CHAIM NOY

"SEEING THE VOICES":
ON THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF TEXTS IN JEWISH MUSEUMS

Abstract

I share observations from two ethnographic studies conducted during the last eight years in Jewish heritage museums, where collective Jewish identity is displayed and performed, visualized and textualized. I show the visual pervasiveness of texts (historical and contemporary) at these museums, and that these texts indeed amount to the most popular category of artifacts presented as display. In other words, I show that texts or textual (discursive) artifacts play a central role in the visual organization of these Jewish museums, as they are (re)presented, (re)mediated and (re)materialized. I then move to inquire into texts that visitors inscribe, i.e. texts which visitors produce in situ and which are on display. Taking a visual and cultural approach to these museums and to the texts that are publically presented therein, my ethnographies shed light on contemporary visualizations of Jewish texts, as well as—on a different level—on multimodalities and visual designs of the texts themselves. The folkloric view of Jewish visual culture and imagery is examined within an institutional context, as an emerging cultural production that manifests dialectic recourse to the Jewish museums that afford its production.

For *Abba*—the folklorist
And for *Ima*—the physical anthropologist
zikhram livracha
May their memories be a blessing

וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת

"And the people saw the voices"
(Exodus 20:15, JPS Tanakh translation)

One of the main questions that propelled this inquiry concerns the visual (re)presentation, or visualization, of Jewish texts in public spaces, specifically museum spaces. These are spaces where audiences can read the texts and also respond—(inter)textually, via writing—to objects that have been curated and are exhibited. When I address the (re)presentation of texts in public spaces, or, in other words, texts in spaces that are available and accessible to the public gaze, I acknowledge the already visual environments of these texts. Visualization, then, refers initially not to qualities inherent to the text itself or to its graphic and ornamental dimensions and organization, but to the circumstances of its (re)presentation as publically visible and visually accessible writing. Following from this is a complementary type of textual visualization, which concerns the visual and graphic elements of the text in and of itself. Along lines that merge inquiries from folklore, linguistic anthropology, discourse studies, and material and visual cultures, my view of texts is concrete and material.[1] I avoid viewing texts abstractly (as in the expressions "culture as text" and "the biblical text"), but view them as artifacts occupying physical spaces and inscribed on actual surfaces of and for writing. A text is "a unique material inscription," where the linguistic code is but one of a number of elements that contribute to the artifact's overall semiotics.[2] These textual artifacts, and the spaces and surfaces on which texts are marked, can be framed as private, domestic, public, institutional, national, and so

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[1] See, on folklore, Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Poetics and performances as critical perspectives on language and social life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88; on linguistic anthropology, Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) and Chaim Noy, *Thank You for Dying for Our Country: Commemorative Texts and Performances in Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); on discourse studies, Ron Scollon and Susie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis: Discourse and the Emerging Internet.* (London: Routledge, 2004); on material

culture, Brenda Danet, "Books, letters, documents: The changing aesthetics of texts in late print culture," *Journal of Material Culture* 2.1 (1997): 5–38; and on visual culture, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[2] Paul Prior, "Tracing Process: How Texts Come Into Being," in *What Writing Does and How it Does it: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*, eds. Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior. (Mahwah N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 169.

on (as well as any mixture of these features), the point being that texts' dual visualizations emerge from the combination of the material and spatial circumstances of their (re)presentation, together with the graphic features inherent in and to the texts themselves.

I take these insights into the dual visualizations of texts in museums and curatorial spaces, and specifically in two Jewish museums—one in the United States and one in Israel.[3] In this essay, I will first dedicate some space for a close description and discussion of texts and textual visualizations in museums, and for the institutional function they serve vis-à-vis museum audiences. Then, I will turn to museum audiences, to ponder how audiences' textual productions are arranged visually and displayed publically. By and by I offer a contemporary ethnography of how "כָּל-הָעָם", drawing on Exodus 20:15, "all of the public," "רֹאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת": "apprehend the [written] voices." In the terms used in this article, I will discuss how voices are visualized textually, or visually textualized, in the context of contemporary Jewish heritage sites. The inquiry joins recent studies on folklore in museums, with a specific emphasis on audiences' contribution and participation, and the construction of collective identities and the notion of "publics" ("כָּל-הָעָם").

Lastly, on an autoethnographic/biographic note, my inquiry into texts and/in museums may be easily traced to a small ethnological Jewish museum, formally called the "Haifa Museum of Ethnology and Folklore," which was established by Dov Noy and by Haifa's mayor, Abba Khoushi, in the mid-1950s. I used to travel to Haifa from Jerusalem with my father and visit this museum as a child, mostly during summer vacations. The museum was located in a bottom floor of a common residential building on one of the city's curved, descending roads, and for some time it was a home for two types of ethnological collections: texts on the one hand, and everyday and ritual material artifacts, on the other hand. The museum's textual collection took the shape of what later came to be formally designated as The Israel Folktale Archives (or IFA).[4] This collection of folk stories was established by Dov Noy in 1955, and it included folktales from rich Jewish ethnic and cultural backgrounds worldwide. The collection grew rapidly and has since become the largest repository of Jewish folktales, including related non-Jewish folktales as well. It was stored and archived in a couple of rooms, via a sophisticated (if "low-tech") system of index cards, and it was managed—for decades—by Edna Heichal. From this perspective, the Museum of Ethnology and Folklore served as a unique library.

