



'My Holocaust experience was great!': Entitlements for participation in museum media

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study brings together research on audiences' participation in the media, and an up-close exploration of communicative entitlement of and for such participation. Viewing visitor books as situated, public media, the study asks two related questions: how museums and institutions that employ this medium frame participation of 'ordinary' people in the public sphere, and how, in return, visitors variously articulate their participation. The article first examines the context in which visitor books mediate participation, and how museums frame them so as to invite 'authentic' expressions by 'ordinary' visitors. The analysis depicts a taxonomy of participation, evincing five types of entitlements found in visitor book texts. These entitlements shed light on how participation in the public sphere is both understood and pursued (performed). The article responds to calls for empirically rich studies on mediation practices and processes. It adds to the literature on communicative entitlements by examining an under-researched hitherto public medium and by illuminating a shift from talk-in-interaction to the context of text-in-interaction.

Keywords

Communicative entitlement, entitlements, heritage, media, moral discourse, museums, public sphere, texts, writing

Introduction

One of the prolific lines of research exploring the interface between media and the public pursues discursive research into how media institutions afford participation and how it is

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actually pursued by audiences (Dori-Hacohen, 2012b; Hutchby, 2001; Montgomery, 2001, 2007: chapters 6 and 7, 2010; Myers, 2000; Scannell, 1991, 2000, 2001; Thornborrow, 2001). These studies address the fact that, increasingly, media incorporates audience participation and representation in its broadcasting, ranging from media interviews to user-generated content on the web. Typically, these studies focus on the ways 'ordinary' people frequently access public spheres in radio call-ins and televised interviews (broadcast talk). While these studies do not usually employ the term 'mediation', they are informative in this regard because by attending to discursive detail and interactional nuances, they reveal the complex and constructed nature of participation, and the authenticity and spontaneity with which ordinary or lay people imbue mass media. Furthermore, this line of research does not so much focus on *what* audiences are saying as on their *communicative entitlements* or on the demonstrated relevance audiences have in relation to the public events they talk about. In other words, these studies delineate the preconditions for participation in broadcast talk and for accessing the public sphere.

Seeking to enrich these empirical and theoretical discussions, in this article I look at an intriguing medium, namely *visitor books* (VBs), and the institutional context in which it operates and mediates *vox populi*, namely, museums. I see museums as media institutions because the very notion of the museum is mediational, and because museums' spaces are filled with various analogue and (recently also) digital media. This is especially true of heritage museums, where the past – that foreign land that is not accessible to our senses – must be effectively mediated (Cameron and Kenderdine, 2007; Henning, 2006). In this context, VBs function as institutional media that afford and shape access to the public sphere in the form of displaying visitors' comments. In studying what visitors write in a heritage VB, I turn from *broadcast talk* to *broadcast text* and more generally from *talk-in-interaction* to *text-in-interaction* (Noy, 2009, 2015a, 2015b).

In addition, I am responding to calls for empirical studies of participatory media practices. Among many others, Sonia Livingstone (2009) suggests that further studies of mediation can 'usefully highlight the artifacts and practices used to communicate, [and can] more readily invite analysis of the social and organizational arrangements through which mediation is instituted' (p. 12). This study of mediation adds to the literature on communicative entitlements by examining an under-researched hitherto public medium (VBs), and more generally by adding the context of *text-in-interaction* to our discussions of *talk-in-interaction*.

Media in museums

Despite the prevalence of VBs, or perhaps because of it, they are infrequently studied. During the last decade or so, research in the fields of media and communication studies (Noy, 2008a, 2015a; Conley and Mullen, 2008), discourse analysis (Stamou and Paraskevolpoulos, 2004), and museum and tourism studies (Macdonald, 2005; Noy, 2008b; Reid, 2005; Silva, 2010) has started to shed light on this taken-for-granted medium. These studies depict VBs as on-site public media, which possess distinct affordances and allow particular forms of participation. Through examining this medium and the texts it 'broadcasts', I ask first, how the medium is offered and framed institutionally as a platform that grants access to the public sphere, and second, how the public

actually participates in and through this medium. I am specifically intrigued by the *communicative entitlements* associated with this activity, and by the ways audiences frame themselves when partaking in public discussion. Susan Reid (2000) observes that texts in VBs are ‘a form of role-performance or self-alignment’ (p. 117), to which I add that visitors’ public contributions should be read as *retellings* of the core ideological heritage narrative, in the words of and from the perspective of the visitors (Noy, 2008a, 2008b). Nancy Thumim (2009) concludes her discussion of the museum–visitors interaction by highlighting its relation to the study of mediation: ‘exactly *how* the public is to be represented continues to be debated, and this debate, I suggest, turns on the question of *mediation*’ (p. 618, italics added by the author henceforth).

