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TEXTUALISING LABOUR: CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN POETRY AND ITS CRISIS OF REALISM

Abstract: This article explores the formal and ideological dynamics of realism, autobiography, and autotheory in contemporary Romanian poetry, situating it within the evolving dynamics of capitalist division of labour. We argue that the "crisis of realism" manifests in two distinct yet dialectically intertwined forms: first, as an early reflexive mode rooted in autobiographical realism, which often obscures the structural determinants of socio-economic realities; and second, as a meta-social mode that converts realism into a practice of autotheory, integrating theoretical abstraction into poetic discourse. This dual crisis reflects the trajectory of Romanian poetry as it negotiates the socio-economic disorientation of post-socialist transition and the ideological pressures of neoliberalism. By examining the intersections of productive, reproductive, and artistic labour through frameworks from Lukács, Jameson, Kornbluh, and Mies, we demonstrate how these poetic modes both critique and reproduce the contradictions inherent in the contemporary labour system,

offering new insights into the literary engagement with the material and ideological structures of late capitalism.

The relationship between poetry, capitalist labour relations, and the division of labour raises several questions: firstly, whether poetry itself constitutes labour; and secondly, whether poetry can address labour — and if so, in what ways it engages with this subject. This distinction lies at the heart of our article, encompassing two distinct perspectives on the literary: a reflexive perspective, exemplified by poetry about work, and a meta-social perspective, where narratives on labour and capitalism are informed by a variety of leftist philosophies of work. Our analysis suggests that the reflexive mode occupies a central position within the Romanian poetic landscape. In the cultural context of post-socialist Romania, which has experienced significant changes in labour regulations and the status of the writer — transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a free market — labour has emerged as a subtle "obsession." This occurs against the backdrop of the de-professionalisation of writing and a publishing market that prioritises profit over the promotion of emerging literature. One of our objectives is to examine whether contemporary poetry has managed to make the leap to the aforementioned meta-social narrative.

Furthermore, we aim to demonstrate how contemporary Romanian poets engage with "History", which exists "as an absent cause, (…) inaccessible to us except in textual form" (Jameson, Political Unconscious 35). In other words, we explore how these poets "textualise" the social fabric and, by extension, the production relations embedded within it. Our central thesis asserts that twenty-first-century poetic realism is fundamentally structured as a "crisis of realism", to borrow Fredric Jameson's terms. We conceptualise this as a dialectical phenomenon that can be analysed through three interrelated poetic modes: realism, autobiography, and autotheory. While the realist poetry of the 2000s was heavily infused with autobiographical elements — by no means neglecting the mode of production but obscuring the ideological underpinnings of the era — the second decade of post-communism marked a peak in ideological awareness. However, this shift came at the expense of realism, which declined in prominence as autotheory gained ascendancy.

Autotheory, in our understanding, is a formal practice that intertwines theoretical discourses — such as feminist, queer, post-Marxist, or antispeciest perspectives — within realist autobiographical writing. This approach responds to the need to elucidate the self's relationship to social structures, moving beyond realism and autobiography. As Anna Kornbluh puts it, "autotheory disintermediates institutions like the university press, the academic degree, and the tradition of theory itself in promotion of amateur knowing and antidisciplinarity." (Kornbluh, Immediacy 158). This form of antidisciplinarity dissolves genres, serving as a means of subverting realism.

Another significant element of our argument is the observation that the prevailing mode of production is rarely examined in depth, except in contexts where it becomes notably precarious, such as during crises, or when its dynamics are interrogated through the lens of gender. During periods of so-called stability, when capitalism obscures its crisis-producing contradictions and naturalises a perpetual state of crisis, realism is further marginalised in favour of alternative literary forms such as autotheory. In our theoretical framework, we draw on the model of critical realism articulated by Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson, distinguishing between the aesthetic category of realism — defined as a mere reflection of social realities — and its critical-ideological counterpart, which focuses on understanding the material, historical, and ideological determinants of the current mode of production.