The second collection was ethnological and took the shape of a typical museum exhibition, presenting both ritualistic and everyday clothes and artifacts used by various Jewish diaspora communities behind glass vitrines. I specifically remember an impressive, white and gleaming Yemenite bridal dress with the many heavy artifacts that Yemenite brides wore for the henna and wedding ceremonies. For Dov Noy, this was an ideal combination of narrative cultures of Jewish ethnic identity, where words and texts, together with material artifacts, converged in the way they embody Jewish folklore. I believe that his sense of history, together with the total devastation brought about by the Holocaust, as well as the powerful Zionist 'melting pot' ideology, led him to believe that not only was (and is) the collection of folk Jewish cultures essential, but also that collecting it was an urgent enterprise.

"Textual Museums"

It is perhaps needless to emphasize the sociocultural roles museums play in the landscape of national and ethnic identities, and specifically the role that heritage museums play in shaping collective identities, collective memory, and a sense of "public."[5] Although museums have historically revolved around the authority and agency of the collection, these

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[3] This work also draws from ethnographic work in a third Jewish museum, namely the Florida Holocaust Museum (located in St. Petersburg, Florida). The present scope does not allow examples from this museum, but see Chaim Noy, "Writing in Museums: Towards a Rhetoric of Participation," *Written Communication* 32.2 (2015): 195–219, and Chaim Noy "'My Holocaust Experience was Great!'": Entitlements for Participation in Museum Media," *Discourse & Communication* 10.3 (2016): 274–290.

[4] See, "Israel Folktale Archives," accessed August 1, 2014, http://ifa.haifa.ac.il/index.php/en/.

[5] For instance, Tamar Katriel, *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli Settlement Museums* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997); Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006); Scott Laderman, *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

institutions have always also been about the rhetoric of display and the politics of representation.[6] In fact, with the neoliberal privatization of public space and museums that has taken place globally during the last couple of decades, and the growing competition over resources and audiences, museums are becoming ever more 'visitor-friendly', presenting a heightened degree of visual entertainment and infotainment apparatuses and interactions.[7] Thus, any artifact located inside a museum—inside its curatorial spaces—can be addressed as an exhibit and can draw a specific kind of gaze by the museum's visitors.[8] Texts are no exception: there is no plausible reason to assume that the linguistic modality would necessarily override visual and contextual dimensions and modalities. Rather, in museums, and often times in other public spaces as well, texts are viewed/gazed at/scanned, etc., as much as they are read. This is a result of the perfusion of texts displayed in public spaces, and the multimodal type of "reading" that is required in order to make sense of them. Put differently, a mono-modal analysis, which addresses only one code (say, the linguistic), has every chance of missing the meanings and the effects of the texts at stake as these transpire in situ.

Before I proceed, a few words are due about the two textual museums that I reflect on, and about my ethnographies there. Chronologically, the first museum I began studying was the Ammunition Hill National Commemoration Museum, which is located in northeast Jerusalem. The Ammunition Hill Commemoration Museum and its site were inaugurated in 1974, and its location marks the historic battle between the Israeli army and the Jordanian Legion, during the Six Day War (on June 6, 1967). In 1990, the Knesset formally recognized the site as a National Memorial Site, and as a result, Jerusalem Day ceremonies featuring the President, the Prime Minister and other notable political and military figures have been hosted there. The museum is part of a larger outdoor site, whose ideological charter concerns the commemoration of Israeli soldiers who fell in the Jerusalem front during the war, and the celebration of militaristic-national Israeli (Zionist) ideology. My ethnography at the Ammunition Hill site took place between 2006–2012, and included observations of the museum and the visitors, specifically revolving around writing activities undertaken during the visit. The ethnography also included conversations with the staff and the management, with the purpose of learning how they see the museum's ideological goals and mandates, and how it functions institutionally on daily basis to achieve them.[9]

The second museum is the National Museum of American Jewish History, located in historic and tourist district of Philadelphia. The museum was founded in 1976, and was relocated and comprehensively restructured in 2010, which is when it assumed its present shape. The museum is located on the Independence Mall (overlooking the Independence National Historic Park), and it narrates the history of Jewish immigration to and livelihood in the United States from a liberal American perspective. It portrays the high levels of integration and accomplishments of Jewish communities in American culture, society and politics, and reserves only minimal space to the Holocaust and to the establishment of the State of Israel. I began studying this museum during a fellowship at the Katz Center for Advanced Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (which is located nearby) in 2010. My first few visits were spontaneous and motivated by curiosity, and they gradually turned into a more formal and comprehensive museum and museum-audience ethnography. I have been visiting the museum regularly since, focusing on visitors and their on-site, participatory writing practices. One annual event in the museum, which I attended and observed a few times, takes place on Christmas day and is called "Being _____ at Christmas." I will address this ritual later in the article.

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[6] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

[7] Micheal X. Delli Carpini and Bruce A. Williams, "Let Us Infotain You: Politics in the New Media Environment," in *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, ed. W. Lance Bennet and Robert M. Entman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 160–181.

[8] My notion of visitors' "gaze" here is shaped by the contributions of the sociologist John Urry, who influentially developed and discussed the "tourists gaze"—as a historically and politically constructed activity, John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990); and more recently and with further elaboration on the gaze with regards to embodiment and performance see John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2010).

[9] See Chaim Noy, "Mediation Materialized: The Semiotics of a Visitor Book at an Israeli Commemoration Site." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25.2 (2008): 175–195; and idem, "Writing Ideology: Hybrid Symbols in a Commemorative Visitor Book in Israel." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 18.1 (2008): 62–81.