The institution’s invitation that visitors ‘speak for themselves’ is set in order to emotionally and experientially authenticate and validate the museum narration. This authentication process touches on the public sphere, intending to make ‘emotions or personal experiences part, not of individual, but of public consciousness’ (Montgomery, 2010: 189). This explains why museums offering VBs typically pay special attention to their design and presentation (more on this later; cf. Macdonald, 2005; Noy, 2015a). As with broadcast media, the paradox is that institutional efforts go into the design and operation of media intended to shape how visitors communicate spontaneously and authentically.

The VB I studied and to which I now turn is located at the Florida Holocaust Museum (FHM). The FHM is a typical US Holocaust museum located in St Petersburg, Florida. It portrays the roots of medieval European anti-Semitism, moving chronologically through the events leading to the rise of the Nazi Party and the Holocaust. Visitors are mostly US citizens, local school and college students (on field trips and assignments), as well as out-of-state and international tourists visiting Florida. Although the VB is located in a Holocaust museum, I do not focus on Holocaust representations per se. Rather, the relevant institutional context is the moral mediation of events of the past and the construction of heritage. Heritage is viewed as ‘a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 7), and while heritage is culturally perceived as ‘residing’ in the past, the past is made to exist *through mediation* in the moment of the present or in ‘the time of the visitor’ (as Blair and Michel, 2000: 47, put it in their study on memorials).

Texts and media at the Florida holocaust museum

We should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice. (Raymond Williams, 1991: 422)

The first thing I observe at the FHM is that the past is mediated here by offering a *rich discursive display*: the museum halls and spaces are replete with handwritten documents, which are the most popular category of items on display. The documents include personal letters and journals that were kept by Jews before and during the Holocaust, copies of German documents that describe Nazi operations, and holy Jewish scripts. Multi-layered and multimodal texts are presented repeatedly: the actual historic documents or facsimiles thereof; museum labels produced in cursive fonts to resemble handwriting; projections of handwritten texts; animated, graphite-like texts simulating children’s

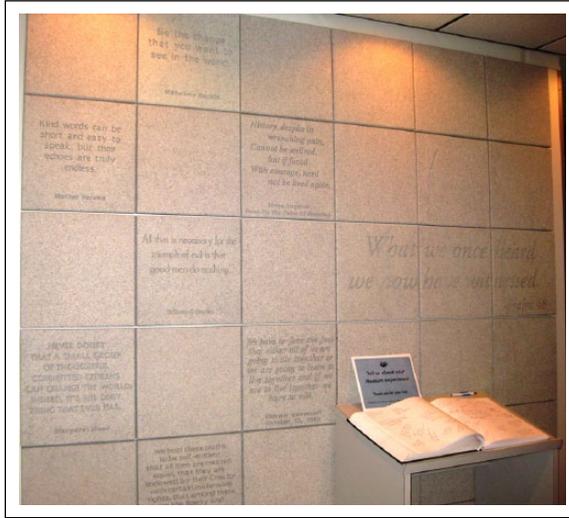


Figure 1. Textual context: Engraved wall, sign, and visitor book (image by the author).

post-card writing; and more. These handwritten and handwritten-like textual artifacts are authenticating exhibits, which instill the exhibition with an embodied (indexical) connection to the historic events of their writing. In light of this, it is not surprising that the museum holds a VB, which is in effect *part and parcel* of the institution's richly textual environment and means of mediation.

I now turn to address the more immediate context in which the book is situated and where it operates. The museum's VB is a large and heavy volume containing 150 wide white pages (each 13×13 inches). Its function is framed by three elements, the first of which is its location: the book is located near the museum's exit, which is a typical location for VBs, where they serve as commenting platforms available for visitors approaching the end of their visit. At the FHM the book is positioned so that visitors leaving the museum *must* see it. There, it functions like a ringing telephone, initiating a 'summons-answer sequence' in which visitors may or may not engage. Mediation emerges because those who write in this book, as in all VBs, are not directly interacting with their audiences. Whether their implied readers/audiences are museum employees, historical figures who populate the narrated events, spiritual or religious entities, or future visitors (to mention a few categories of ratified addressees, as I have shown elsewhere; Noy, 2015a, 2015b), the people are absent—and therefore imagined—at the moment of communication.