The phenomenon we describe is transgenerational, reflecting how poets engage with two pivotal moments in Romanian social and economic history: the spontaneous transition following the post-socialist era and the significant ascent of neoliberalism. During the 1990s, poetry often lacked a strong connection to reality, tending instead towards metaphysical themes, as exemplified by Ion Mureşan or Ioan Es. Pop, among others, who had previously established themselves as neo-expressionists. However, this period also harboured a critical nucleus that would later evolve. This precariousness, codified decades later through the trope of the capitalist "monster" (Vişan, Monstruozitate 123), initially manifests in 1990s poetry as a "metaphysics" of alcohol — a precursor to the socially critical orientations of poets like Dan Sociu, Ruxandra Novac, and Elena Vlădăreanu. Alongside neo-expressionism and postmodernism — both of which remained somewhat marginal — the mainstream poetic discourse of the 1990s was shaped by figures such as Mircea Dinescu and Adrian Păunescu. Dinescu continued to critique the socialist regime

even after its collapse, while Păunescu, despite his popularity during socialism, expressed similar sentiments. The political tone of 1990s poetry appears characterised by an "axiomatic" anti-communism, which had already begun to incorporate anti-capitalist ideologemes within the literary press of 1990–1994 (Dumitru, Presa literară românească 2).

In the 2000s, poets such as Marius Ianuş, Dan Sociu, and Ruxandra Novac began to articulate their perspectives on labour — or, more specifically, unemployment — shaping a hybrid ideology that combines anti-communist and anti-capitalist attitudes. They express their contemporary trauma through the lingering spectre of the communist past. Our central argument regarding this poetics is that the confusion resulting from the spontaneous transition led to an inability to fully grasp the socio-economic structure, corresponding to a quasi-absence of ideological insight. However, after 2008–2009, during the peak of neoliberalism, this confusion gradually gave way to a growing ideological awareness. For us, this shift signals an increased comprehensibility of the socio-economic structure, attributable to the poets' engagement with various leftist theories and the development of a critical perspective. Nevertheless, we argue that a crisis of realism emerges in this context, albeit in a counterintuitive way. Some of the authors we examine demonstrate a marked tendency towards theorisation and abstraction of the realities they aim to critique. As these poets delve into theoretical realms, they move further from realism and autobiography, adopting a form of "idealism" that manifests as a distinctly "utopian" practice — the practice of autotheory.

Although our article addresses a theoretical issue, we also include a brief analysis of several representative volumes of poetry. In our analysis, we draw on a network of concepts from fields such as social theory, classical Marxism, Marxist feminism, and even post-Marxism. To name a few, our discussion is structured around the concepts of productive, reproductive, and artistic labour, "housewifisation," and "post-/anti-work" philosophies.

While productive labour is central to classical Marxist theory, typically referring to workers engaged in highly controlled, wage-earning activities, the concept of reproductive labour — first discussed by Friedrich Engels in his 1884 *Der Ursprung der Familie, das Privateigenthums und des Staats* — only gained proper recognition within social theory through the socialist feminism of the twentieth century. Marxist feminists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontai, and Clara

Zetkin brought particular attention to the conditions of women's labour by highlighting the gendered division between paid productive and unpaid reproductive labour. The issue of reproductive labour is especially significant because, as Elisabeth Armstrong observes, "[i]n the latter half of the twentieth century, women workers have become universal to the workplace, but feminised, unpaid reproductive labour hasn't dissolved" (Armstrong 47). Furthermore, reproductive labour cannot be understood apart from the process of "housewifisation," a term coined by Maria Mies to describe how capitalism, within a patriarchal system, relegates women's labour to uncredited subsistence work. We also connect these issues to the question of artistic labour and post-work philosophies, as our primary concern lies with the literary and the ideologies surrounding contemporary labour relations.