Upon visiting these museums, one need not be a scholar of texts and writing in order to appreciate the pervasiveness of textual artifacts as well as of displays and representations of discursive nature. Indeed, the museums' textual artifacts and representations amount to the most prominent category of items at display. Consider, for instance, the different types of textual visual (re)presentations offered at the National Museum of American Jewish History. First, there is the most basic unit of display, which typically includes a historical text (usually a facsimile, copy or reproduction of the original document): for instance, two handwritten lists of belongings and prices of tools involved in the work of a Jewish butcher called Asher Levy (dated 1682). The authentic texts are framed inside a glass vitrine, and near them clear print texts explain the artifacts ("Levy opened his own slaughterhouse near the eastern end of what is now Wall Street…"), information and credit about the original text is supplied ("NYC Municipal Archives"), and oftentimes also transcriptions and/or translations. These latter texts are representations and (re)textualization of the original document. In between the texts, images are usually interspersed, such as a black-and-white pencil drawing of the butcher's work and workshop. This is an example of what can be seen as the museum's "basic exhibit unit," which is essentially multimodal and includes, and in fact rests on, texts of different genres and functions, and textual mediation.

A second type of common visualization of texts utilizes projection technologies, whereby texts are not part of a material artifact, but are rather offered as imagery that is projected against one of the museum's walls or screens. In one of the museum's dimly lit rooms, for example, a passage from the Gettysburg Address is projected in bright and cursive writing. The cursive writing, and Lincoln's signature at the bottom of the passage endow the projected text with a seeming of familiarity, informality and authenticity. Here the text is ephemeral—it is offered not as part of an authentic/ historic document/artifact, but as a visual remediation (which the audience recognizes as such). Two points are worth mentioning now. Firstly, these projections'

materiality emerges from the kind of substances that serve as surfaces on which the textual image is projected. In the museum's main hall a few texts in Yiddish and Hebrew are projected against non-smooth backgrounds. The effect that is accomplished evokes texts' textures, and although the audience recognizes words and occasionally sentences as well, reading the text as a whole is difficult. The texts' linearity (the sense that emerges when words that join into sentences which join into paragraphs, etc.) is deconstructed in favor of their visual and tactile textures—words, as such, visually enmeshed on various backgrounds. The second point is that these are sometimes visitors' texts that are publicly projected in the museum, such as in the Contemporary Issues Forum room (informally referred to as the "Post-it notes room"). In this room visitors are invited to respond to questions on current social, cultural and political issues in the United States, that the museum presets, and where visitors can write their texts and have them be publically projected in the room and on the Internet.[10] Put differently, one of the types of visual (re)presentations of texts in the museum concerns texts that are authored and composed on-site by visitors.

A third type of textual visualization has to do with representation and remediation of texts through digital screens. Screens—of various sizes and display technologies—are widely used in museums, mainly because in the space of a single picture, a screen can offer a number of alternating still images, video, and audio materials. The textual effect is similar to that of the projected texts, but the technology is different, presenting a higher resolution, more dynamic and nuanced textual visualization, and a possibility for interactive features (in the case of touchscreen, which invites further types of visitor activity and interaction). For instance, in the museum's second floor a number of TV-size screens show preset loops of video recordings of visitors telling their life-stories and answering questions presented to them by the museum staff. Visitors sit in front of these screens and with the help of earphones hear and see the narrator-visitor talk. Yet the image on the screen does not include only the face

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of the narrator-visitor, but also a textual word cloud (a tag cloud) emerging from these narratives.[11] The audience can see the popularity of different words and terms used by the narrators, and because the screen is interactive, tapping on any of these words/terms will direct the viewer to other digital stories of other visitors that share them, and so on.[12] So this is another type of museum textual visualization.

The different types of common textual visualizations that I have just described (and this brief list is not exhaustive), suggest the kind of pervasive and immersive visualization of texts in current museum spaces. I went into some detail because I think that it is important to delineate the heightened visual architecture of these spaces and the specific technologies that contribute to it, where texts do not function as explanations, but rather amount to one of the display's organic building blocks.

Textual Visualizations by Visitors

In light of the pervasive visibility of texts, textual visualizations and remediation in the spaces that these museums offer, it should not be surprising to learn that visitors, too, are actively invited to participate in the production and mediation of public texts. We have seen, in the National Museum of American Jewish History, the museum's digital storytelling screens, where visitors' videotaped personal narratives are visually presented together with texts (which are drawn from the narratives, in the form of word clouds). Indeed, the museums present participatory interfaces through which visitors are invited to participate, *specifically by writing*, and where the texts that they produce are publicly presented and visualized. In other words, visitors' writing becomes instantaneously part of the museum's visual display and design, and their texts join other (historic) texts that are already exhibited.

I now turn to examine two types of visualizations of *visitors*' textual productions. The two illustrations show interactions of different orders between audiences and institutions, where both are predominantly Jewish. The first example is taken from the Ammunition Hill National Commemoration Museum, and revolves

around the site's impressive commemorative visitor book, and the texts (visitor book entries) that visitors inscribe therein. I will first describe the artifact and its context-of-use, and then describe the visual dimensions of visitors' productions. The second example concerns an annual ritual that takes place at the National Museum of American Jewish History on December 25th.

Visual Culture: Entries in a Commemorative Visitor Book

Visitor books are interesting artifacts for folkloric study. They offer space for artistic, yet mundane, productions by visitors, thus capturing some of the language and lore as spontaneously expressed "bottom up." At the Ammunition Hill National Commemoration Museum the visitor book is not located near the museum's exit (as is usually the case in most museums), but rather has its own special hall, which is located well within the museum. The visitor book hall is actually located near the museum's "sacred" and innermost hall, where the names of the Israeli soldiers who died on the Jerusalem front are engraved in gold, and where the commemorative "eternal fire" is constantly flickering. In the visitor book hall itself, a soundtrack repeatedly recites the names and ranks of the dead soldiers in a gloomy male voice. In addition, the hall presents significant symbolic icons in the shape of four very large flags, hanging from the high ceiling right near the visitor book: the flag of the State of Israel, the flag of the Israeli army, the Jerusalem municipality flag, and a flag carrying the logo of the Ammunition Hill site.

