests, it features the full *LSD* soundtrack and remixes.

Ever since my university days, I've been a big fan of 'Dadaism', 'Russian avant-garde' and 'Surrealism'.

There have been many interpretations of the acronym LSD: "Lovely Sweet Dream", "Limbo, Silence, Dream", "In Lunacy the Savage Dream" and even "In Leisure the Sonorous Dreams". What is the true meaning?

For me, having multiple possible interpretations conveyed a certain sense of chaos. It represents the way dreams are truly irrational and confusing. Going into the game with that kind of mindset allows you to fully appreciate it.

Did you have any trouble trying to find a publisher for your game? And what made you decide to develop it for the PlayStation instead of the Saturn or Nintendo 64?

Personally, I felt that Sega and Nintendo had more of a reputation as toy companies. Whereas Sony were already making products with polished and elaborate concepts, which

I felt was more appropriate for my creations. That being said, I no longer feel that way about those companies.

As a game developer, did you ever get any help with your creations, from Sony or anyone else?

No, I had absolutely no help from anyone.

Were you satisfied with the game's sales? Did they live up to expectations?

What to say? It's been such a long time since the game came out that I find it funny how anyone could still care enough to talk about that sort of thing!

***LSD* is now on the PSN, which means it's accessible to a whole new public. What would you say to this new generation of gamers to get them to check it out?**

I'm happy that it's been published on the PSN. Is it available in other countries as well? I thought it was only available on the Japanese market...

You're not just a game designer, you're also a talented and successful musician. What kind of thing inspires you musically?

I've loved music since I was a kid. I listen to it practically non-stop. Recently, I've been listening to a lot of rock and black metal vinyls from the late 60's and early 70's. I've been listening to that kind of music for so long that I feel like it's now part of my DNA!

The soundtrack to *LSD* is even stranger than the game itself. When you were composing it, you used 'samples' instead of 'melodies'. Why did you choose to do it that way?

Because breaking the rules is fun! Using sounds that didn't conform to the standards made me feel like I was closer to conveying a dream state.

In Japan they released a double-disc compilation in 1998. Was it common-place to release this kind of compilation back then, or was it something new?

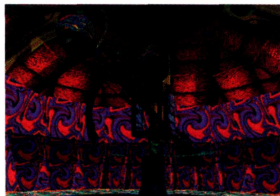
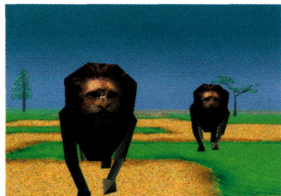
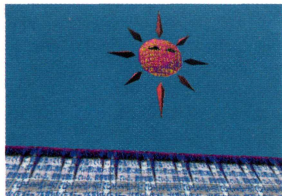
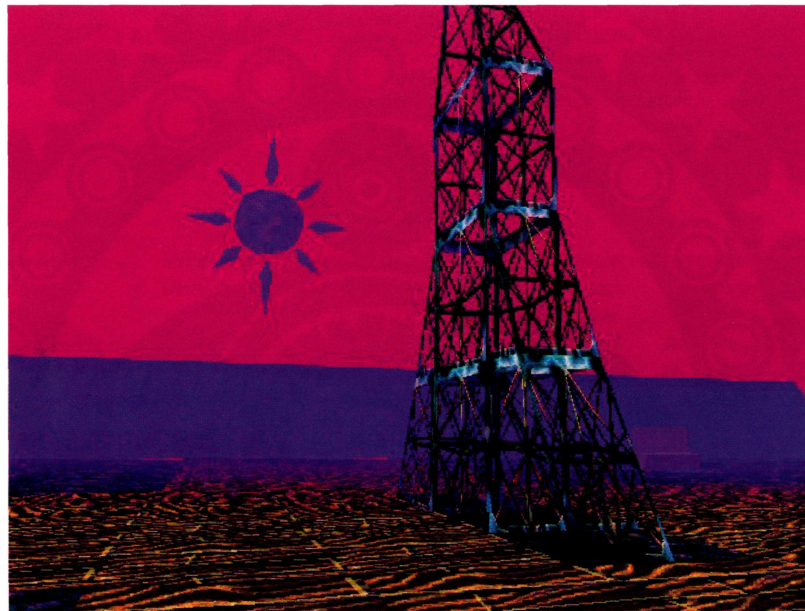
Good question... Seeing as I was crazy about music, I was adamant that I wanted to release the soundtrack.

The three games you produced (*LSD*, *Tokyo Wakusei Planetokyo* and *Rhythm 'N Face*) were never released in Europe. Was that your decision? Do you know why they never came out there?

Because I wasn't the one financing the project, so I didn't get to make that kind of decision.

You're often classified as an alternative designer. How do you feel about that description?

As I'm a graphic designer, I'm also an artist. The alternative side is an essential part of my understanding of what it is to be an artist. These days, I express my artistic nature with photography and paintings. ☺



It's hard to describe Osamu Sato's graphical style, because his creations are just so unusual.