Political (Un)Consciousness and the Crisis of Realism

Labour relations function as a resonant reflection of the social totality, revealing its degree of comprehensibility or opacity. These relations shape not only subsistence but also social practices and ways of life, embedding individual identity within an ideological framework. As Marx and Engels assert, "what they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production" (Marx and Engels 42). In this section, we situate the history of literary theorisation on realism within its broader intellectual context, with particular emphasis on Georg Lukács's and Fredric Jameson's conceptualisations of realism as a political category, noting that the latter expands the scope of realism to encompass poetry as well. Our objective is to examine the historical conditions underpinning the "crisis of realism" as articulated by Jameson in his essay "Rimbaud and the Spatial Text." Following this, we historicise what we term the contemporary crisis of realism, interpreting it as a symptom of late capitalism within the current Romanian poetic landscape. Contemporary realism in poetry can be understood as structured around a crisis; however, it is, in fact, an adaptive or evolving phenomenon shaped by the socio-cultural and historical-material conditions of the present.

While recent scholarship has extensively explored representations of labour relations in the Romanian novel[1], poetry has largely been approached from broader perspectives, such as its intersection with biographism and "individualist anarchism" (Stan 8) or as a site of economic trauma (Goldiş 379). Other frameworks, including posthumanism, post-postmodernism, and metamodernism, have been employed, yet these perspectives often overlook the specific formal techniques through which poetry renders social experience into textual form[2].

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[1] The theme of labour has gained significant theoretical and methodological prominence, embodying a critical approach that bridges literature with disciplines such as political economy, sociology, and cultural theory. This conceptual rise of labour within literary studies can be understood as a response to post-communist socio-economic shifts, where structural disruptions and labour precarity emerge as central concerns. Scholars increasingly explore literature's depiction of labour not merely as an economic activity but as a symbolic field mediating access to power, agency, and social integration. For instance, Ştefan Baghiu and Cosmin Borza's article, "The Sickle and the Piano. A Distant Reading of Work in the Nineteenth Century Romanian Novel," conducts a distant reading to foreground the invisibility of physical labour and the proletariat within the nineteenth-century Romanian novel. Their analysis highlights a bourgeois literary preference for intimate, labour-detached settings, suggesting that the Romanian novel of this era mirrored the European bourgeois literary conventions that tended to marginalise depictions of physical labour. Teodora Dumitru's study, "Trauma locuirii ca traumă identitară în literatura română a deceniilor 2010-2020. Duţescu, Branişte, Novac," explores the psychological and identity-related impacts of economic instability in contemporary prose and poetry, particularly by framing housing issues as reflections of broader identity crises. Dumitru's analysis reveals how characters—both epic and lyrical—navigate unfulfilled desires for community, belonging, and psychological and emotional stability, facing traumas closely tied to employment that fails to provide the financial means necessary to secure housing. Similarly, the article by Ştefan Baghiu and Ovio Olaru, "Capitalist Heterotopia & Lost Social Utopia: Documenting Class, Work, and Migration in Post-Communist East-Central European Fiction," investigates post-communist literary narratives, focusing on how themes of work and migration encapsulate the socio-economic realities of East-Central Europe. This latter study critiques both the prevalent anti-communist ethos in post-communist literature and the absence of social utopias following communism's collapse. Baghiu and Olaru examine how recent novels address the systemic failures of both communism and capitalism, especially through the lens of migration, as a means to critique neoliberal capitalist exploitation. Meanwhile, Mihnea Bâlici's paper, "The Unhappy Marriage of Care and the Global Market: 'Soft Backsliding' in the Narratives of Two Romanian Badanti," introduces a Marxist feminist framework to analyse the global care chain. Bâlici's study of narratives written by *badanti* in Italy exposes the exploitative dynamics of reproductive labour outsourced to migrant women. His concept of "soft backsliding"—a contradictory rhetoric blending emancipatory and reactionary ideologies—enhances the discourse on work and migration, particularly regarding the gendered dimensions of care work. In a similar vein, Adriana Stan and Cosmin Borza's paper, "Labors of Love: Migration and Women's Work in Contemporary Literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova," examines the intersection of class and gender in contemporary literature from these regions. Their analysis considers how migrant female characters are commodified within an exploitative transnational labour market, employing world-systems theory to underscore how these narratives reinforce domestic roles and conservative values despite oppressive working conditions. This study critically engages with neoliberal empowerment narratives, demonstrating how global capitalism, rather than subverting traditional gender roles, ultimately reinforces them.

