



# PAGES AS STAGES: A Performance Approach to Visitor Books

**Chaim Noy**

University of Surrey, UK

**Abstract:** This article offers a contribution to the fields of tourist performance and language. By exploring a visitor book located at a heritage site in Jerusalem, Israel, it argues that texts produced by tourists can assume the semiotic status of performances. Consequently, tourists' texts should not be viewed merely as instances of "discourse" or "language," but also as organic parts of the aesthetic and semiotic aspects of tourism. The article describes four dimensions that establish the visitor book as a particular "stage," and the texts therein as the tourists' situated performances. Taken together, these dimensions constitute a model for the analysis of linguistic performance and for the semiotic interrelationship between stage and performance in tourism. **Keywords:** performance, language, writing, museum, heritage. © 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION: PERFORMING TOURIST LANGUAGE

This article argues that visitor books, which are familiar artifacts in tourism and fascinating cultural objects, can also function as tourist stages. Located in sites like museums, galleries and natural parks, which contain aesthetic, educational and emotive attractions, visitor books are treasuries of comments, impressions and observations. While, as a product, visitor books can be studied as collections of expression and articulation (containers of written discourse), in terms of their function in situ they constitute spaces in which these expressions and articulations materialize and take shape. In precisely this capacity—of supplying public spaces for expression—they can constitute unique sites that elicit tourists' linguistic performance.

The conceptualization of the visitor book as a tourist stage has a formative impact on the perception of "language" in the sphere of tourism. Since linguistic expressions are uttered in particular circumstances and contexts, and since language is performed through specific media, the focus of investigation must shift from the abstract entity of "language" or "discourse" to embodied and situated instances of language or discourse (Derrida 1976). This shift has semiotic consequences,

---

**Chaim Noy** is a visiting scholar at the University of Surrey, Guildford, UK (Email <chaimnoy@mscc.huji.ac.il>). His research interests include the semiotics of tourism and the tourist experience, as these are evinced in tourists' performances. He is presently engaged in a project that examines "Tourists Texts" in various sites, through applying approaches from performance studies and material culture.

since it implies that meaning does not lie primarily in the *content* of the tourists' expressions, often referred to as "tourist discourse", but rather in their attributes as *performances* produced on specific stages with particular features. The notion of "language" is thereby refined to include a variety of "languages", or a variety of codes and modes of communication which are typical of tourism.

In addressing tourists' linguistic articulations from the perspective of performance, this research is part of the paradigmatic "performance turn" in tourism studies (Adler 1989b; Coleman and Crang 2002; Edensor 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Löfgren 1999; Neumann 1999). The term "performance" reflects an approach that sees tourists' behaviors as meaningful social roles that are both carried out and evaluated publicly. Performances are formative behaviors that conform to, confirm, or challenge social norms, as well as the institutions, power relations and identities that these norms support. The advantage of applying a performance approach, especially to linguistic expressions, lies in the fact that performance is inherent to the general understanding of tourism as a set of staged and staging sociocultural phenomena. Since tourists' actions of walking around a site, gazing at attractions, taking pictures, collecting souvenirs and recollecting memories have been conceptualized performatively; the various instances of tourists' language-use can and should be approached in the same way. If "[t]ourists move and walk in distinct fashions" (Edensor 2000:338), it makes sense to inquire whether tourists also employ language in distinct fashions, and if so, how.

From the perspective of research on language in tourism, this study builds on an earlier body of works mostly published in the 1990s (see comprehensive review in Dann 1996), which illustrate the scope and structure of language in different spheres of tourism. These works describe and classify the rich variety of communicative media and vivid linguistic genres and registers evinced in tourism. They establish that "tourism is grounded in discourse" (Dann 1996:2), and should be viewed a language in itself. These works, which by and large attend to language as a consequence of tourism and through more formal approaches, led the way to studying language as a primary research focus through the prism of post-structural, critical and feminist theories.

More recent works, published in the last decade, show how the language of tourists makes use of particular situated resources and conforms to certain norms of embodiment, articulation and aestheticization (Harrison 2001; Jaworski and Pritchard 2005; Noy 2004, 2006; Phipps 2007). However, these works focus mainly on oral expression, while the present research focuses on tourists' written performances produced in visitor books—a "virtually unknown genre" (Stamou and Paraskevolopoulos 2003:35).

A performance approach also entails a holistic perspective whereby diverse social practices are viewed as sharing a common semiotic foundation. They are regarded as meaning-making aesthetic behaviors produced on the stages of tourism. Indeed, this is one of the main lessons of MacCannell's classic work *The Tourist* (1976) (which is influenced by

post-structural perspectives). In this approach, the familiar distinctions between “language” and “body”, “discourse” and “materiality”, give way to a different set of concepts, including embodiment, stages, aesthetics, mobility and materiality—along with sensitivities to power-relations, and to the restrictions they present on the very possibility of performance. Applying these integrations to social life and social research, a performance approach is clearly an interdisciplinary project in essence, which combines bodies of knowledge from both the social sciences and the humanities.

In line with the above, after describing the site and the methods, the article will outline four dimensions that both qualify and characterize the visitor book as a stage. These dimensions illuminate how the qualities of this stage afford possibilities of participating in this stage and constructing meaning therein. Specifically, it shall address the semiotics that arise from the precise location of the stage within a commemorative museum, from the collective character of the stage’s use, from the visual-graphic aesthetic qualities of this stage, and from the rhetoric of the texts inscribed therein. These dimensions account for the visitor book as a meaning-making, interactional stage, and together amount to a model for the appreciation of performance in tourism. The article concludes by outlining implications for the semiotics of tourism, and for the characterization of tourists’ languages and performances in various sites.

