

# 6

## WHY AND HOW, MULTIMEDIA - THE JAPANESE SITUATION

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### Multimedia, why?

A Museum is always looking for a good information-management tool and rarely finding it. A few years ago, Japanese museums were pursuing *new media*. This term, new media, had a very wide application, but now is not used today. Recent trends in museums places multimedia as a new exhibition in itself because of its freshness and ability to catch the eye. Multimedia use varies from the personal one, e.g. education in schools; to exhibitions in museums and for public information.

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### Now, why does a museum begin to use a multimedia system?

It is because of the interactivity and its integration of a variety of documents. In other words, the multimedia is an excellent work of communication. In the past, for technical reasons, computers could not manage sound, nor motion pictures. Today, however, multimedia can permit museums to enter the modern communication world.

The ways of providing information to visitors in museums, is a one-sided conversation. Traditionally the visitor who wants information on X, might have to get the information from another source.

Using multimedia systems will facilitate giving some information interactively, like people browsing a book. Because the way the visitor thinks is not as logical as museum people think, the visitor is likely to be interested in the museum object from different angles.

Multimedia for the visitor and/or museum people has the following advantages:

- Many different facilities
- Independence
- Richness of the contents
- Presentation
- Interactivity

Let's move from the general to the specific about multimedia used in museums in Japan, illustrated following 2 case studies.

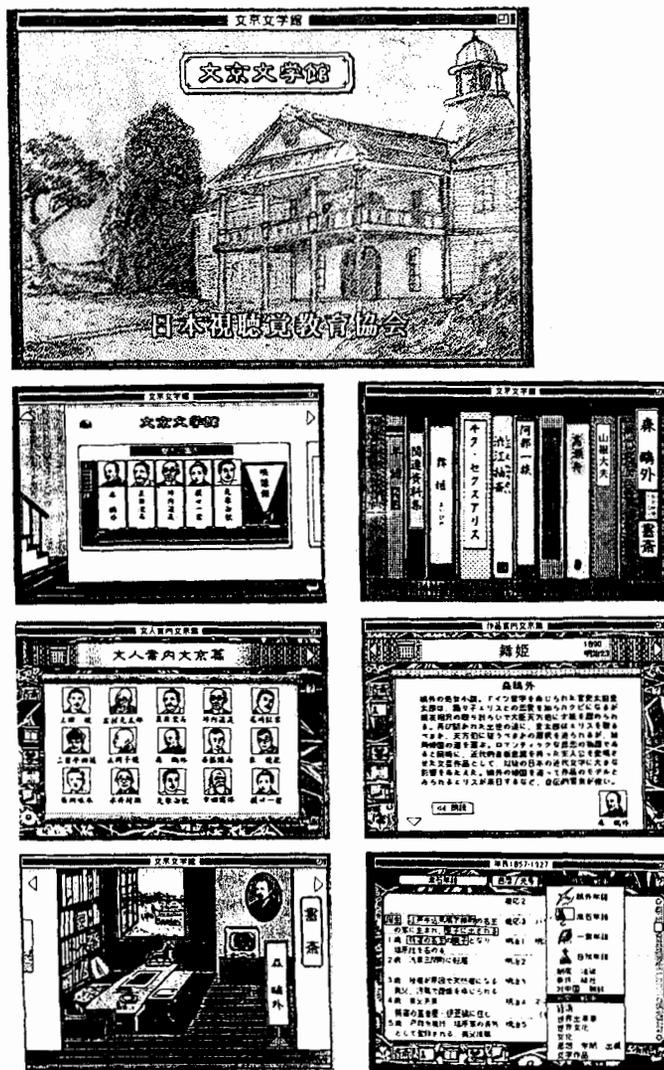
Case study 1: Presentation of Bunkyo Bungakukan (Bunkyo Literature Museum). From 1988 to 1990, the Ministry of Education was developing some teaching materials using New Media. Bunkyo Bungakukan is a part of this scheme, and was the first exhibition using multimedia in Japan. This is one of the presentation in the Bunkyo Furusato Rekishikan ( Bunkyo District History Museum) - Writers in Japanese Modern Literature:

The contents include:

- Introduction to each writer/novelist/a man of literature,
- Guide to the novel (text),
- Recitation (read aloud) of the novel,
- Album (photos and graphic),
- Map around the Bunkyo district (graphic),
- A chronological table of Japanese literature,
- Relevant film footage (LD), etc.