The second element concerns the wall that rises right behind the book, which is a specially designed discursive surface (Figure 1). Idioms and moral sayings are engraved on the wall, such as 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing. Edmond Burke', and in large letters, 'What we once heard, we now have witnessed. Psalms 48'. In this way, visitors who write or read in the book must literally face the writing on the wall, where short and optimistic idioms offer types of messages that

is these discursive and communicative qualities that are essential to deciphering how participation is pursued. Writing about entitlement in broadcast talk, Montgomery (2001) notes that when people partake in the media they are publicly ‘judged by their capacity to project such communicative entitlements’ (p. 451). Furthermore, as we learned from Goffman (1981), the projected, public nature of entitlements is a specific case within the larger public nature of footing (alignment/positionality) and frame shifts in social interaction. Following Goffman, Stephen Levinson (1988) expands the concept of footing by drawing a connection between footing and participation, noting that ‘participation is a *demonstrative social role*, where each kind of participant role requires a particular kind of *display* by its incumbent’ (p. 178, my emphasis). Put together, Goffman, Levinson, and Montgomery make the point that participation is not pursued simply or unreflexively. In fact, participatory entitlements are not abstract or mental features lying in realms of cognition, but vital social elements at the heart of mediation. When access to media is granted, entitlement for participation needs to be publicly performed and confirmed. The taxonomy I present immediately highlights these projected entitlements, or visitor-positionings, as displayed in the VB’s broadcast text.

The 18 extracts that follow illustrate a *participatory discursive taxonomy* consisting of five categories, which are presented according to the number of times the categories are instanced, in descending order (the larger ones first). In the first category, participation entails entitlement to a moral experience; in the second category, participation involves the expression of commissive speech acts (defined later); and in the third category, participation entails three subcategories of non-‘ordinary’ visitors: regulars, experts, and survivors’ descendants. Texts are taken from the VB presented in the museum during part of my ethnographic stint there, which took place between November 2012 and July 2014. The book contains approximately 2749 texts (a relatively large corpus in terms of VBs), with an average length of 16.3 words per text (similar to findings by Noy, 2009: 425, and Stamou and Paraskevolpoulos, 2003: 38, who report averages of 19 and 13 words per text, respectively). Over 97% of the texts are written in English. Due to funding limitations, the analysis rests on approximately a third of the book’s texts (960 texts), which were randomly selected.

‘My Holocaust experience was great!’: Experience as participatory entitlement

The largest category, comprising 51% of the overall number of texts in the book, includes texts of which entitlement concerns the powerful *moral experience* visitors have undergone during, and as a result of, their visit to the museum. In these texts, the term ‘experience’ pivotally characterizes the type of text that visitors are writing, tying it to the time and place of its enunciation. The frequent mention of visitors’ experience bears qualitative implications as it becomes a standard, an entitlement norm of participation associated with this medium. This normative character corresponds, in turn, with the way participation is framed institutionally – recall that the sign near the book asks visitors to tell their ‘Museum experience’.¹

[1] My Holocaust/ experience was great/ It was very/ interesting and made me want/ to learn more./ – Taylor/ Jones/ (3/20/13)/ [drawing of a heart]

[2] “I had a great experience/ & learned so much. I/ appreciate everything/ so much more.”
Thank you, love/ [unclear signature]

[3] This experience has made/ me realize that I am lucky to be/ here because I am free/ Hannah
Rancart/ Saint Petersburg, Florida

[4] my experience here is definitely/ life changing

Texts that tell of visitors’ experiences attest that something powerful has happened to them during the visit, and that although it is not observable, it is meaningful and of consequence. Importantly, it is also articulable, and the mental or ‘inner’ state of having an experience can be described and elaborated by those (and only by those) who visit the museum. ‘Experience’ is a multifunctional key-word that is tied to social roles that visitors demonstratively occupy and to the actions that they perform through the texts they write. In extract [1], for instance, ‘experience’ is the subject of the first sentence where it is mentioned together with a first-person possessive pronoun. The text characteristically attests to *this* visitor’s experience, which only he can elaborate and evaluate. Visitors are entitled to communicate this through the VB, which means that it is what they can, and morally should, publicly narrate. This museum-bestowed experience is highly valued: it is ‘great’ and ‘very interesting’. It has moved the visitor to ‘want to learn more’, which further confirms the power of the experience as a transformative moral event. Like the experience, so are its consequences described in reference to first-person (‘made me’), suggesting a personal experience that leads to individual commitment. The agency engulfed in personal experience emerges, because it is not the visit per se that ignited a wish for future engagement in the Holocaust – or the museum/exhibition – but ‘experience’. Likewise, in extracts [2]–[4] experience assumes an agentic effect in propelling self-change: visitors’ experiences are responsible for bestowing a new and broad view of ‘everything’ [2], a new personal realization [3], and a general ‘life changing’ moment [4].²