These symbols and logos are reiterated inside the book—in and on each of its pages. These pages are large and thick, and are made of parchment (not of paper). They do not have any lines or graphic arrangement for where visitors should write their texts (which allows them a free hand in terms of designing their entries), and they include a vertical column consisting of the four symbols that appear on the flags nearby (figs. 1 and 2). Through this iconic repetition of images, now on the writing surface itself, the semiotics of the book's surfaces are dually tied into the aesthetics and spaces of national commemoration where the book is

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[11] On the visualization of words in word cloud technology see the recent work by linguistic anthropologist Laura M. Ahearn, "Detecting research patterns and paratextual features in AE word clouds, keywords, and titles." *American Ethnologist* 41.1 (2014): 17–30. On digital storytelling in museums see Nancy Thumim,

Self-representation and Digital Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[12] Like the Post-it notes interactive exhibition, the digital storytelling exhibition, too, is available both on-site and online at http://iys.nmajh.org (accessed July 31, 2014).
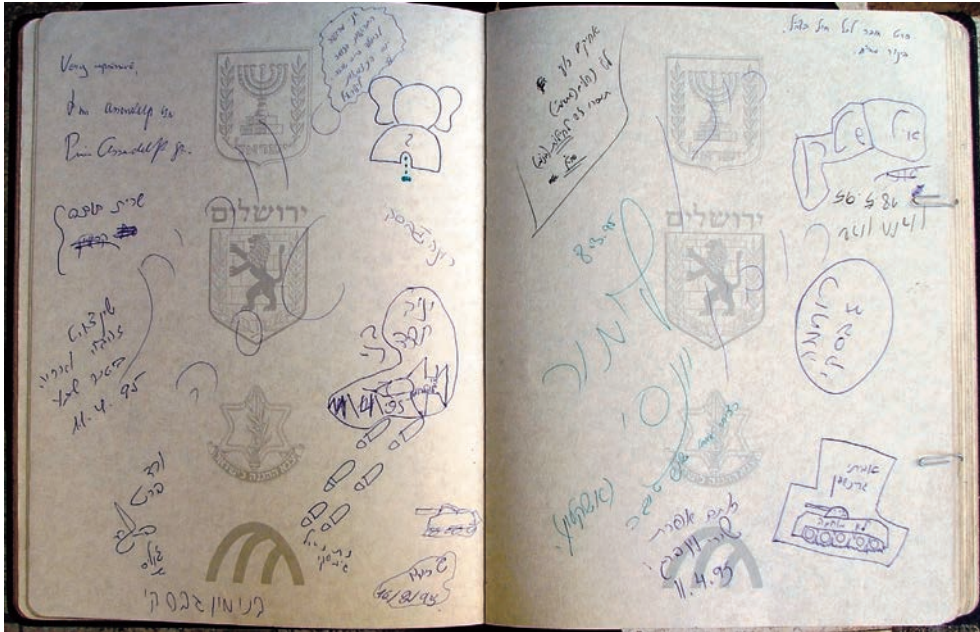
Fig. 1. Pages/Spreads from the Ammunition Hill Visitor Book of 1994–1995, Jerusalem, 2006–2012. Photograph by Chaim Noy.
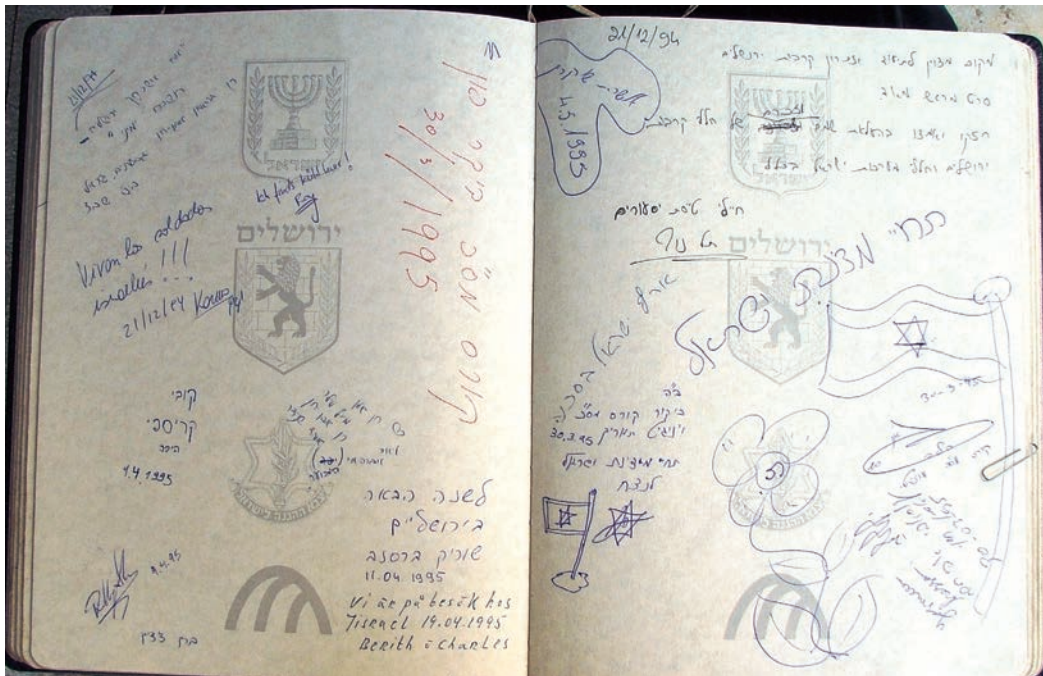