## PAGES AS STAGES: DIMENSIONS OF PERFORMANCES

Over and above its integral relevance to tourism, the performance approach is particularly productive in explaining how situated social practices are afforded—i.e., both restricted and enabled—by a variety of features of specific stages. “Tourism”, Tim Edensor (2001:71) notes, “is constituted by an array of techniques and technologies which are mobilized in distinct settings,” and are used by the tourists and by the industry. As mentioned above, the focus on these “techniques and technologies,” requires a shift from content (from focusing on the “what” of tourism, i.e., what tourists think, what tourists experience), to performance (to focusing on the interactional “how” of tourism, i.e., how meaning is produced and sustained through moment-by-moment interactions). In line with this shift, this study avoids conducting a variety of systematic analyses of the entries in the visitor book under examination, and does not approach the book as a treasury of textual, linguistic or discursive information (“data”).

Tourist stages are situated spaces that assume and endow meaning depending on their particular location and framing. The location of the stage discussed in this article—a visitor book located at a commemoration museum—places the stage within two semiotic frames: the powerful frame of authenticity, which underlies the semiotics of modern museums (Katriel 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), and the equally powerful frame of commemoration, which is central to sites of national heritage (Chronis 2005; Macdonald 2006).

In this charged location, the visitor book by no means plays a neutral, or instrumental, role of merely allowing communication between the museum visitors and the management. Rather, it constitutes a meaningful stage in and of itself, and its semiotic and communicative functions are manipulated so as to serve and promote the mission of the site, which is to construct a sense of shared heritage.

### *Study Site*

This article explores a museum visitor book which is part of the Ammunition Hill National Memorial Site (AHNMS) in Jerusalem, Israel. The research at the AHNMS is part of a larger project focusing on tourists' meaning-making practices, which explores sites of linguistic articulation and performance—specifically, practices of inscribing—in various sites. This particular book was chosen as a case study owing to its location in a symbolic and ideologically charged site of national commemoration. This context brings together and touches upon aspects of national heritage, collective identity, nationalism, and the Israeli-Arab conflict, which makes for an interesting research site.

Inaugurated in 1975, the AHNMS is a war commemoration complex dedicated to the memory of the Israeli soldiers who died in the battle of Ammunition Hill during the Six-Day War in June 1967. The site celebrates the victory of the Israeli Army over the Jordanian Legion, the “liberation” of East Jerusalem and the “unification” of city. It comprises two main spaces: an outdoor area that includes the original trenches in which the fighting took place, and an indoor museum.

The museum presents exhibits and information about the Ammunition Hill Battle, and about the overall campaign over Jerusalem during the Six-Day War. Most of the exhibit features are commemorative, such as the Golden Wall of Commemoration on which the names of fallen soldiers are inscribed, and a short film about the battle, narrated from the perspective of the soldiers who fought in it. Expressing a militaristic-nationalist variety of Zionist ideology, this museum is one of many small-scale Israeli museums established the last thirty years or so which celebrate the agricultural and military Zionist achievements (Katriel 1997).

Although the museum is relatively small, and receives nearly twenty five thousand visitors a year, it has a special role in commemorating the nationalist ethos surrounding Jerusalem, and is quite well known. The observations conducted at the site indicated that approximately half of the visitors who visited the museum during the study period were Jewish tourists, mostly Ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) Jews from North America, who were on a trip to Israel. The rest were Jewish Israelis on sightseeing tours in Jerusalem. Both populations are Jewish, they both tend to strongly identify with Israel's Zionist ideology, and are supportive of the nationalist and militaristic worldviews promoted by the site.

*Study Materials: Documenting Performances*

The essential feature of the performances in the visitor book, which assumes the form of inscribed entries, lies in their *enduring quality*. Like photographs and letters (and unlike gazing, strolling, or talking), signs and texts in visitor books are traces left by actions performed sometime in the past. Like photographs they are fixed traces of an ephemeral phenomenon, namely the passing of tourists through the site. These traces are created through acts of *conscious documentation*: the tourists document their own performance as it occurs, or, more succinctly, they perform an act of documentation. Hence, the appreciation of these performances, and of their relation to the stage through which they are performed, requires an examination of the ways in which their visual, aesthetic, material and rhetoric aspects and arrangements are consumed (Haldrup and Larsen 2003).

These aspects have been explored in studies of semiotics and document analysis (Blommaert 2004; Hull 2003; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Stewart 1991, 1993), as well as in multi-modal literacy studies (Kress 2003; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). These works do not use rigid, highly structured or systematic methodologies, but instead employ various sensitivities to explore specific research sites. These sensitivities address two broad, related aspects, namely the material dimensions of documents and the spatial or compositional dimensions of the inscriptions therein.

Materiality, Kress and Jewitt (2003:14) explain, is “what a culture provides as materials for making meaning.” Material aspects function as semiotic resources which are available to tourists. In his work on material aspects of documents, Hull (2003:292) supplies a “laundry list” of pertinent parameters which includes the size, qualities and costliness of the paper, the structure of the document (a book, a file, are there things attached to it, etc.), its uniqueness and quantity, and its age and wear. Other aspects commonly observed include the location of the document in the institution, whether it is stationary or mobile, and how and by whom is it used.

Semiotic and multi-modal research addresses the dimensions that must be considered in the study of inscriptions. These approaches hold that, when observed closely, meaning-making processes (semiotics) seldom include only one mode of expression (Kress and Jewitt 2003:1). Rather, a number of modes and combinations thereof exist simultaneously. Delineating these modes and their interrelations can shed light on how meaning is achieved in particular contexts. Semiotic and multi-modal research considers such aspects as whether the inscriptions are handwritten, printed, or typed, the organization of the graphic space, the directionality of the inscriptions, and how different “codes” or “grammars” (namely semiotic systems such as different languages, graphic vs. alphabetic inscriptions, etc.) are used.

The following sections will address the material aspects and compositional dimensions of the AHNMS visitor book. A single volume filled just before the ethnography (between July 2005 and July 2006) supplies the case study of this examination. It was chosen because it was the

most recent volume to be completed, and because it is typical of the AHNMS visitor books in all respects. Containing 100 pages, it took about one year to fill, and contains approximately 1,600 entries. Given that it includes a considerable number of entries (comprising a substantial linguistic corpus), written over a long period of time, and is located at a National Commemoration Site, the book arguably provides a representative sample of inscribers' actions at a symbolic site. The entries in the book vary in length, ranging from one-word inscriptions to short paragraphs, with the majority (approximately 60%) written in Hebrew and the rest (approximately 40%) written in English.