Addressing radio call-in programs, Montgomery (2001) describes the communicative entitlement of ordinary people who participate in the public sphere ‘simply to be the voice of experience’ (p. 451). ‘Speaking from experience’, he concludes, ‘is a communicative entitlement in its own right’ (p. 452). Similarly, it is the *authenticity of expression* as performed by ordinary museum visitors that entitles them to write in the book and depicts the positive experiential and moral transformation they have undergone/are undergoing. Writing in situ is itself part of the public activities entailed in the visitors’ role and includes witnessing the Holocaust exhibit, acknowledging the suffering, and admitting to the sobering effect that the visit imbues (Hutchby, 2001; Peters, 2001).

Visitors use a plethora of adjectives to qualify and evaluate their experience and to elaborate its consequences: truly unforgettable, moving and touching, extraordinary, fantastic, rewarding, eye-opening, incredible, very fun and cool, hard and amazing, amazing learning, mind-blowing, very rewarding and enlightening, sad but wonderful, inspirational, very touching, super awesome, life-changing. This variation highlights visitors’ participatory literacy, distinguishes individual experiences (visitors are not an

‘undifferentiated mass/public’ but individuals), and ascertains visitors’ entitlement to publicly communicate their feelings.

Sociologist Eva Illouz (1997, 2007) offers a critical appreciation of the cultural value of ‘experience’, describing the preoccupation with individual experience as part of consumer culture and ‘emotional capitalism’ in the United States. She draws a connection between experience and emotion and argues that both are tied to the advent of public institutions (museums and mass media are good examples) and democracy, and to the ‘moral force of the idea of individualism’ (Illouz, 2007: 1). In her analysis, the transformative power of personal experience and the notion of public discourse are a uniquely modern amalgamation. Illouz’s ideas inspired studies of museums’ audiences and how they choose to ‘speak for themselves’. Thumim’s (2010, 2012) discussions of museums and visitors incorporate Illouz’s views and highlight the modern origins of individual experience. These origins rest in part on the *public-democratic function* of experience associated with individual voice and cultural participation. Illouz’s ideas are incorporated into museum audiences and participation studies because they emerge both in regards to the capitalist commercialization of experience and to the *mediated public sphere*.

Returning to extract [1], I note the text mixes the Holocaust with its representation, resulting in the visitor’s own, seemingly unmediated, ‘Holocaust experience’. The visitor writing this text correctly perceives that personal experience needs to be publicly attested, that a compliment is due, and that the text should be tied to the museum (showing knowledge of what the exhibition narrates). The ingredients for desirable participation are all there, yet they are oddly put together. This mix-up is telling in terms of mediation, because it foregrounds the museum’s role in inspiring ‘experience’. Indeed, media scholars often make the case that media institutions – presently the museum – attempt to generate an *unmediated* experience, providing a powerful authentic and ‘first-hand impression’ (Montgomery, 2007).

‘We should NEVER FORGET!!’: Commissive speech acts as participatory entitlement

In most of the other texts in the book (38% of the book’s texts), participatory entitlement concerns visitors’ expression of moral commitment to the remembrance of the Holocaust, usually accompanied by positive evaluation of the museum’s moral narration. As active remembrance evokes the notion of time, these texts bring home the idea that while the museum describes the past, it is also a heritage institution and therefore faces the future. Past and future are connected by visitors’ speech acts, which are performed during the visit as well as being as part of it.

[5] Wonderful./ we will not forget &/ we will do something.

[6] Always Remember./ Never Forget./ Stefan Moskaluk

[7] 8-16-13/ Thank you for keeping/ the memory of those/ who suffered and died/ alive. We should/ NEVER FORGET!!/ Seryle and Steve [unclear surname]

[8] The opposite of/ love is not hate/ – / It is indifference / Always to remember/ 1 April 2014

[9] I will BE/ A WillING WiTNESS/ 12-2012/ Linda Millard

Visitors who approach the end of their visit in heritage sites communicate that they know and can (re)cite relevant moral maxims (Noy, 2008a, 2015a). Whether to ‘never forget’, to recognize the ‘educational’ value of the visit, or to commit to ‘doing something’ in the future, this is what visitors to the FHM are discursively pursuing. Some texts are more elaborate [7], others are schematic ([5] ‘something’), and a few directly quote texts that appear on the wall near the VB (extract [8] cites an idiom that is attributed to Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel). Yet the texts all share an understanding of what occupying the position of a participant-visitor demands.