Fig. 2. Pages/Spreads from the Ammunition Hill Visitor Book of 1994–1995, Jerusalem, 2006–2012. Photograph by Chaim Noy.

located and where it functions as a public medium. Eric Laurier and Angus Whyte observe in their ethnography of mundane writing practices—and we must keep in mind that the visitor book, too, is a document—"Documents are composed in and of particular places," and the symbols are means of assuring this semiotic association.[13] The symbols grant the book's surfaces a special aura and a special look, which designate its function. These pages comprise "'special' paper, inviting 'special' writing," in the words of linguistic anthropologist Jan Blommaert.[14]

Another consequence of the presence of the printed symbols on the book's pages is that anything and everything that will be written on these pages will stand in relation to these canonic (or hegemonic) symbols. In other words, just as the many texts in the museum's general display supply the context for visitors' actions, so do the symbols printed in the book supply the visual and semiotic context for visitors' texts. All the entries in the visitor book will be seen near, or read against the visual book-scape of national symbolism. So, on the wide and deeply symbolic pages of the Ammunition Hill commemorative visitor book, visitors' texts are publicly visualized in a highly ideological fashion. The cohesive visual power of national symbolism was noted by art historian Ernst Gombrich, who, while observing the aesthetics of national symbols, states "what is striking is the way in which anything that enters this field of force is becoming formalized and transmuted into a motif."[15] Following Gombrich, and specifically addressing Israeli national symbolism, anthropologists Don Handelman and Leah Shamgar-Handelman show how texts are assembled together with graphic elements that were borrowed from the sphere of national symbolism. They conclude that national emblems are particularly powerful symbols and are "so highly stylized and fixed in design that any and all presence within their visual field acquires significance."[16]

Figures 1 and 2 are images of pages, or more accurately of spreads, from the 1994–1995 visitor book. Perceptively, the spreads show the aforementioned juxtaposition of visitors' spontaneous and improvised texts, on the one hand, with the museum's national symbols and logos, on the other hand. More specifically and subtly, visitors' texts are arranged close to and largely to the sides of the vertical column of symbols. Although a few of the texts and the signatures are written over the printed symbols, the general design of visitors' writing evinces a number of entries (4–6) on each side of the vertical column. A kind of symmetry is visible, where the entries are arranged vertically to the sides of the printed symbols. Also, the spreads in Figures 1 and 2 show the lively collection of visitors' visualized "voices"—one may almost hear the visual entries (as mentioned, in the background a continuous recitation of the dead soldiers' names is clearly audible). The visitors are "speaking" and expressing themselves through the essentially visual means of orthography on spaces that are made to be visually consumed.

In addition, the visual design that is reveled in these pages (figs. 1 and 2) is essentially a collective design. It amounts to a visual polyphony in that it conveys the traces that visitors chose to leave in the book in the form of handwritten autographs and text. I stress the point that the layout is visually polyphonic because in terms of content, the majority of the texts in the book repeat and (re)confirm the site's conservative national-militaristic ideology. In this regards the texts are significantly more monophonic than polyphonic. But because the texts are inscribed by different visitors, they possess different orthography, color, size, location, and so on. Finally, note the number of graphic images that accompany the texts in these spreads. This finding initially surprised me: nearly half of the book's entries include at least one sort of graphic sign (which could be anything from an inflated exclamation mark to a curved underline), and half of the book's spreads evince at least one drawing. This suggests not a contextual or circumstantial multimodality, but one that has to do with the actual design of visitor-produced texts.[17]

The visual elements, which complement and augment the text, and are sometimes offered in its stead,

[13] Eric Laurier and Angus Whyte, "'I Saw You': Searching for Lost Love via Practices of Reading, Writing and Responding," *Sociological Research Online* 6 (May, 2001), paragraph 2.2.

[14] Jan Blommaert, "Writing as a Problem: African Grassroots Writing, Economies of Literacy, and Globalization." *Language in Society* 33.5 (2004), 654.

[15] Ernst. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1984), 233.

[16] Don Handelman and Leah Shamgar-Handelman, "Aesthetics Versus Ideology in National Symbolism—the Creation of the Emblem of Israel." *Public Culture* 5.3 (1993), 436.

[17] The former type of multimodality has been in use in the literature on writing studies (in the US) for some time, while texts' inherent multimodality has productively emerged during the last decade or so. For the former, see Paul Prior, "From speech genres to mediated multimodal genre systems: Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and

serve a number of functions. First, texts in museums are relatively short, even telegraphic (an average word length of an entry in this visitor book is sixteen words), and are made to be consumed (and produced) as part of the routine of a time-constricted visit. In this context, images are helpful because they are semiotically condensed and can convey meanings without need of much (or any) verbal elaboration. Also, akin to the way visitors' textually (re)cite the national narrative that the site narrates, visitors can do the same visually by (re)producing the site's key images and symbols. In other words, visitors' in situ writing activity need not be limited to the linguistic modality (or code), but can take the shape of images and of bi-modal and multi-modal productions consisting of hybrids of texts, graphics, and symbolic drawings. As for the latter, the images that are most commonly drawn are expectedly those of the flag of Israel (two occurrences are visible on the right page in fig. 2), the Star of David, and images of weaponry and warfare (a combat airplane and two tanks appear in fig. 1). Occasionally, more personal and idiosyncratic images are also sketched: such are the little elephant on the upper right side of the left page in fig. 1, and the large flower on the bottom of the right page in fig. 2. Other common "lighter" and less canonic images include balloons and clouds. In these cases, the personal meanings of images, such as the elephant and the flower, join in on the array of visual national symbols and the individual contribution is visually enmeshed in the visual order of the state.

