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THE EXPERT AND THE NETWORKED PUBLIC: PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE FACEBOOKED WEDDING

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A typical middle class wedding in Israel is documented by roughly 3000-6000 still photos taken by friends, family, service providers and professional photographers, uploaded and shared throughout the ceremony, and archived thereafter in various online, offline and printed photo albums. Conceiving of the wedding as a paradigmatic site of cultural production and reproduction, this paper explores the practices through which professional photographers distinguish themselves from amateurs just as digital photography became ubiquitous (Hand, 2013), and has seemingly levelled the playing field.

Amateur (or citizen) photography has severely affected professional photographers. Reflecting on the crisis in employment and work conditions of photojournalists, Klein-Avraham and Reich conclude that while the implementation of digitization did not cause the situation, it did precipitate a negative synergy between photojournalists' "old and new weaknesses" (2016:429). The deskilling they describe – a new weakness – entails a transition from subtle to crude skills, namely from "capturing publishable frames under pressure of uncertainty" to "walking and driving" (440) or merely attending. Drawing on interviews with ten wedding photographers and ten newlywed couples, as well as Facebook pages of wedding photographers and newlywed groups, we will suggest that as independent, "artisanal photographers" (Frosh, in press) whose livelihood depends on direct sales to the market, wedding photographers managed to distinguish themselves from the networked public of amateur photographers and overcome this impending crisis through professional, technological and artistic upskilling.

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Expertise: The wedding photographers are recognized for the quality of their pictures. Only the photographer's pictures will find their way into the printed photo album of the wedding. Similarly, the newlyweds refer to guests' expectation to receive professional photos which they then upload as their profile pictures. Thus, although most wedding guests would use their telephone cameras during the event; and although other suppliers – the DJ, the stylists and notably the "magnet photographer," hired to shoot small portraits of the guests and hand them out to them as mementos – would also document the event and upload their pictures, it is the professional photographer who accompanies the bride or the couple throughout the wedding day (and indeed long before that), who is solely responsible for documenting the wedding ritual, and who coaches the couple through the daunting labor of curating and archiving the immense output in the days and months that follow.

But what the newlyweds appreciate most are the photographer's friendship and the "chemistry" that ties them together. As one bride posted on her photographer's page, "my photographer and my husband were the best choices I made. From the first day we knew we were fortunate, but we didn't realize how much! We didn't just have a great photographer but a dear friend." Since the photographers' work is displayed on Facebook, the encounter with them is devoted to evaluating the potential bond: "I tell the couple on our first meeting that they should see how they get along with me and if there is no chemistry they shouldn't take me since it affects the results." Thus providing professional photography is just one of the photographer's missions – coaching the bride and groom through the trials and tribulations of their wedding events is no less important, and indeed although they sign a business contract with the photographer, the couples define him or her as a friend. In the paper, we elaborate on the forms this neoliberal artisanal photography takes as photographers' work becomes intertwined in prolonged emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003), and as an expanding social network – arguably, an economic circuit (Zelizer, 2006) of sorts – is required for securing the current and future jobs.

Equipment: The photographers must always stay (at least) one step ahead of the amateurs. Our exploration was intrigued by an NYT piece on "unplugged weddings" that invited the guests to attend the ritual and "bear witness" in a nostalgic appeal for unmediated authenticity.¹ As we went along, a local report featured a wedding documented by the professional photographer's cellphone camera alone.² These very different low-tech accounts – man bites dog stories that indicate the growing technological sophistication of the field – underscore, at the same time, professional photographers' imperative to maintain a technological advantage.

And they do. The photographers use a dedicated, visible camera that marks them as professional ("the guests see someone with a big camera and assume he is one of the professional photographers" even when it is an inconsiderate guest who harms the professionals' reputation); men photographers used *go-pro*, drones and selfie-bottle cameras as well. In the paper, we suggest that although these technologies – especially when used in ensemble – are important for creating a professional edge, it is the

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/fashion/the-i-dos-unplugged-this-life.html>

² <http://www.mako.co.il/women-wedding-magazine/articles/Article-d970d2983ec5e41006.htm>

amateurs' cellular cameras that feed and indeed dominate the public network, whereas the quality photographs of the professional photographer end up in more private collections such as the printed photo album and offline data storages.

Aesthetic: The newlyweds and the photographers aspire to authentic, spontaneous, "simple" documentation. While this can be accomplished by most amateurs, only professional photographers master the broader range of styles that is in fact required for the successful documentation of the wedding. Thus a crucial element of the event is the ritual, wherein the photographer is expected to produce a prescribed set of images (in a Jewish wedding these would include putting the band on the bride's finger, drinking from a wine glass and displaying the *Ketubah*; see Shandler, 2009). Another crucial component is family group portraiture – "the only thing I continue to stage," as one photographer admits: family photographs "are where the photographer is measured."

The natural-staged photograph is another specialty of the professional photographer. Bridal photos are particularly prone to reality shows' rhetoric (Engstrom, 2008) of staged behind-the-scenes: "my friend helped me wear the gown. She closed the buttons and left one open. We went out to the photographer who waited in the living room, and he shot her closing the top button of my dress." But decisive moments (*à la* Cartier-Bresson) are staged under the *Chuppah* as well: "I tell the couple, when you reach that moment when he lifts your veil, take your time and experience that moment." In the paper we propose that free, spontaneous photography is where the professional photographer slightly loses ground (see Larsen, 2005). Professional photographers' spontaneity is by definition assumed, since they are commissioned to produce it. Photos taken and uploaded by the networked public of amateurs are, by contrast, "authentic" in that as guests, they presumably experienced a moment or an angle that made them take out their cameras and document that singular instant. Further, whereas the friended professional photographer knows only to tag the couple, friends can tag each other such that, ironically, metadata serve as indicators of contrived v. authentic spontaneity.

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