This type of entitlement is accomplished through expression of *commissive speech acts* that state visitors’ promises and resolutions for future action – usually embodying remembrance (or, conversely, to not forget/never forgetting). These speech acts are *text acts* that accomplish participation which extends beyond place (museum) and time (visit) and serve as ‘an audience-contributed gesture of closure’ (Katriel, 1997: 71). This type of entitlement where participatory commissives are used, adds to, rather than excludes, entitlement for personal experience. If ‘experiential participation’ has the moment-of-the-visit as its focus, commissive texts draw a future-oriented trajectory: they are not explicitly about the here-and-now of the visit, but about its aftermath. Commissives are sometimes bundled with the agentic locus of personal experience (as in extract [1], where ‘My Holocaust experience’ generates a commitment ‘to learn more’), tying the past (which is on display), the present (moment of participation), and the future (commitment) together.

I add that sometimes commissive entitlement explicitly indexes a collective or group identity. In extracts [5] and [7], for instance, visitors position themselves as part of a larger (imagined) community (‘we will ...’, ‘we should ...’). Similar texts that use first-person plural indexes collectively assert that ‘we must never forget the events of the Holocaust’, ‘we must not take life for granted’, or as a rhetorical question, ‘will we ever learn?’. All these texts are written by individual visitors *on behalf* of imagined publics in whose name they are committing to remember. Commissive entitlements are similar to a participatory entitlement that Myers (2000) depicts, where individuals who are interviewed in the media give voice to ‘the emotional response of ordinary people in general’ (p. 174).

From a ritual perspective, writing in the book embodies what visitors are *already doing* in the present. Thus, writing is a public materialization of entitlement and participation as members of an (imagined) moral community. At stake are the metapragmatics of writing in heritage VBs, which suggests writing as a social activity that indexically establishes participation (rather than references to what is ‘going on’ in visitors’ minds or what they will do in the future). Now a participatory moral (re)action, writing publicly makes and states visitors’ stance in relation to the museum’s narrative.

Both types of communicative entitlements we have seen – attesting to an experience and committing to future action – are produced by ‘ordinary’ visitors, that is to say by visitors who are so positioned. Montgomery (2001) stresses that ‘when an ordinary member of the public is given a voice within the public sphere, their main claim to a communicative entitlement is having had an experience that they can authentically render’ (p. 452). I add to this the commissive texts and the relations that Illouz (1997, 2007)

draws between experience and self-change. Ordinary museum visitors are viewed as *tabula rasa*, and what they can and should attest to in writing is the moral change that they have undergone (experience), and what they take away from the museum (future-facing commitment).

'Granddaughter of a Polish member of the underground': Non-ordinary entitlements

The third and last category of participatory entitlements includes only 2.5%³ of the book's texts, where visitors are established as *non*-ordinary members of the public. This category consists of three subtypes of entitlements: *regular*, *expert*, and *survivors' descendant visitors*. Although, quantitatively, these entitlement categories are almost negligible, they are articulate and creative, and their exploration is necessary in order to complete the overall appreciation of participation accomplished through this public medium of the VB. As part of their distinct framing, texts in this category typically avoid reference to experience and fail to express commissive speech acts. They diverge from other texts by (self-)framing their writers as possessing special knowledge or links to the Holocaust.

Studies on participation in the media typically differentiate between entitlements of ordinary people and of experts or professionals. Participatory entitlement of lay audiences mainly rests on spontaneity of 'an unstudied naturalness of delivery' (Montgomery, 2001: 452) or of 'untrained speakers – ordinary citizens' (Dori-Hacohen, 2012a: 156); however, experts or professionals are viewed as neutral commentators who can competently explain and evaluate events (knowledge over experience, see Montgomery, 2007; Thornborrow, 2001; See also my discussion of so called 'VIP' visitor books in Noy, 2015a chapter8). While media institutions do the work of introducing experts, lay participants 'have to establish their own "expertise" in relation to their contributions' (Thornborrow, 2001: 465). With museum VBs, introducing and framing oneself is left to the visitors, both lay and expert.

Regulars. The first of three categories of texts establishing non-ordinary visitors includes 21 texts that construct them as knowledgeable connoisseurs who *routinely* visit Holocaust sites and destinations. I recall observing such visitors during the first few days of my ethnography. Because the VB is located near the museum's ticket counter where I would stand, I noticed visitors would occasionally mention other Holocaust sites that they had visited before coming to the FHM. I was surprised they did this on their own account and during the brief and otherwise instrumental interaction of purchasing tickets. The museum staff and volunteers later assured me that these interactions are quite common.