[2] Upon thorough review, we have come to the conclusion that our earlier analyses — see Lupaşcu, "Postumanismul şi poezia română contemporană," and Vişan, "Este postumanismul un metamodernism? Convergenţe şi divergenţe în poezia română contemporană" — no longer align with the standards required for a materialist reading of contemporary literature. We now recognize the limitations of these approaches in adequately addressing the socio-economic foundations and formal dimensions of poetic representation.

Realism has been analysed through the lens of various branches of literary theory. Drawing on Anna Kornbluh's framework, we limit ourselves to outlining two primary models that have shaped the historical conceptualisation of realism: the referentialist model and the political model. According to Kornbluh, referentialism constitutes a "fallacy" that "forecloses a formalist theory of realism" (Kornbluh, The Order of Forms 45). This perspective was notably advanced by theorists such as Erich Auerbach, through his theory of *mimesis*, and Ian Watt, whose approach underscores realism's lack of form. Contemporary approaches, including computational humanities and new historicism, further develop the association between realist discourse and linguistic transitivity (Kornbluh, The Order of Forms 44).

This referentialist model is evident in recent Romanian contributions to the field, where the issues of autobiography and realism are intrinsically linked. An important precedent in examining realism in contemporary poetry can be found in Mihai Iovănel's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* (*The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020*) and Adriana Stan's article, "Post-Socialist Realism. Authenticity and Political Conscience in the Romanian Literature of the 2000s." By prioritising realism over generational divisions in literary forms, Iovănel treats it as "an operator capable of suggesting a transgenerational common reference — the orientation of writers towards reality through a set of theoretical, rhetorical conventions"[3] (Iovănel 11).

In this context, the realism that Iovănel explores in poetry, particularly in the subchapter *"Poezie și realism"* (*"Poetry and Realism"*), is marked by transitivity and referentiality[4]. Adriana Stan, meanwhile, argues that millennial realism at the periphery of global capitalism encapsulates an economic awareness intertwined with questions of identity. She posits that "millennial realism displays a conception of the self that is more economically aware than it would be in the centres of capitalism" (Stan 5). This perspective broadens the aesthetic boundaries of realism — traditionally defined by its transitivity, focus on descriptive reality, and mimetic

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[3] "un operator capabil să sugereze transgenerațional referința comună - raportarea scriitorilor la realitate printr-un set de convenții teoretice, retorice etc.". Unless otherwise stated, all translations are ours.

[4] "Încă din anii '40, atât grupul Albatros (Geo Dumitrescu ș.a.), cât și Cercul Literar de la Sibiu practicau - în forme diferite între ele - o poezie narativă și tranzitivă. Apoi, chiar realismul socialist a promovat o poezie narativă, tranzitivă, fără metafore complicate care să insoliteze discursul, adecvată la o realitate descriptibilă/relatabilă. Arghezi din *1907. Peizaje* (1955) - care continuă de altfel vechiul filon narativ din *Flori de mucigai* (1931) - reprezintă un reper important" (Iovănel 496).

approach — to incorporate economic dimensions within the personal sphere while still retaining a referentialist framework. Is the realist merely a passive observer, reflecting reality as it is, or an active interpreter who questions and subverts representational conventions? Does this mimetic approach risk reducing realism to a mechanical reproduction of the world, thereby neglecting its critical, self-reflexive role — or even its capacity to mirror and engage with class struggle?