The semiotic multi-modal analysis was supplemented by ethnographic observations and interviews, which were conducted over a period of four weeks in the summer and autumn of 2006. Twelve formal interviews were conducted with the AHNMS staff, and thirty-seven informal interviews were conducted with visitors. The former set of interviews supplied a picture of the structure and operation of the AHNMS, and of its educational and ideological orientation. The second set of interviews addressed the visitors' impressions of the site in general, and what they thought of the entries they read and/or wrote in the visitor book. The observations and interviews supplied background information about the visitors' identities, practices and experiences, addressing such questions as what they did during their visit to the museum and what their motivations, expectations and impressions were.

### *Institutional Interface*

The first dimension to be examined here concerns the semiotic relations between the stage and the site in which it is located, or, in other words, the stage's institutional contextualization. These ties determine the institutional nature of the visitor book as a situated surface which is semiotically marked (MacCannell 1976). First, the mere fact that the book is located inside the AHNMS museum is meaningful in that it designates the book as an integral part of the site. This may sound trivial, but had the book been located elsewhere, it would have been understood and used differently, eliciting different types of expressions and meanings. As Edensor (2001:63) notes, performance "takes place within meaningful spatial contexts." Written performances are no exception: they create "documents [which] are composed in and of particular places" (Laurier and Whyte 2001, para. 2.2).

As for the specific spatial location of the book within the museum, it is rather unique and consequential. The volume is not found in the location usually reserved for visitor books, namely near the museum's exit, where visitors can express their overall impression of the site and their visit. Placed in this position, visitor books commonly allow "an audience-contributed gesture of closure" (Katriel 1997:71). At the AHNMS, the visitor book is located in one of the museum's *innermost halls*, near the Golden Wall of Commemoration and the eternal flame, where a recording solemnly recites the names of the fallen soldiers.

This location, inside the museum's "holy of holies", endows the book with the semiotic status of a *unique museum exhibit* (Macdonald 2005). It is there to be consumed visually (by looking at it) and verbally (by talking about it and by writing in it), just like any other valued exhibit. Indeed, visitors who were observed to spend longer looking at other exhibits also spent longer looking at and leafing through the visitor book. Its position at the heart of the museum suggests that it is metonymic to the museum, and at the same time also equally accessible to the visitors' gaze as any other surface in the museum.

The book's unique framing is further augmented by the structure on which it rests. It is installed on a large and impressive structure, consisting of two columns of black steel, each of them about one meter thick. The shorter column, approximately one meter tall, functions as a kind of table on which the book rests, and beside it is another pillar some four meters tall. The entire structure rests on a base that is slightly elevated from the floor, so that those wishing to read (or write) in the book must step up and enter a specially designated zone. In its overall design, the structure resembles a monument or a memorial, lending the book a very solemn and dignified character, and designating it as a unique exhibit—perhaps even as a monument in itself. These dimensions call to mind MacCannell's (1999:44–45) discussion of framing, which, in this case, shapes the semiotic function of the book-as-stage. As will be demonstrated below, the book's semiotic function has more to do with emotive and aesthetic expressions of involvement than with reflexive comments on the quality of the museum's exhibitions and displays.

The connection between the book and its institutional context is established not only through its spatial location, but is also reiterated from "within," through the design of the book's pages. Each of the pages in the book is printed with a vertical line of four symbols (Figure 1), specifically (in descending order) the symbol of the State of Israel (the Menorah or candelabrum), the symbol of the City of Jerusalem (a lion), the symbol of the Israeli army (a sword and olive branch in a Star of David), and the logo of AHNMS (three arches). These symbols are repeated on large flags that hang near the installation, and correspond with other national and military emblems that are profusely exhibited throughout the site. They reiterate the connection between the spaces/stages of the museum as a whole, and the spaces/stages of the visitor book.

All this suggests that the visitor book is a stage of a particular semiotic value, which invites visitors to communicate with and among national symbols. This is an opportunity that is not often available to the ordinary citizen. The stage (the visitor book) allows visitors not only to walk through this materialized "forest of symbols" (Turner 1967)—something they do throughout their tour of the museum—but also to *participate* in this as active producers and contributors, i.e., to become "laymen artists" (Adler 1989b:1385).

Note that this opportunity is afforded by manipulating aspects of size and scale. If the outdoor part of the Ammunition Hill site allows visitors to walk in the actual, life-size trenches, and to wander among

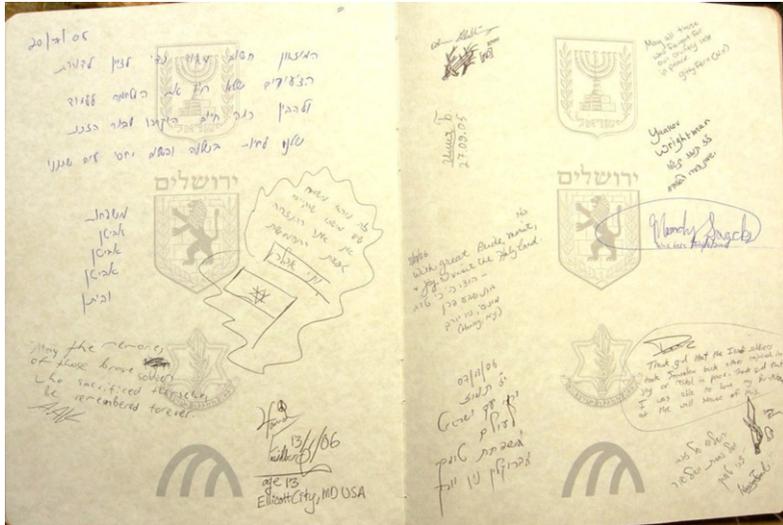


Figure 1. An Opening: The AHNMS Visitor Book

life-size monuments, the surfaces of the visitor book provide a *miniature stage*, only a few inches large, where words and signs are printed and inscribed, documented and collected. This technique is generally characteristic of museums, where a limited number of symbolic representations are concentrated in small spaces, allowing an intensified and condensed experience (Stewart 1993:161).