[10] This is an excellent/ exhibit, however it is tame/ compared to what I saw/ at Dachau./ M. Dumont/ Tampa

[11] I had an opportunity to visit/ Anne Frank house, but she/ is only a little piece in this/ huge puzzle. Thank you for/ showing the world./ Kelly [unclear surname]/ 04-06-2014

Extract [10] commences, typically enough, by paying the museum a compliment. Yet this compliment is curbed, and the contrastive 'however' draws a comparison between the

museum and the Dachau concentration camp. The text conveys that although ‘excellent’ in itself, the FHM is ‘tame’ in comparison. We learn that the visitor holds special knowledge that rests on visiting other Holocaust sites, which allows and entitles a comparative evaluation of the museum. The text tells of a Holocaust-site hierarchy, where a concentration camp is located higher—as a more worthy (more authentic?) attraction—than a museum.⁴ Similar texts in this book compare the FHM to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (‘Just as good as the one in D.C.’), the Anne Frank House Museum in Amsterdam, concentration camps, *Yad Vashem* (Israel’s official Holocaust memorial site), and other state Holocaust museums in the US. This category of texts draws a hierarchical topography of national and global Holocaust commemoration sites (a ‘huge puzzle’ in extract [11]). The puzzle metaphor suggests not only topography, but that these sites are interconnected to make up a larger picture. The result requires travel to various Holocaust commemoration sites in order to complete the puzzle and see the larger picture they portray. Commemoration is a global project for Holocaust tourists, and these texts establish the FHM as a legitimate site-to-be-visited on this grid.

Texts that establish visitors’ familiarity with and knowledge of Holocaust sites position them as members of a separate category with special participatory entitlement. Being experienced travelers, these visitors can draw a comparative evaluation rather than report on a first-time experience or attest to a commitment they made upon their encounter with Holocaust representation (they are not *tabula rasa* anymore). Indeed, their commitment is established by the very fact of their routine visits to Holocaust destinations. On one occasion, a visitor wrote prospectively rather than retrospectively: ‘I loved the experience! Now to the one in D.C.!’ This is a reflexive text because the moral commissive speech act addresses further travel to more Holocaust destinations. Symbolically, this visitor is on her or his way not only to a physical destination, but also to becoming a member of the group of *regulars*.

Experts/professionals. The second category of participatory entitlements that establishes non-ordinary visitors consists of 21 texts, which show that their authors are part of the global Holocaust commemoration and education structure. These visitors are ‘insiders’ who are employed by commemoration institutions. The texts frame the visitors in this way by detailing their relevant occupational identity and sometimes by showing special knowledge on the subject matter of the Holocaust and its display.

[12] Impressive – don’t forget/ the lessons history is/ telling you!/ Dr. DOHLB/ Director of the state archives/ of Salzburg, Historian and/ teacher of the University/ of Salzburg, Austria

[13] You made a great job!/ Congratulations!/ [indented] Michel Laub, secret.-general of the/ Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance/ in Mechelen, Belgium [indented] 16 February 2013

[14] I’m a docent at the Dallas/ Holocaust Museum... I really/ loved touring this wonderful/ museum, and especially listening/ to your docent Anthony/ Keep up/ the good work! Mimmie Henson

These texts explicitly position the visitors as insiders: they are professional commemorators who occupy the production, rather than the consumption, side of the

global Holocaust commemoration structure. Because this attribute has to do with their occupational identity, relevant category membership is often conveyed in the texts' signatures (extracts [12] and [13]). These signatures diverge from the VB *signing norm* where only name, place, and date are typically indicated. This diversion is a matter of improvisation, which says something about creativity and agency of members of this group. In addition, the texts establish the special position and entitlement of these visitors by what they avoid conveying: these texts do not attest to a transformative moral experience that their authors have undergone, nor do they perform commissive speech acts (which only makes sense as they work, day in and day out, in Holocaust commemoration). Rather, the texts are directed *collegially* at the museum staff ([13] and [14]) or *pedagogically* directed at the visitors [12]. While most of these texts also address the museum (their authors acknowledging the fact that here they are visitors), the terms they use and the claims they make build on different participation entitlement: a congratulatory tone [13] and the combination of encouragement and familiarity ([14], where the docent's first name is mentioned) are missing from ordinary visitors' texts. The same goes for the distinctly pedagogical tone in extract [12], where a speech act is performed but, contrary to most texts, it is pedagogical ('lessons') and does not position the visitor within the imagined community of those committed to remembrance. These are all characteristic of the tone of non-ordinary visitors who are a group of self-acclaimed experts.