The political model of realism can be traced back to the Marxist tradition, which imbues the concept with formalist significance. In Marxism, history itself is form (Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms* 46). The works of theorists such as Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson provide profound insights into realism's operation beyond mere imitation, whether by exposing reality's ideological character or by examining the economic dimension of individual existence. Lukács's conceptualisation of realism was developed during his time in Moscow (1930–1940) as a response to German Expressionism and in opposition to Zhdanovist "socialist realism", which he disliked as much as Western modernism (Jameson, Ideologies of Theory 439). In "Realism in Balance," Lukács highlights the critical role of abstraction, arguing that realism seeks to penetrate "the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society" (38–39). Furthermore, Lukács posits that realism, guided by a dialectical understanding of society, constructs typologies that reveal contradictions within both social and individual realms. In "The Ideology of Modernism," he aligns realism with Aristotle's concept of *zoon politikon*, emphasising its capacity to portray the tensions and contradictions within social formations as integral components of a cohesive whole (Lukács 1224–1225).

Fredric Jameson's ideas originate in Lukács's theories, yet the North American theorist broadens realism's scope to encompass a critique of the socio-economic conditions inherent to the second and third stages of capitalism. In "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate," Jameson argues that realism must challenge the "reification" of capitalist society, whereby human relations are reduced to objectified exchanges (Jameson, Ideologies of Theory 447). This vision finds its theoretical "inverse" in what he describes in "Rimbaud and the Spatial Text" as "a crisis of realism," or "a gap between individual and phenomenological experience and structural intelligibility" (Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* 240). According to Jameson, under the decentralised conditions of imperial capitalism, concrete

experiences become largely unintelligible, as their ultimate determinants lie beyond the perceptual scope of the individual (Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* 240–241). *Even when these determinants are understood in abstract or scientific terms, they remain divorced from lived experience, relegated to the realm of intellectual abstraction.* Jameson's reflections primarily pertain to poetry from the period before the First World War, corresponding to imperial capitalism, during which the realist mode was gradually supplanted by a modernist poetics. In this context, Jameson identifies modernism as being marked by the distinct gap that arises when individuals can no longer fully comprehend the structures of the mode of production (Lukács similarly situates reification at the heart of modernism). The roots of Jameson's perspective on realism are grounded in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, particularly in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Notably, Jameson critiques the deconstructivist discourse, which paved the way for social fragmentation, micropolitics, and populism, while addressing the problem that "the weakness of the American left lay in the lack of a centralized co-ordination and any sense of overall direction" (Pawling 42).

Lukács's and Jameson's conceptions of realism are fundamentally incompatible with the formal modes of autobiography and autotheory, as their realisms reject self-narratives and micropolitics from the outset, as previously noted. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that contemporary Romanian poetry frequently employs these practices. On one hand, the autobiographical model might be reconciled with realism by framing it as a localised approach, where the self serves as a lens through which broader socio-economic experiences can be glimpsed. The risk, however, is that autobiographical poetry might become insular or overly introspective, ultimately obscuring the dynamics of the mode of production rather than elucidating them.

On the other hand, autotheory, while embedded within autobiographical realist writing, dialectically subverts it from within, transforming into a framework that addresses broader theoretical questions rather than concrete socio-economic phenomena. As previously mentioned, realism is not inherently destined to collapse; instead, what we observe is its ongoing transformation. Although Lukács's and Jameson's models of realism represent ideals that are "rarely attained" (Kornbluh, The Order of Forms 49), the critical focus lies not on describing an "ideal of realism"

but on providing a contextualised analysis of the crisis of realism as both a formal and ideological category.

In Jameson's analysis, the crisis is linked to the imperial stage of capitalism. The contemporary crisis of realism, as we propose to understand it, cannot be attributed to any single individual but is instead rooted in a broader systemic force: the late capitalist system, whose crises are experienced collectively. According to Jameson, the third stage of capitalism has led to the "waning of our sense of history" and, perhaps more significantly, to "our resistance to globalization or totalizing concepts like that of the mode of production itself" (Jameson, Postmodernism 406). This phenomenon is particularly evident in Eastern European contexts, notably in twenty-first-century Romania, for several reasons. Chief among these is the disjunction between instantaneous connectivity to various human, social, and economic crises — such as wars, inflation, genocide, and systemic human catastrophes (e.g., the Colectiv tragedy in Romania) — and the political disempowerment experienced by individual subjects. This political powerlessness is further reflected in the inadequate political and symbolic representation of the working class (Tamás 27). For instance, political representatives of the proletariat often align with far-right ideologies, in Romania as in Europe and the United States.