The text accompanying the elephant drawing in figure 1 was written by a female visitor: "I feel (*margisha*) a tremendous excitement with being born on a day such as this. The Israeli Independence Day. Malli." (The entry was written around May 5th, 1995, my translation). Oftentimes, romantic and more light and playful images, such as this one, are drawn by female visitors. These images are usually colored (red and pink, sometimes green) and are produced with a "cute" informal handwriting. Visitors signing near drawings of national symbols are mostly male. In fig. 1, on the right page on the lower right-hand side, a male name (Amitai) is signed above and near an image of a tank. The visitor's name and the tank are enclosed in a line (perhaps in order to ensure that the connection between the name and the image of the tank is not lost). Inside the image, two additional words are inscribed: *lo milhama* (no war). These words carry some of the meanings of public graffiti, because they are placed on the side of the body of the tank (the side that is facing us, the readers/viewers). In fig. 2, on the lower left side of the right page, the text written near the drawing of the Israeli flag is this: "*B.H.* [*Be'ezrat Hashem*, acronym for 'God willing'], a visit of the General Sports Instructors class, the Wingate [National Centre for Physical Education]. Date 30.3.95. Forever lives the State of Israel." Again, a more masculine authorship (and text) accompanies the drawing of a national symbol. (Note that a failed attempt to draw the Magen David shape appears near the flag. This is a trace of the first attempt, and a reminder of the skills and literacies required for drawing and writing even seemingly simple and small texts and images, such as visitor book entries). These images-cum-texts, or vice versa, texts-cum-images suggest a gendered aestheticization and visualization of visitors' contribution.

The last function that the entries' visual elements accomplish concerns a competition that exists for viewers'/readers' attention. With an average of 1,000 entries per book and about ten entries per spread, the larger, more colorful and more visually attractive entries can capture the attention of readers more quickly. This, too, may account for the perfusion of images in this visitors' book and for its highly visual nature, which is partly a result of a deliberate effort on behalf of the writing-visitors. We are reminded that resources, such as visitors' time, are limited and the rules that hold for the museum display (saliency, visual attractiveness) also hold for the display within the pages of the visitor book.

Being _____ at Christmas

The second visual-textual interface I will discuss concerns a writing ritual that takes place at the National Museum of American Jewish History annually on Christmas day. The ritual takes place as part of a day-long event that is called "Being _____ at Christmas," and is offered as an "annual day of family fun." The museum considers this to be one of its "signature events," which has been running for more than three decades.[18] Since the museum's inauguration in its new location and

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the question of writing," in *Genre in a Changing World*, ed. Charles Bazerman, Adair Bonini, and Deborah Figueiredo. (Fort Collins, Colo.: The WAC Clearinghouse, 2009); and for the latter see

Gunther R. Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[18] See "Being [] at Christmas," accessed August 2, 2014, http://www.nmajh.org/CalendarEvent.aspx?eventid=129.

Fig. 3. Event logo, *Textually Visualizing Jewishness at Christmas*, National Museum of American Jewish History, http://www.nmajh.org, accessed December 23, 2014. Photograph by Chaim Noy.

structure in 2010, the "Being _____ at Christmas" day is the museum's single busiest day of the year, when it receives around 1,000–1,300 visitors. Also since 2010, the event's title was slightly reworded: it traditionally included the word Jewish (Being Jewish at Christmas), and in order to be "more general and accepting" the word "Jewish" was removed in favor of a dashed line—representing a blank space to be filled.[19] The annual event is sponsored by the Robert Saligman Jewish Heritage Fund and appeals mainly to Jewish families and communities residing in the greater Philadelphia area.[20] The event is successful at least partly because the museum steps into the cultural lacuna concerning "what to do during Christmas." For many Jewish communities and families, the preferred activity, which has become a tradition, is going to the movies and dining in Chinese restaurants, which are two types of businesses that are open on Christmas Day. The museum, too, is open, and hence the impressive attendance by predominantly Jewish visitors.[21] Throughout the day the museum offers family-friendly cultural events and activities with a Jewish flavor, including a stand-up comedy act, clay and other creative workshops for children (with designs involving Jewish symbols), storytelling events, and more. Informal lunch is offered, and the museum's permanent exhibitions and galleries are open.

One of the activities that is unique to this day, which invites visitors' contribution and participation, entails signing colorful notes on a highly visible board located near the museum's exit. This installation and the associated activity give the day its title: "Being _____ at Christmas", as well as its visual logo (fig. 3).[22]

The "Being _____ at Christmas" logo discursively frames the day in terms that are "more general and accepting," as well as more politically correct. Importantly, the logo also marks an invitation for audience participation, where the blank single-word slot that occupies the logo's visual center is a discursive space stimulating textual imagination. The instructions to the right of the logo invite visitors to "fill in your own blank," and thus participate, through writing, in framing and publicly defining what this day means to the visitor-writer. Indeed, the text to the right of the logo goes on to offer seven words and terms (Dov Noy would have noted the number seven!) that are suggested as examples: "Snowy. Jewish. Happy. Caring. Generous. Family. Creative." These words designate a very broad range of potential semiotic categories, conveyed through nouns and adjectives. The adjective "Jewish" is not missing from the list, but it is offered as one possible category. By offering a space for the audience to fill and thus to complete the event's logo, the audience is instructed as to how to use the installation, allowing self-definitions produced by on-site participatory writing activity.

Inside the museum, the actual installation is simple and consists of a large white vertical board, at the center of

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[19] Interview with Emily August, Director of Public Programs, (December 25, 2013).

[20] My observations concur with museum's survey data, which indicates that some 80% of the visitors self-identify as being Jewish. On the museum's second most popular day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, only about a half of the visitors self-identify as being Jewish.

[21] The number of visitors during this day exceeds the number of visitors on the Martin Luther King Jr. Day, when the entrance to the museum is free.