#### *Public Stage/Collective Accomplishment*

The second dimension that characterizes the visitor book and qualifies it as a tourist stage concerns the public manner in which it is consumed, and the collective quality of the production it yields. The space in which the book is located—a museum hall—is a public space, accessible both visually and physically to all museum visitors. Except for a writing implement, and perhaps basic literacy and graphic skills, no further knowledge, implements or rights are required in order to read or to write in the book.

Moreover, the practices of reading (and writing) in the visitor book are pursued socially, and often involve social interaction. According to the observations, people who read and/or wrote in the book usually engaged in this activity as part of a group. This is somewhat surprising, since one might expect that commemorative expression would be consumed and produced individually and privately. Yet it makes sense when considering that the visitor book is consumed in the same manner as other museum exhibits, i.e. in public and via public practices (gazing, discussing, comparing, and appreciating). Few visitors come to the museum alone; most are accompanied by family, friends or members of their tour group. In this context it is therefore clear why

the spaces offered by the book meet the conditions specified by Adler (1989b:1368) for performances, which she characterizes as behavior “whose execution [can] be guided and publicly evaluated”.

The small-scale social gatherings that form around the book generate interesting exchanges. The following exchange is typical of cases in which parents guide and monitor their children’s written productions. Before writing, a child of about ten said to his parents, “I’ll write that I really enjoyed it here (*neheneti*),” to which one of the parents replied pedagogically, “‘Enjoyed’ is not a good word. Write that you were *impressed* (*hitrashamta*) or *moved* (*hitragashta*), and that you are respectful (*rohesh kavod*).” This instance and others like it illustrate the covert rules that govern the process of entering and participating in a particular public stage—specifically the tone that is considered appropriate for entries in this visitor book (as will be further elaborated below).

The “techniques and technologies” (Edensor 2001:71) associated with the visitor book also afford the creation of a *collective production*. On average, an opening includes 16 entries inscribed by 16 different individuals, and the entire 100-page volume thus includes some 1,600 entries, all of which are simultaneously available for visual consumption. The accumulation of entries, and the crowded visual impression it creates, obviously result from the enduring nature of writing, which means that the entries remain long after their authors leave the site. In communication terms, the visitor book is thus an *additive or accumulative* stage, wherein every new entry is added to the entries already present. In this respect, the book differs from other surfaces for linguistic expression that are common in tourism, such as letters, postcards and personal (travel) journals, which are produced by only one individual. It is more similar to internet talkbacks and chat rooms, and to other collective productions of inscribed texts, which are consumed in public and generate a composite public creation.

The collective quality of the performances on this stage is not only manifest in the existence of numerous entries by numerous individuals. Taken together, the multiple entries also constitute a *collective accomplishment*, for the simple reason that the inscriptions avoid overlapping one another (Figure 1). Far from being trivial, this feature reflects a collective collaboration, without which the coherence and meaning produced on the pages could not have been attained. In other words, the additive quality of the stage does not compromise its coherence, and this is due to the fact that the consumers make a joint effort to share the stage’s spaces.

Note that this joint effort, from the perspective of the inscribers, is not necessarily motivated by a social impulse (in the altruistic sense), but by the simple technical constraint that if two entries overlap, neither will be readable. Related to this issue are the frames that some inscribers draw around their entries, which serve to mark entries as autonomous and distinct within the collective context. Other forms of demarcation, which separate and/or highlight individual entries, also evince tension between private (individual) and collective (communal) co-presences (Figure 1). Finally, it should be noted that not all visitors inscribe in the visitor book. According to observations, roughly a third of the

visitors who pass through the hall approach and examine the book, and approximately 10% of these also inscribe in it. The majority of visitors, then, do not participate in this collaborative production (similar figures are reported in Stamou and Paraskevolopoulos 2003:37). Interviews with visitors indicate that some avoid writing in the book because they are indifferent, while others express their comments through alternative channels (such as sending/faxing letters directly to the management-channels which, unlike the visitor book, are not public).

The collective impression created by the inscribers' contributions, in combination with the technical parameters of the stage, serves the museum's agenda very effectively. As a museum of national and military heritage, one of its aims is the construction of a shared—i.e., collective—sense of identity and belonging. Heritage and commemoration fundamentally rely on the construction of collective memory, and the stage's quality of mediation through time supplies both a vehicle and an embodied illustration of this process. Hence, the visitor book turns out to be a *situated and mobilized stage* that promotes the mission of the heritage site in which it operates.

Lastly, the public nature of this stage, and the collective character of the performance enacted through it, might suggest that it is a “democratic” space, openly and freely accessible to all. Yet this is not the case. The stage evinces two complementary tendencies: inclusionary and exclusionary. As mentioned earlier, the technical qualities of this stage foster social inclusion and cohesion. In this capacity, the stage operates inclusively, since entries are added to one another, each one contributing to the whole.

At the same time, there is also a clear exclusionary tendency, which has to do with the identity of the visitors at the site. With hardly any exception, the visitors to the AHNMS are all Jews, and this is naturally mirrored on the pages of the visitor book. Indeed, while tourism is often “an intensely multilingual and intercultural experience” (Phipps 2007:17), known for the linguistic heterogeneity of its stages, this particular stage is dominated by only two languages: Hebrew (approx. 60% of the entries) and English (approx. 40%). In this particular context, these languages may be referred to as “the languages of the Jews;” the former being the local national language, and the latter being spoken by the majority of the museum's foreign visitors (most of whom, as mentioned above, are observant Jews from North America).

