About the special section "Masayuki Uemura and Play"

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Masayuki Uemura sensei (passed away on December 6, 2021) played a pivotal role in the formation and development of the digital game industry in Japan and around the world as the person responsible for the development of Nintendo's Family Computer, SUPER Famicom, etc. In 1998, through the mediation of Kyoto Prefecture, he helped to promote game preservation activities in collaboration between Nintendo and Ritsumeikan University, and in 2004 he was appointed as a professor at the Graduate School of Advanced Sciences and Engineering, Ritsumeikan University, and later taught at the College of Image Arts and Sciences, which opened in 2007. Since the establishment of the Ritsumeikan Center for Game Studies (RCGS) in 2011, he was appointed as the first director of the center. After that he has visited New York University, the Strong National Museum of Play, the National Video Game Museum in the UK, and other game-related institutions around the world, and has made efforts to connect game research institutions and researchers in Japan and the world.

As a professor at Ritsumeikan University, Uemura's work has included not only research on games, but also education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, external and social activities. In his contribution to Vol. 1 of this journal, he clearly expressed his awareness of the role of universities.

> *Video games have been able to develop through business forces. However, competition among companies and legal restrictions such as copyrights make it difficult for companies to provide a place where researchers, who are among the users of video games, can freely study have released video games and exchange opinions. It is here that the role that only universities can realize, which will have a great impact on the future development of video games, becomes clear.*
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> ("On the Publication of the Preparatory Issue of Replaying Japan", *REPLAYING JAPAN* Vol. 1, RCGS, March 2019)

With these issues in mind, he has moved from the field of game development at a private company to the field of research and education at a university. The major themes that he had publicly stated that he wanted to consider through his activities at the university were "Why have digital games, especially home video games, been accepted and spread so widely throughout the world?" and "How can we position digital games in the long history of human play?".

1. Why did home video games become so popular around the world?

He said that he wanted to find out why the boom in home video games, as typified by the Family Computer (NES in Western world), caused such a huge social reaction, and why it has become an even bigger global phenomenon. He always laughed and said, "I still don't understand it well," but looking back at his writings and many interviews, I think that he had already realized the core of the answer to this question.

> *They studied how other people play games by watching the game screens with them, and when it is my turn to play, they try it out. They would play games desperately and exchange strategic information over the phone. Games were the glue that held people together, and I think that was one of the major attractions of the Family Computer.*
> (Interview by NHK, March 15, 2019).

And it can be understood that the people of the world, who came to know the appeal of good games through the achievements of Uemura sensei and others in the early days of the game industry, are approaching the answer with even more conviction than him.

> *Like bridges between worlds, his fantasy-delivery devices linked the Japanese and Western imaginations, with repercussions that are still being felt today.*
> ("A Tribute to the Nintendo Engineer Masayuki Uemura", *The New Yorker*, December 14, 2021).

The game is still developing globally, searching for a new form. What is it, and what does it bring to whom? We are convinced that Uemura sensei has hit the nail on the head with his intuition, but on the other hand, to clarify the concrete inner reality, it is necessary to conduct further empirical surveys and research based on academic findings from such as management studies and sociology.

2. How to position digital games in the history of human play

Uemura sensei has continued to ponder this issue with his students through lectures and seminars at Ritsumeikan University and has left us with a variety of thoughts on the subject. We were planning to publish a book on the game archives that he and we had been working on for a long time, even before the RCGS was established, in 2022. He had given us a copy of the manuscript, but since he passed away, we have stopped the project at the stage of reviewing the overall structure of the book (we plan to re-edit and publish it in near future). From the manuscript, we can see that he was already gaining a certain focus of the image on the role of digital games (video games) in the long history of human play.

In the first place, video games can be thought of as the product of the work of creators, who utilize the functions of computers to reconstruct the various enjoyable elements of play that they have experienced in the real world and that are etched in their minds, while understanding the computer's functions.

The most important point in reconstructing the game is to build the entire game based on the rules of the real world that people know, and to choose to reproduce exactly the phenomena that are commonplace in everyday life, or to incorporate unique phenomena that are completely out of the ordinary. In real-world play, the person playing the game may be reconstructing the same phenomena in his or her mind, but like in a video game, no one else can experience it except for himself or herself. And like a video game, it cannot be saved or reproduced. The reconstruction of the play can be influenced by various cultural factors of the time, such as events and common sense of the era in which the person was living. Especially in the case of anime-style video games, where the objects displayed on the screen are supposed to have life, the creator's religious and historical views may have had a strong influence.

When we look at video games from the historical perspective of play, they are a new play culture that was born by utilizing computer technology based on the various play cultures that have accumulated in the long history of mankind. In other words, they can contain not only the rules of the play of the time when they were created, but also various images and information related to the play, as well as people's religious and historical perspectives. By preserving video games, it will be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the various cultural environments created by the people who lived in those times, including the culture of play, which has only been understood through the preservation of books, paintings, and playground equipment.

(Masayuki Uemura, "Video Game Archives from the Perspective of Play History", excerpt)

Uemura sensei believed that video games have two major roles. One of them is recognized to be the function of preserving and reproducing the contents of the long history of human play. The other role is to realize advanced play that has never existed before by displaying computer images of shapes and movements that cannot be realized in the real world, which is governed by the laws of physics, and by using richer images than those of play in the real world.

The former point of view is expressed in an easy-to-understand and concrete form, especially in his work on game preservation and in development devices such as the "Video Game Image Recording System". Regarding the latter point of view, there are some suggestive phrases about the relationship with animism in terms of shapes and movements that cannot be realized in the real world, and keywords such as "anime-style video games" are sometimes used. Unfortunately, there is no systematic discussion of this topic by him, but we can assume that it was a discussion of the functional role of video games in that the developer's image of play is expanding and becoming more richly

expressed, supported by the remarkable technological advances in computer hardware and software. It can be inferred that this was a consideration of the functional role of video games.

This special corner is planned as one of the efforts to deepen the research theme that Uemura sensei has been working on at the university, while organizing his discussions and remarks and taking over his intentions and thoughts.

In this special contribution, Professor Yasuhiro Komago of Tsukuba Gakuin University and Associate Professor Takashi Obana of International Professional University in Osaka, who studied under Professor Uemura at the Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, explain in detail how digital games have the ability to preserve and reproduce the long history of human play, and how games, as play preservation devices, have been used to preserve the content of human play. They also explain in detail what kind of devices have been used to realize Uemura sensei's idea of preserving the game and how they have been realized with the recording of controller operations. Another contribution concerns a project to support learning about Japanese culture using the Metaverse, headed by Professor Mitsuyuki Inaba. Uemura sensei was one of the co-researchers of the project. From this special contribution, the possibility of learning support, another role of games that Uemura sensei had in mind, is discussed based on the past learning practices in the project. Through this special contribution, we will be able to confirm the valuable footprints of what Uemura sensei has focused on as the role of play in society and how he has pondered these issues.