[22] The logo appears on the museum's webpage (accessed December 23, 2014, http://www.nmajh.org) a few weeks before the event.

Fig. 4. The 'Being _____ at Christmas' board (detail), National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, 2014. Photograph by Chaim Noy.

which the event's logo is printed, and on which visitors' colorful notes are placed (fig. 4). On a table nearby, notes and markers are offered (fig. 5). The installation is conspicuously located right near the museum's exit (where visitor books are traditionally located), where it cannot be missed by visitors who are on their way out of the museum.

During the course of the "Being _____ at Christmas" day, the board attracts attention and activity on behalf of museum visitors and staff, and on average, one-hundred and ten notes are posted on it. I was surprised to see that the first posts on the board appeared in the morning, shortly after the museum opened. These posts were prepared by museum volunteers, and when I asked the museum's Programs Director why this is done, the reply had an apologetic tone: "so people [visitors] would know what to do," and one of the volunteers offered "these are samples."[23] Then, mainly during the afternoon, when visitors are on their way out, children and families who participate

in the writing activity usually filled the board. Like other museum activities offered on this day, writing notes and posting them is a truly collaborative family activity, which is sometimes initiated by children and sometimes by their parents (and grandparents). The latter usually ask the young "what do you feel?" and the children write down the short answer on the note. On a number of occasions I saw young writers regret writing, such as in the case where a ten-year-old boy from Philadelphia threw away the note he wrote, saying to his father "I messed up my handwriting."

As the board gets crowded with notes, the visual impression is of a vivid, Jewish, textual space. This impression is accomplished by the salient location of the board and its colorfulness, as well as by the relatively large number of notes that have the word "Jewish" inscribed on them (or related terms, such as "Jewmazing" and "Jew-nificent!"), by a "Jewish" vocabulary ("a mensch" and "Oy Vey"), by multiple Magen David drawings and drawings of men with

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[23] Inviting the museum's volunteers to partake in the ritual, and more so to be the first to post on the board, might also serve

organizational functions. It is a way of showing gratitude to the volunteers' work, specifically in regards to the crowded day ahead.

Fig. 5. Writing supplies: colorful papers and markers, National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, 2014. Photograph by Chaim Noy.

kippah and pe'ot, by signing with recognizably Jewish names and surnames ("Levi"), and by writing in Hebrew ("חנוכה אוהב, אני", "שלום", "!!היהודיה" ["I love Hanukkah," "Shalom," "The Jewess!!"], seen in fig. 4,)—and of course by the multi-modal combinations of these elements.

Every year, visitors deliberately post a few notes outside the space delineated by the board's surface. These notes are posted a little under and a little above the board. I mention this little ritual (within a ritual), because it adds to the overall visual impression of Jewish textuality and identity, as it physically extends it beyond the limits of the writing surface. The notes that are added outside the board are special in content: they are humorous and reflexive, and index the very act of writing in situ.[24] On Christmas 2013, the three notes on top of the board included these texts (in ascending order): "TOP," "WAY TOP!!" and "WAY, WAY TOP," while the words inscribed on the two notes posted under the board were (in descending order): "BOTTOM" and "DOUBLE BOTTOM."

Fig. 6 shows a father lifting his daughter so she can post the note she wrote above (all) other notes on top of the board. Her two sisters, a few visitors and a few volunteers are observing enjoyably. These notes are posted outside the box, as it were, and I understand their recurrence as a performance that relates to the notion of "being Jewish" by way of thinking outside the box or being a (Jewish) smart aleck. The image in the figure 6 captures a moment of the actual posting of a note—a moment where two visitors (father and young daughter) are collaborating in the physical construction of the visual arrangement of the board. A minute or so earlier, the mother suggested that they'd write, and the daughter (the youngest of three) wanted to post the note, and the father suggested its location and content (indicating the topmost note)—and used his physical strength to lift the girl so high. This is a collaborative (familial) production through and through, which contributes to the overall collective visual arrangement of the "Being _____ at Christmas" design.

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[24] In the terms suggested by of Roman Jakobson, "Closing statement: linguistics and poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), 350–377. At stake are metalingual (or reflexive) functions.

Fig. 6. *Reaching high:* "*WAY, WAY TOP*," National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, 2014. Photograph by Chaim Noy.

The final display of the "Being _____ at Christmas" installation is highly visual, combining texts, colors and graphic images in a way that is multimodal in a twofold fashion.[25] As with the commemorative visitor book at the Ammunition Hill, multimodality here concerns both the contextual-circumstantial features of the object(s) *and* visitors' actual textual production. Yet compared with the commemorative visitor book, the latter kind of multimodality, the one that emerges from visitors' textual production, is limited. The notes, though multiple and colorful, offer very limited space and possibilities for writing: if the average length of a visitor book entry is sixteen words, the average length of texts written on the notes is two words. This is a (sub-)telegraphic mode of communication, or better even: pseudo-communication. It allows only a bare minimum when it comes to visitors' and audiences'

input in the shape of voices and visual traces. In addition, the notes system allows the museum's staff better control over visitors' publicly expressed contents, and every year a number of notes that are judged "irrelevant" are removed from the board (such as notes that made reference to pop culture icon, Justin Bieber). This action is pursued easily and does not leave traces. The removal or deletion of texts from visitor books is a different matter: it is more difficult, it usually leaves traces (marks of deletion) and in all the museums I studied the curators consistently opposed any kind of censorship on what visitors write in them.