When this system was introduced in Japan for the first time, the multimedia presentation created a sensation. The system was created by the Association of Audio-Visual Education supported by Pioneer (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Presentation screen from the Bunkyo Bungakukan

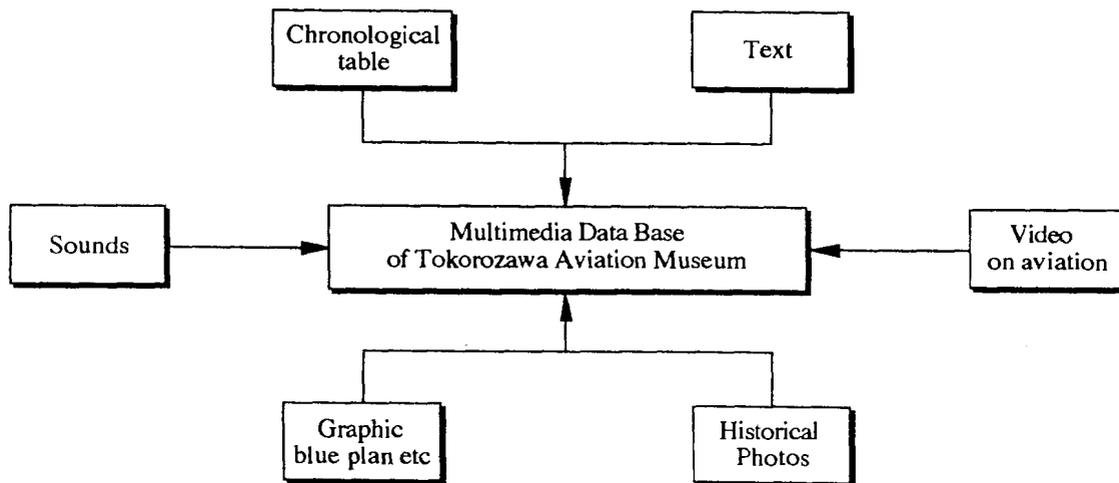


Our particular interest is in how museum people deal with information, and how visitor communicate with the exhibition, and how they derive information from this sort of system.

Case study 2: Multimedia Database of Tokorozawa Aviation Museum. Different from the Bunkyo Bungakukan, another example of multimedia usage is as a database. Tokorozawa Aviation Museum was opened in April, 1993. This museum has a Data Centre for collections management. From the beginning of the design phase of the museum, we insisted on the importance of user-friendliness, and as a data base it should be able to deal with the text, pictures, graphic, video and sound at once. The museum has 10,000 items in its collections up to now, including aviation materials, blue prints, historical pictures, photos, aviation video, and so on (Fig.2). By the use of the multimedia database the curator can manage the information of the museum. We use the Japanese alphabetic order as information retrieval.

The most important point I should mention is that we adopt the MDA data standard. Probably, this is the first system in Japan taking the standard into consideration. The system was created by our Japanese Science Foundation.

Fig. 2 The concept of Multimedia Database of Tokorozawa Aviation Museum



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## Museums in Multimedia

I will give you another idea how we Japanese use and enjoy multimedia in the home, not in the museum. The two case studies above are used in museums, but the next case, on the other hand, is about museum collections on LD or CD-ROM.

The following software packages are easily obtained:

- Musée du Louvre
- Musée d'Orsay
- De Italia
- Vincent Van Gogh, etc.

So in a sense, it is not necessary to visit the museum in order to appreciate fine arts thanks to the multimedia package.

Multimedia is enthusiastically developed in computer fields in USA, Europe and Japan. Today, it is no exaggeration to say that we are over the hump of that development and of trial production. But still, there are some questions to ask, when our museum people wish to employ a multimedia system in a new exhibition or database.

Firstly, are there sufficient information sources and/or image resources available to the museum?

Secondly, the cost of the system itself and also production costs are still higher than we expected.

However, there is great limitation to the media which already exists in museums. So we need to know that there is a good possibility of success if we can combine multimedia with the existing media in museums. Recently, some museums have tried to distribute museum information through the computer network. We are always seeking a good information-management tool. Multimedia, what is it good for? What gives us new concepts in presenting the museum material? The museum is questioned in detail museum material via different multimedia content levels.