Especially conspicuous in its absence is the Arabic language, whose non-occurrence reflects the absence of Palestinian visitors to the museum. Since the museum commemorates a battle in the Six Day War—a major episode in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict—the Palestinians can be regarded as the missing Other of the site, which presents the battle over Jerusalem from an exclusively Israeli point of view. The absence of Palestinians is even more striking when one considers the geographical location of AHNMS, on the border between East Jerusalem (El-Quds) and West Jerusalem. It is located only a few minutes' walk from some of East Jerusalem's Palestinian neighborhoods. In fact, the park adjoining the compound is frequented by Palestinian youths and families, and there is a large Arab high-school right across the street.

The spaces of the AHNMS, the museum and the visitor book all call to mind Edensor's (1998) distinction between "enclavic" and "heterogeneous" stages. Although these spaces and stages are located in a seemingly heterogeneous urban area, the political divides between East and West Jerusalem are evident in all of them, and contribute to the creation of an enclavic and exclusive/excluding space. Performances therein thus achieve both inclusionary aims (involving "Us"), and exclusionary effects vis-à-vis the Other which are part of, and contribute to, the ongoing division of the city.

### *Visual-iconic Semiotics*

The third dimension which qualifies and characterizes the visitor book as a tourist stage involves the aesthetic aspects of the stage and of the tourists' performances therein. The well-known Kantian concept of aesthetics ties this notion to the human senses. In current literature, emphasis is placed on visual modes of production and appreciation. Since Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), which was as much concerned with aesthetics as with power relations and dominance, aesthetics has been recognized as fundamental to contemporary tourism (Adler 1989a; Harrison 2001), and to everyday postmodern life in general (de Certeau 1984; Urry 1990:84–87). This is particularly true when tourists are viewed from the perspective of performance, because performance, by definition, involves aesthetic awareness both on the part of the performer and on the part of the audience (Adler 1989b).

The pages of the visitor book elicit a visual and graphic production, which, in turn, elicits an aesthetic appreciation; this is "'special' paper, inviting 'special' writing" (Blommaert 2004:654). Although the openings are crowded with letters, words and sentences ("language"), these signs in fact create a graphic and visual document (Figure 1). As argued in Noy (2007:12), while "writing is a verbal medium, under the semiotics of tourism it is also a visual, or at least a vision-inducing, medium." The invitation to create aestheticized graphic performances is inherent in the stage itself, and stems from its deliberate technical features: the book has *wide pages* which *lack any dividing or guiding marks* (such as lines for writing on, or dividers demarking spaces for different entries). The inscribers are offered a blank space to fill—more similar to a blank canvas, intended for drawing on, than to a notebook intended for writing in.

In addition, as mentioned above, each page in the visitor book is printed with a column of symbols. These symbols are themselves graphic-iconic in nature, and therefore, by way of illustration, they too encourage further graphic and iconic elaborations on behalf of the consumers-inscribers. More importantly, the symbols create a *graphic scene* on the pages of the visitor book. The logos that run down each page create a graphic stage that exists prior to and regardless of the visual quality of the tourists' entries. The result is a visual document, which, with the addition of texts, becomes a composite, multi-model record (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). As such, it is consumed not so much through practices of *reading* as through practices of *scanning*

*and gazing.* This is evident from the manner in which visitors look through the book—they do not read it entry by entry, but leaf through it in a more haphazard fashion. This evokes the way in which other museum exhibits are visually consumed, whether they include discursive elements or not.

Figure 1 demonstrates that visitors respond to the invitation of this graphically-oriented stage, filling the book with a colorful array of signs and symbols. At least 40% of the openings include at least one drawing, and all the openings include graphic representations (usually lines that encircle or underline the texts). The opening in Figure 1 includes four symbols: an Israeli flag (center of the left-hand page), a small peace symbol (bottom of the left-hand page), a sword with two olive(?) branches (top left corner of the right-hand page), and a sword with one olive(?) branch (bottom right corner of the right-hand page).

This opening (Figure 1) is quite representative of the book's openings in that it contains seventeen entries (the average being sixteen), which form a composition of texts and symbols that run vertically down the page. Note that the number of English entries and graphic symbols in this opening is slightly larger than the average, and it is also somewhat more organized than other openings, which is why it was chosen for illustrative purposes.

It should be noted that previous visitor books used in this museum prior to 1994 present a different picture. The current type of volume, and the physical structure on which it is placed, were introduced in 1994. Prior to that time, the visitor book was a plain, standard-sized (quarto) notebook with lined pages. In these notebooks, drawings and other graphic representations were far more infrequent, appearing only on 5% of the openings (compared with 40% in the book presented here). The graphic quality of the entries can thus be directly linked to the particular features of the current type of visitor book.

The graphic qualities of this stage do not stem solely from the presence of drawings. Other marks also contribute to the overall visual quality of the production, including stylized personal signatures, frames that surround some entries, underlining, and abundant punctuation marks (especially exclamation marks!). Different styles of handwriting (i.e., orthographic features) further contribute to the visual variety. Hence, even if there is no explicit intention to create a stylized "graphic" entry, the various handwriting styles create an aesthetic document characterized by visual heterogeneity.

Lastly, another important factor that contributes to the overall appearance of the opening—and highlights the collective character of this stage—is the positioning of the entries on the page, and their spatial relationships. Consider the arrangements of the right page and of the left page in Figure 1. The right-hand page displays a symmetrical composition, with entries positioned neatly to either side of the vertical axis created by the printed symbols (four entries on the left and five on the right). On the left-hand page, the entries form a more complicated, but likewise harmonic, composition, proceeding from top to bottom and from left to right. The composition begins with a date, written in the upper left corner of the page, and ends with the

address of an inscriber in the bottom right corner. In between, the first entry has a “tail” of four signatures that occupies the space to the left of the column of symbols. The next entry (second from the top) is positioned below and to the right of the top entry, so that it sits right across from the signatures and “balances” them. Moreover, note that this entry is tilted to the right, mirroring the slant of the signatures across from it. The third entry from the top is placed below and to the left, continuing the zigzag pattern of progression down the page. The fourth and last entry is located, quite expectedly, below and to the right, thus completing the design. Together, these entries comprise an aesthetic, graphic performance, which represents an accomplishment of a collective and collaborative nature.