Note that extract [12] evinces a shift in alignment, which is accomplished by a change in addressivity: the text begins with praise directed at the museum to then shift (with the help of a dash sign) to the visitors. As an archivist, historian, and university teacher, this visitor's text commences collegially and shifts to assume a pedagogical position, occupying in this way *two* expert positions.

Descendants of Holocaust survivors. The third and last category of non-ordinary entitlements consists of 28 texts, which establish visitors as having a *personal and direct* connection to the Holocaust. This is an association between visitors and the narrated events, rather than Holocaust narration and commemoration. These texts, too, are longer and more elaborate than most of the book's texts and use the signature creatively to indicate special and relevant features of visitors' identities.

[15] I was born in 1.1946 in Amfing, Germany/ which had become [a] concentration camp. My parents/ were survivors who had been in many camps, &/ lost many members of their family. I am grateful/ that places like this museum exist, & that many/ visitors see what happened. Thank you/ Lynne Farbman, daughter of/ Rachel Semor – b. Vilna/ Isaac Semor – b. Saloniky Greece

[16] We are/ visiting from/ Ann Arbor, Michigan./ all my great-grandparents, great aunts, uncles, great cousins/ who lived in Hungary were murdered./ Only my father's parents, my father/ + 1 brother were able to escape./ Belita Cowan, age 64

[17] Granddaughter of a Polish member/ of the underground & survivor from/ Strzyżów, Poland. Glad there is/ a wonderful memorial here in/ St. Petersburg./ Lila Wolan-Jedziniav/ 12/26/2012

Descendants' entitlement rests on attesting to personal relations to the Holocaust, which are not 'second hand' or mediated. At stake are not individual experiences (morality and authenticity) or education/knowledge (epistemic discourse), nor do they perform moral commissive speech acts. Instead, they indicate having been directly impacted by the events of the Holocaust through genealogical ties to those who perished in or survived World War II. The texts also show knowledge that is missing from ordinary texts (such as mentioning European cities: 'Amfing, Germany' and 'Strzyżów, Poland'), and they explicitly mention the category of the 'survivor' ([15] and [17]) using first-person possessive pronouns to connect between the visitor and people, locations, and times relating to the Holocaust. These texts' signatures are often creative and elaborate, including the mention of absent family relatives who were afflicted by the Holocaust [15], and the visitors' age (mentioning one's age in VBs happens only if it has specific relevance, such as when visitors are very young or when their age validates their testimony [16]).

Compared to texts written by experts, which validate the FHM as a legitimate site on a global Holocaust topography/itinerary, descendants' texts validate the events themselves. In this way, these texts support one of the museum's core missions, namely, establishing time and again the factuality of the Holocaust. The texts supplement survivors' testimonies, which are frequently displayed in the museum yet offered by survivors' descendants who are visiting the site.

These texts perform special position and value as first-person (biographical) testimonies, which are evidenced by surrounding texts that address them. Consider the text written on the page following extract [15]:

[18] I have not lost any family relatives in the/ Holocaust but I am a firm believer in/ NEVER AGAIN!!

This text could have been a typical example of a commissive text attesting to self-change, but for its irregular opening clause. The clause affirms who the visitor is *not*, positioning her or him in relation to both the museum *and* the text written by the survivor's descendant. The text voices a position whereby moral esteem can be acquired by visiting the museum, and one need not have 'special' entitlements to earn what the visit can bestow. (This calls to mind Harvey Sacks' discussion of entitlements for experience and for telling it; see Sacks, 1992: II.) The text assures that the visit itself suffices in endowing a 'firm' moral value. For this reason, the text's conclusion indicates that the author understands what is at stake and is committed to the cause. The text can also be read as arguing for *inclusion*. Because most of the texts written by survivors' descendants are signed by Jewish surnames, the inclusionary point this text makes might relate to issues of faith and heritage, specifically that one need not be Jewish in order to participate in and possess the moral value and voice associated with Holocaust remembrance.

Conclusion

Focusing on mediation processes promotes an integrated approach to media and communication studies, which moves from the media themselves - their affordances, and

environments, to a critical analysis of audiences' participation and institutional agency and power. Bringing the conceptual toolbox associated with the *mediation approach* to the study of museums provides a rich exploration that nourishes the theoretical discussion on mediation and participation. It offers 'richly contextualized processes' that further 'reject narrowly linear assumptions about media effects or impacts' (Livingstone, 2009: 3). This is partly the case because history and heritage museums are mediational laboratories: history is intangible and inaccessible and museums must mediate and bridge the there-and-then with the here-and-now, supplying—as media do—events and evaluations, information and experience.