The colorful "Being _____ at Christmas" board satisfies the museum's expectations and needs: it offers a vivid, audience-contributed exhibition, it visually captures and portrays a collective of (mainly Jewish) visitors, and it offers a festive and enjoyable—the word

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[25] I note that Christmas celebrations are characterized by a particularly salient visual element and have been studied productively as a visual tradition. See Russell W. Belk, "Materialism and the making of the modern American Christmas," in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1993), 75–104. The question of the corresponding Jewish visual tradition and public visibility consists one of the subtexts of the museal event, and may account, too, for the predominantly visual and "high-spirited" nature of this installation.

"merry" comes to mind—activity on Christmas day. Visitors supply a variety of words and symbols, which they inscribed and draw on the notes, and which is their way of declaring who they are on Christmas day: "Jewish," "smiley," "happy," "together," "warm," "thankful," and even: "Questioning the wisdom of having a second child"—are examples. Yet regardless of what they write, it is clear where they are and what they are doing at Christmas, namely visiting the National Museum of American Jewish History and partaking in Jewish writing and signing ritual (indeed, on one of the posted notes a visitor wrote reflexively and humorously the word: "here"). The handwritten texts are indexical in that they mark a physical association with their writers, and they tell all those involved—the visitors who write, the visitors who observe, and the museum staff and volunteers—that the writers have truly been at the museum on Christmas day. In other words, the inscriptions' subtext is not merely "I was here," which rests at the core of all visitor book inscriptions, but more specifically: "Being writer/visitor-at-the-National-Museum-of-American-Jewish-History at Christmas."[26]

Conclusions

I was propelled toward the ethnographic study of museums by an interest in the visual (re)presentation and visualization of Jewish texts. In the museums I studied, the most dominant and widespread fabric of display was in fact textual, whereby texts served a number of semiotic functions, over and above their traditional role of supplying information about the items on display and conferring their value and authenticity. The interesting turn towards audience participation and visual-cum-textual contributions had emerged because these museums also offer writing interfaces for visitors. These comprise of highly visible surfaces, and what visitors write thereon becomes instantaneously an "authentic" part of the museum's textual display—that is, a(nother) textual artifact from the recent, rather than distant, past. In both the Ammunition Hill National Commemoration Museum and in the National Museum of American Jewish History, texts on display are often multimodal and hybrid, combining different semiotic modalities and codes. This multimodality is itself multiple, and concerns the spatial and physical context and materiality of the texts' representations,

on the one hand, and the actual vivid design of the inscriptions themselves, on the other.

The museums differ in their textual multimodalities. In these two heritage museums, varying visualizations are institutionally offered and, correspondingly, various textual/visual contributions are pursued by their audiences. First, the two institutions' Jewish agendas are different: to strengthen ethno-national identity and center it around the national-military complex, at Ammunition Hill, and to celebrate Jewish individuals and families in the Northeastern United States by participating in a festive communal event, at the National Museum of American Jewish History. The Israeli commemoration museum holds a conservative-nationalist agenda that advocates the glorification of national symbolism and war-related death and heroism, while the Philadelphia museum is liberal, and holds a progressive agenda that narrates the history, livelihood, integration and accomplishments of Jewish individuals and communities in the United States. These agendas are different and even contradictory, and the multimodal contexts for visitors' participation differ dramatically. They take the shape of commemorative, symbolic and somber visitor book, in one site, versus colorful and lively surface(s) in the other, each with its own set of texts and icons.

Second, relatedly, these museums offer and invite opportunities to write in different mood-scapes: the solemnness surrounding the visitor book in Jerusalem versus the festive atmosphere surrounding the day-long event at the Philadelphia museum, and with it the cheerfulness associated with Christmas. Visitors' visual variations correspond with these identity mood-scapes, and while humor is legitimate and in fact common in the writing ritual of the "Being ____ at Christmas" event, at the Ammunition Hill humor is not present. In addition to the lighter and more amusing texts, such as "with Lyla," "hungry" and "Questioning the wisdom of having a second child," that are inscribed at the Philadelphia museum, there are also those notes I referred to as the Jewish smart-aleck texts (like the "DOUBLE BOTTOM") that are physically positioned outside the space of the board, or reflexive-humorous text ("here"). At Ammunition Hill, visitors' texts are not playful and are not positioned outside the book (they don't evince a kind of Jewish smart aleck performance). In Jerusalem, emotional and ideological texts that seem

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[26] See, Noy, *Thank You for Dying*, 73–92.

"lighter" only serve the museum's discursive agenda in further mobilizing and colonizing mundane semiotic texts and icons under national symbolism.

In all these cases, we may say that multimodality suggests that the people or the audiences are seeing the "voices": "וְכָל-הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת," "and all of the audience/people sees the voices." That is, I am not only interested in the text's visual elements (or the textual elements of the visual sphere), but also in practices, specifically visual practices (seeing, gazing). Not only representations but also social actions that people publicly engage in: the texts are read in as much as they are gazed upon and seen; and the texts are written in as much as they are sketched and drawn.

Returning to Dov Noy's holistic, integrated, and subversive vision of folklore and the little Museum of Ethnology and Folklore in Haifa. For Noy, folklore or tradition (*masoret*), is at the crux of culture and is essentially composite. Texts and materiality come together to comprise a narrative lore, a memory that is collectively embodied, evincing no organic distinctions between modalities. I recall my father illustrating this often by pointing at the folkloric elements concealed in the biblical text (the epitome of texts), that had to do with rhythm, sound (alliteration), and the embodied performance of the Genesis stories before they were inscribed and canonized. Folklore is sensuous in that its wisdom resides in the senses and in the moments of its performance, and this is an important lesson that museums teach with their prominently visual displays. The Museum of Ethnology and Folklore in Haifa embodied the idea of having the stories and the artifacts stored together, under the same roof and within the same (semiotic) space. They weren't different materials, but perhaps different access points for those seeking to engage with folklore.