This collaboration and co-existence of (Jewish) entries side by side, and the aesthetic quality of the designs, both individually and as a group, further qualify and designate the stage as an organic component of the AHNMS. It now becomes an additional surface that exhibits familiar aesthetics, which visitors can both look at and take part in producing. The fact that these aesthetics are produced by the visitors themselves grants them a desirable “authentic” status: they enrich and enliven the site’s collection of images and they do so in a seemingly “spontaneous” way.

Obviously, not all performances and not all openings are as artfully constructed as the one in [Figure 1](#). As with any artistic production, perfection requires practice and earlier drafts. Indeed, the book occasionally exhibits unfinished drawings, apparently judged as inadequate by their inscribers, as well as textual corrections and erasures. Drafts and textual corrections are usually produced by young visitors. This highlights a fact that is implicit in most performances—namely that the production of coherent and aesthetic performances that are in accordance with, and appropriate to, the norms and characteristics of particular stages is an acquired skill.

### *The Semiotics of Rhetoric: Entries as Utterances*

The fourth and last dimension to be discussed here involves the linguistic aspects of the production in the visitor book. Just like the performative dimensions discussed earlier, the meaning of linguistic expressions is tied to, and shaped by, the particular conventions and norms associated with a particular stage. Yet different codes demand different adjustments, and the exploration therefore turns from visual and graphic aesthetics to rhetoric, which Aristotle famously characterized as the skill of artful linguistic expression ([Aristotle 2007](#)). As explained above, the following is not concerned with the content of the entries as such, but with the meanings that these entries assume, and with the way these meanings are communicated, as rhetorical dimensions deriving from the particular properties of the stage.

In order to explore the rhetoric of the entries as situated performances or “utterances,” several aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin’s “theory of utterance” shall be employed ([Bakhtin 1981, 1986a](#)). According

to Bakhtin, utterances are bounded units of meaningful linguistic expression, which are dialogical in essence, and whose meanings are determined by the voices they establish and the dialogues in which they partake. The voices of utterances are informed by two features that all utterances share, namely responsivity and addressivity. The former relates to the fact that utterances always respond to a given context or to prior utterance(s); they are “responsive reactions” (Bakhtin 1986b:91). The latter captures the fact that utterances are necessarily addressed *to* someone; that is, they are always “directed at” or “turned to” some addressee (Bakhtin 1986a:95,99). Addressivity and responsivity are the qualities that allow specific utterances to form part of larger social chains of exchange and interaction, and thus to assume meaning in specific contexts. (Note that Bakhtin’s original notions relate to oral expression, i.e. to speech; however, his theory of utterance has been extended and applied to all modes of expression).

Below are two examples that show how entries employ rhetorical conventions and norms, thereby establishing meaningfulness through voice, responsivity and addressivity. These entries exemplify different “enactions, which take place on a particular stage in the meeting and contestation of different social roles” (Edensor 2000:341).

The first entry was originally in Hebrew, while the second was in English except for the name *Eretz Yisrael*. The entries are on the same page, the first written slightly above the second, and are dated August 8, 2005 and August 9, 2005, respectively.

#### Entry I

9.8.05

The visit taught us of the difficult battles  
and of the high and dear cost we paid in blood  
so that today we would be able to stroll and live in Jerusalem  
quietly and freely.

It was very moving.

The Shaked Family

#### Entry II

Thank you for dying for our country.

What you did enabled me and other Jews  
to be able to live in *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel].

With great Respect,

August 9, 2005      Shira, NJ.

The entries both comply with the norms that govern this stage, yet they do so in ways that are both different and similar. In terms of similarities, both display elements that appear in many of the entries on this stage—namely the date, inscriber’s name, and inscriber’s place of residence—and both are relatively short, as expected in visitor books (Stamou and Paraskevolpoulos 2003:38). The general themes expressed are also typical of visitor books, revolving around gratitude and praise.

As appropriate to performances in a *heritage* site, the narratives combine past and the present, conveying a causal relationship between past sacrifices and present existence (Katriel 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:197–199). This narrative also reflects the visitors' collective sense of identification with the objectives of the site—a sense which is commonly expressed through the use of the first person plural (“we paid”, “our country”). Lastly, both utterances make use of verbal symbols (“Jerusalem”, “Judaism”, “Land of Israel”), whose function is similar to that of the iconic drawings discussed above. These verbal symbols are rhetoric means that communicate meaning effectively and concisely, and are thus optimally suitable for short expressions. In all these respects, both entries are well suited to the stage, and demonstrate that their authors know the relevant norms and express themselves aptly.

However, the two entries differ in terms of voices and dialogues. Consider the addressivity of the first entry. The message in this entry is addressed to the management, which is seen as the agent responsible for the museum and its exhibits. Though the addressee is implicit, it can be deduced from the reference to “the visit” at the beginning and end of the utterance (“The visit taught us”, “It was very moving”). In other words, the object of the utterance is the visit, and, in referring to it, the inscriber evokes two important themes, namely the educational effect of the visit and its emotive impact.

The former theme corresponds to the mission of modern museums, which is an educational one (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). In the present case, this theme also echoes a fundamental principle of Sabra (i.e., native Jewish-Israeli) culture, related to the socialist ideal of education (Katriel 1997). In the visitor book, this theme is typically conveyed through the use of words such as “we learned” (*lamadnu*), “interesting museum” (*muzeon me'anyen*), and “demonstrates well” (*mamhish tov*). As for the emotive theme, it corresponds to the site's heritage and commemorative mission, which is to create an emotional and moving “experience.” This experience is usually referred to using words like “moving” (*meragesh*), “saddening” (*ma'atsiv*) and “painful” (*ko'ev*).