Addressing the relations between mediations and participation, while keeping an eye on tight examination of texts and contexts, I introduced this article by discussing how the museum frames the VB, positioning it at the exit, near a special discursive wall, with a sign that instructs visitors to share their 'Museum experience'. These features supply 'the conditions of a practice' (Williams, 1991: 422), which visitors pursue. More than half of the book's texts evince an experiential entitlement in the form of a powerful moral experience that visitors publicly attest to having undergone. If, in the past, broadcast media acknowledged how 'everyone is entitled to their opinion' (Myers, 2000: 171), currently everyone is 'entitled to their expedience'. The discussion shifts from opinions in the public sphere (à la Habermas) to experience – its authenticity and ephemerality – as the central locus of participation and agency.

The study of communicative entitlements allows us to subtly appreciate what complicates and diversifies participation: it is pursued differently. Thornborrow (2001) concludes that participants do not only 'take up the role that, in Goffman's terms, is made situationally available to them [...] but they also have to display the relevance, or validity, of their occupancy of that role' (pp. 477–478). At the FHM, the second largest category of participatory entitlement refers to moral commitments and not to experience. Entitlement for this type of participation concerns expressing commissive speech acts that attest to resolutions visitors have made around matters of Holocaust remembrance. Visitors commit to act morally in the future, yet they are of course *already* acting morally by publicly participating in broadcast text or 'moral writing' (Noy, 2015b). They add to the museum display what ordinary people add to broadcast talk, namely spontaneity and authenticity. To paraphrase Goffman's notion of 'fresh talk' on the radio (Goffman, 1981: 242), writing in the VB amounts to *fresh writing*.

A third category of participatory entitlements includes texts that establish visitors as *non-ordinary* visitors to Holocaust sites and destinations. Within this category, nuances point to three membership subcategories, including *regulars*, *experts*, and *survivors' descendants*. As I have shown elsewhere, some museums hold special VBs which are exclusively offered to visitors who are invited by the institution (Noy, 2015a). These VBs are akin to media programs that invite experts, introducing and framing them as such ('tonight I'm joined by the Prime Minister Mrs.', in Thornborrow, 2001: 462). By using a different VB and a different set of participatory practices, these museums institutionally differentiate between lay and expert visitors, allowing the inviting – and receiving – of different types of entitlements. However, because like most museums the FHM does not hold a special VB, it is up to visitors to *frame themselves* as differing from

ordinary visitors. The result is a heterogeneous medium in terms of participatory entitlements where visitors use their discursive resources to position themselves differently.

Studying VBs contributes to our understanding of communicative entitlements in the public sphere because they enrich the range of media and institutions we research and the related type of interactions that are pursued. Unlike radio and television, VBs are asynchronous media, and exchanges consist of single-turn interactions: the museum addresses the visitors (and frames the media), who then write back. There are usually no further (written) negotiations of entitlement, identity, or stance. While VBs certainly possess different media logics than radio and televised interviews, Thumim (2009) reminds us that when people are invited by museums or the media to 'speak for themselves', 'the question of mediation assumes central importance' (p. 618).

Finally, if at the outset I viewed museums as media institutions, my study of VB mediation and participatory entitlements suggests more. As a media institution, the museum not only affords the visit, which exposes audiences to powerful and immersive emotional, moral, and visual narratives delineated in time and space, but also creates a kind of 'media event'. Audiences are then invited to both *take part in* and *comment on/in* this event. The VB becomes part of the event as well, recording and displaying visitors' participation from within.

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Notes

1. Transcription convention: spelling and capitalization are shown as they originally appeared. A forward slash at the end of a word/represents a line break, and text in square brackets indicates non-verbal (graphic) signs or additions and clarifications by the author.
2. Note that the text in extract [2] is originally written inside quotations. Quotation marks serve to demarcate and frame this part of the text reflexively *as a quote* (an intended repetition). It echoes the idioms that appear on the wall nearby (as though the visitor is saying: I know that *this* is what needs to be written here). As for the narration of personal experience and self-change in relation to tourist attractions more generally see Noy, 2004.
3. The numbers do not add up to 100% because 8.5% of the texts in the book include only signatures. While these are certainly discursive actions, I do not presently address them.
4. A similar if more explicit remark is written in the visitor book (VB) at the Documentation Centre of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg: 'Concentration camps are basically more interesting and shocking. Nevertheless – this exhibition's not bad!' (Macdonald, 2005: 129). These comparisons call to mind the dark tourism continuum that Stone (2006) draws, where museums are located on the 'lighter' side and sites of genocide on the 'darker' side.

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