

Małgorzata Myślińska / Title: **Nobles *imaginarium*. The studium of phantome residence of common ancestor – based on painted backdrops and props.**

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Within the artist residency *Residence in Residence*, in Zamek Culture Centre in Poznan, and my artistic research *The Photo Parlour* (2018), I made an inventory of equipment and paraphernalia of photo parlours in Greater Poland region, mainly backdrops made by painters-craftspeople and props. The collected material let me build a photographic archive, based on which – together with self-publishing collective Ostrøv – I created my photography book *Manors and Palaces*.

My dissertation is devoted to the visual culture of photo parlours and the identity they have built, a “common *imaginarium*” of peasant-rooted and aspiring to a better life – a phantom middle class. This merging into a new social group was due to visual norms featured during the transformation period – mainly imitation. In the field, I have investigated the role of playing dress-up, playing so called “scenes sessions”, inspired by aristocratic and gentry culture. They were taking part in reversal of the roles – lordship and servility, donning masks, displaying past relations related with the social dynamics around the Manor, and ownership, in post-peasant society, stigmatized by the feudal world and serfdom. The scenes sessions, created by backdrops, props, choreographies and gestures, produced images which aimed to legitimize new social positions, helping in climbing the social ladder. Using theoretical tools of Pierre Bourdieu – the concept of habitus and distinction – I show attempts to remove embodiments of peasant habitus, replaced by the cultural nobleness. Based on a biography – the story of upward mobility – Didier Eribon’s *Returning to Reims*, I refer to the category of “structure translation” and show its role in creating class distance.

I use the tools of a “radical program of visual sociology” and the category of Terence Wright’s “looking behind picture”. The peasants’ corps does not fit here into a suit, as per John Berger’s essay, *The Suit and the Photograph*. I prove that the visual culture of photo parlours can be classified as peasant photography. I state it based on evidence surrounding the causes of taking the photos, their form, and even the language that accompanies them.

Additionally, I try to show that photo sessions with backdrops and props, as a manifestation of “populist Sarmatism”, strengthened in the collective consciousness of the emerging new modern society, such phantasms as “nobles *imaginarium*”, “national habitus”, “myths of national Eastern marches”. One of the features of peasant photography is its inability to deny someone’s existence. The peasant photograph, which one of the major characteristics was commemoration, served, as I prove, a strong collective forgetfulness – of one’s own roots, one’s peasant origins.