The text enclosed between the opening and closing statements of the first entry (“the difficult battles ... quietly and freely”), reflects the inscriber's understanding of what is expected of performances on this stage. The inscriber demonstrates that she is a competent “heritage tourist,” and that she knows both how she is expected to *react*, and how she is meant to *convey* her reaction. The Shaked family basically expresses gratitude for being taught about the Ammunition Hill Battle, confirming that the site's narrative—the relationship between the “sacrifices” and the “liberation” of Jerusalem—has been successfully conveyed. This, precisely, is the responsive dimension of the utterance. The entry acknowledges the availability of the site, and the possibility of being informed by the national narrative it conveys.

Examined via these (Bakhtinian) parameters, the second entry differs considerably from the first. In this case, the addressee is quite explicit: the utterance is powerfully framed as a message addressed to *the fallen soldiers themselves* (“Thank you for dying”). Unlike the Shaked family, Shira expresses indebtedness to the soldiers who died in the

battle some forty years ago, and not to the people who perform the job of commemorating them. The address also includes the utterance's responsive dimension, indicating that Shira is responding to the soldiers' sacrifice (and not to the availability of the site and its narrative). This sacrifice ("What you did") does not only "enable" Shira to reside in Israel (supposedly), but also constitutes the prior occasion to which she is responding.

The different dialogues that these two utterances establish through responsivity and addressivity also frame them differently: the first utterance's frame of reference is the site, while the second utterance's frame of reference is the historic battle. Accordingly, the first utterance belongs to the genre of "appreciative feedback", while the second, addressed to people who are not physically present at the time of interaction (Goffman 1981), is more akin to a prayer in terms of its genre. In other words, the latter utterance looks *through* the site and not *at the site*, as it were. While the Shaked family addresses concrete places and mundane activities (the visit, strolling in Jerusalem), Shira of New Jersey does not mention the visit, the site, nor any other locality ("The Land of Israel" being a symbolic religious-scape). As Katriel (1994:12) observes, the latter type of utterance represents an "approach to the events of the past [that] echoes a familiar strategy in traditional Jewish thought . . . more concerned with the timeless meaning rather than with the fleeting shape of historical events."

Note that the language of each entry—Hebrew in the former case and English in the latter—clearly designates the writers as belonging to two different visitor populations. English utterances are commonly produced by Ultra-Orthodox North American tourists (Jewish Diaspora), while Hebrew is used by local Israelis sightseeing in Jerusalem. The differences discerned above are typical of, and can be explained by, the cultural and religious differences between the two groups. (It is not surprising that all the entries that criticize some physical aspect of the museum, such as poor maintenance, lack of sufficient light, etc., are in Hebrew, while those criticizing the message of the site from religious perspective are in English). However, the entries' languages in themselves are not rhetorical devices ("code switching" aside), and a discussion of the populations they represent lies beyond the present scope.

The two entries show how utterers, by constructing certain voices and partaking in certain dialogues, delineate their voice on the multi-voiced surfaces of the visitor book, and how they position themselves rhetorically on the stage. In other words, their textual performance, as a situated, stylized and coherent utterance, is achieved rhetorically, and not graphically.

## CONCLUSION: FROM PAGES TO STAGES – TOWARDS A MODEL OF PERFORMANCE

This research builds on and combines two bodies of literature in tourism studies: language studies and performance studies. This com-

bination is possible since underlying both fields is the search for communicative practices that shape tourists' experiences and meanings. The findings of this research suggest that tourists' entries in some visitor books carry significance beyond what is conveyed by the words themselves. These discursive productions should, in effect, be understood as aesthetic, multi-modal, and politically charged performances. Yet why do some books function like stages, while others do not? Or, in other words, what makes pages into stages?

Like other stages, the AHNMS visitor book affords a performative state for two related reasons. First, it is located at a site that is public and charged with symbolic meaning. At this site, interactions assume a ritualistic character, and are accomplished via specific material settings (interactions with the book and its surroundings), symbolic aspects (interactions with the site's symbols, icons, and narratives), and social aspects (interactions with past and future visitors). While performances clearly require a stage on which they can be articulated, they do not merely occur *on* stages. Rather, people perform *with* and *through* stages. This observation rejects the structuralist dichotomies between producers and consumers, and between structure and enactment, in favor of a post-structural appreciation of enmeshed, situated, and interactional productions.

Moreover, the intensity and dense symbolism associated with this stage result from factors that pertain to the visitors themselves—their identities (demographic profiles) and motivations. As mentioned above, the visitors to the AHNMS are all Jewish tourists, mostly Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox, for whom the site evokes highly charged associations of national heritage. In light of the ever-heated debate over the “unity of Jerusalem,” the relevance of the ideological agenda promoted by the site requires no elaboration. For those visitors who partake in the production on the pages of the book, the battle over Jerusalem is not over. These visitors are true “heritage tourists,” rather than merely tourists *at* a heritage site (Poria, Butler, and Airey 2003:249).

The four dimensions described in the article have broader implications for research structure and methods of exploring performances. The institutional interfaces of stages, their collective versus individual qualities, their visual (graphic-iconic) aesthetics, and—in the case of expressions that are mainly verbal, the aesthetics of rhetoric—all combine to form a model for analyzing tourist performances. This is a model in which each level of analysis is connected to and builds on the previous level(s). In methodological terms, the different levels illustrate sensitivities that should be explored and aspects that should be addressed in further explorations of performance and language in tourism.

With regards to language production, this research addresses yet another medium within the rich communicative environments of tourism (Jaworski and Pritchard 2005). Specifically, it enriches the comprehensive classification model suggested by Dann (1996). This model relates the medium of the expression (written, audio, etc.) to the stage of the trip during which it is consumed or produced (before,

during, after). Visitor book entries clearly constitute “on-trip written and visual media” (Dann 1996:141), which are both produced *and* consumed by tourists during their trip. This medium thus belongs both to the category of tourists’ productions, such as letter and journal writing, which are pursued during the trip, and to that of texts consumed by tourists, such as guidebooks and maps, which are perused during the trip.

Finally, this research has implications for institutions that present their visitors with visitor books and guest books. In terms of content, it has been shown that institutions can learn about tourists’ preoccupations from the topics and themes that they choose to represent in these volumes. Due to the unique nature of this medium, the type of data it provides will probably differ considerably from data collected by more conventional methods, such as interviews or questionnaires. While the latter methods are interventional and rely on researcher-tourist interaction, visitor books produce data through tourist-institution interaction (and through interaction among tourists). They are therefore more “organic” to tourism, require very little effort to maintain, and produce data that resembles that generated via ethnographic and other non-interventional methods.

In terms of performance, this study suggests that visitor book entries should not be viewed from the point of view of what tourists *think about* the attraction, but in terms of what they *do* and how they *behave* while “on tour.” A performance approach is particularly successful at illuminating tourists’ norms and conducts, and the various ways through which they choose to partake in the narrative presented by the institution. For instance, a visitor book located at a restaurant might shed considerable light on the norms and practices that govern dining, and on the meaning that dining takes on at that particular facility.

Lastly, regardless of whether visitor books are viewed as stages or as pages, it seems that that they should not be considered in isolation. More effective is a scheme of “multiple articulations,” whereby tourists’ and visitors’ expressions in different yet inter-related sites are studied. In such a scheme, the visitor book is seen as one site among many—one of the numerous modes of communication and meaning-making practices in tourism.

*Acknowledgements*—An earlier version of this article was presented to the members of the Tourism Program at Surrey University, whose comments improved the article considerably. Many thanks to Tamar Katriel and Brenda Danet for giving the initial academic support needed for the “Tourists’ Texts Project,” and to the members of the “Jerusalem Discourse Forum,” for their sustained intellectual enthusiasm. Finally, the author is indebted to Hagit Migron for her help in editing the article.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, J.  
 1989a Origins of Sightseeing. *Annals of Tourism Research* 16:7–29.  
 1989b Travel as Performed Art. *American Journal of Sociology* 94:1366–1391.

- Aristotle  
2007 *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (G.A. Kennedy, trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bakhtin, M.  
1981 *Discourse in the Novel*. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (C. Emerson and M. Holquist, trans.), pp. 259–422. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
1986a *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (V.W. McGee, trans.), pp. 60–102. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
1986b *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (V.W. McGee, trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Blommaert, J.  
2004 *Writing as a Problem: African Grassroots Writing, Economies of Literacy, and Globalization*. *Language in Society* 33:643–671.
- de Certeau, M.  
1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* (S. Rendall, trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chronis, A.  
2005 *Constructing Heritage at the Gettysburg Storyscape*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 32:386–406.
- Coleman, S. and M. Crang, eds.  
2002 *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Dann, G.  
1996 *The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Wallingford, UK: CAB International.
- Derrida, J.  
1976 *Of Grammatology* (G.C. Spivak, trans). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Edensor, T.  
1998 *Tourists at the Taj: Performance and Meaning at a Symbolic Site*. London: Routledge.  
2000 *Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 27:322–344.  
2001 *Performing Tourism, Staging Tourism: (Re) Producing Tourist Space and Practice*. *Tourist studies* 1:59–81.
- Goffman, E.  
1981 *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Haldrup, M., and J. Larsen  
2003 *The Family Gaze*. *Tourist Studies* 3:23–45.
- Harrison, J.  
2001 *Thinking About Tourists*. *International Sociology* 16:159–172.
- Hull, M.  
2003 *The File: Agency, Authority, and Autography in an Islamabad Bureaucracy*. *Language and Communication* 23:287–314.
- Jaworski, A., and A. Pritchard  
2005 *Discourse, Communication, and Tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.
- Katriel, T.  
1994 *Sites of Memory: Discourses of the Past in Israeli Pioneering Settlement Museums*. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80:1–20.  
1997 *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli Settlement Museums*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B.  
1998 *Destination Cultures: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kress, G.  
2003 *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G., and C. Jewitt  
2003 *Introduction*. In *Multimodal Literacy*, C. Jewitt and G. Kress, eds., pp. 1–18. New York: Peter Lang.

- Kress, G., and T. van Leeuwen  
2006 Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design. New York: Routledge.
- Laurier, E., and A. Whyte  
2001 'I Saw You: Searching for Lost Love via Practices of Reading, Writing and Responding. Sociological Research Online 6(1) <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/1/laurier.html>> (30 December 2007).
- Löfgren, O.  
1999 On Holiday: A History of Vacationing. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MacCannell, D.  
1999 The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MacDonald, S.  
2005 Accessing Audiences: Visiting Visitor Books. Museum and Society 3:119–136.  
2006 Mediating Heritage: Tour Guides at the Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg. Tourist Studies 6:119–138.
- Neumann, M.  
1999 On the Rim: Looking for the Grand Canyon. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Noy, C.  
2004 'The Trip Really Changed Me': Backpackers' Narratives of Self-Change. Annals of Tourism Research 31:78–102.  
2006 A Narrative Community: Voices of Israeli Backpackers. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.  
2007 The Poetics of Tourist Experience: An Autoethnography of a Family Trip to Eilat. Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change 5:1–17.
- Phipps, A.  
2007 Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival: Linguaging, Tourism, Life. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.
- Poria, Y., R. Butler, and A. David  
2003 The Core of Heritage Tourism. Annals of Tourism Research 30:238–254.
- Silverstein, M. and G. Urban, eds.  
1996 Natural Histories of Discourse. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stamou, A., and S. Paraskevolpoulos  
2003 Ecotourism Experiences in Visitors' Books of a Greek Reserve: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective. Sociologia Ruralis 43:34–55.
- Stewart, S.  
1991 Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
1993 On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Turner, V.  
1967 The Forest of Symbols; Aspects of Ndembu Ritual. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Urry, J.  
1990 The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies. London: Sage.
- van Leeuwen, T. and C. Jewitt, eds.  
2001 Handbook of Visual Analysis. London: Sage.

*Received 23 October 2007. Resubmitted 20 January 2008. Final version 29 January 2008. Accepted 13 February 2008. Refereed anonymously. Coordinating Editor: Lee Jolliffe*