This reality stands in stark contrast to the emergence of a cultural "counter-discourse" associated with the New Left, rooted in postmodern ideological frameworks such as pluralism and populism (Jameson, Postmodernism 320). This dynamic materialises through an individuated and textualised phantasmatic aspiration for immediacy (see Kornbluh, Immediacy), manifesting as a collective political urgency for legal, economic, and social representation. As we observe below, this tendency finds formal expression in the genre of autotheory. In Eastern Europe, the independent Left, as Tamás argues, is predominantly cultural in nature — centred on ethnic, sexual, gender, and ecological subaltern identities — while often minimising the oppression of workers, typically associated with being male or white citizens (Tamás 28).

Labour, Class, and Ideological Shifts across Capitalist Transformations of Post-socialist Romania

In international literature, an important observation on the theme of work in poetry can be found in the volume *Poetry and Work: Work in Modern and Contemporary*

Anglophone Poetry (2019), edited by Jo Lindsay Walton and Ed Luker. Walton and Luker assert that:

> the theme of work can create a window onto much wider views of self, society, and universe. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the story of work in the West has, in its rough outlines, been the story of Taylorism and Fordism, of the construction and partial dismantling of the welfare state, and of the rise of neoliberalism and post-Fordism; we also could identify a distinct recent phase characterised by the growth of the gig economy and the use of digital platforms to organise work (Walton and Luker 3).

In this section, we delve into the historical trajectory of capitalism's post-1989 development in Romania, alongside the analytical frameworks proposed by prominent Romanian sociologists and economists. Our aim is twofold: first, to briefly chart the evolution of Romania's economic system, and second, to elucidate how this trajectory intersects with the theme of labour and the representation of labour relations within the realist framework of contemporary socially engaged poetry. It is essential to underscore that Romania's post-communist "labour narrative" has unfolded within a uniquely configured mode of production, divergent from its Western counterparts. Vladimir Pasti, for instance, observes that Romania's integration into the Euro-Atlantic sphere post-transition continues to embody a model of perpetual transition — a *transition after transition* — reflecting the ongoing and unresolved nature of Romania's adaptation to Western developmental paradigms (Pasti 60).

These developments constitute what Pasti terms "forms of spontaneous transition" (Pasti 64), distinguished by their tendency toward disarray in the absence of essential guiding principles — principles that had underpinned Romania's initial transition from socialism, such as "political democracy, a market economy, and the North Atlantic alliance" (Pasti 65). In the early 2000s[5], for instance, as Romania aspired to the Western model of prosperity, the complexities within labour relations surfaced starkly through attempts to establish a new Labour Code. While Pasti has long cautioned against the potential consequences of the "European neoliberal

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[5] See Murgescu 465-483.

model,"[6] political economist Cornel Ban discusses "a local variant of neoliberal 'shock therapy,'" (Ban 160) whereby EU-driven reforms, ironically, ushered in "the adoption of more socially oriented labour legislation" (Ban 163). This legislation was conceived within the framework of a 2001-2004 coalition government led by the PSD (Social Democratic Party), in alignment with labour unions. However, despite its formalisation, implementation was consistently thwarted, as both national and international business interests contested the elevation of trade union rights within labour relations, undermining its prioritisation (Pasti 54; Ban 163).

At the start of the 2000s, with oligarchic capitalism at its zenith, national capital was often favoured over foreign investment. More than a decade later, however, the 2017 Labour Code, revised according to the Council of Foreign Investors' guidelines, "favours employers over employees, while state policies in health, education, insurance, and social assistance privilege those in the top third of the income scale, etc."[7] (Copilaș, *Marele jaf postcomunist* 54). The evolution of the Labour Code in Romania is particularly illustrative within our analytical framework.

Emanuel Copilaș delineates three dominant phases in the post-socialist economic structure, which, while historically overlapping, each maintain distinct hegemonic traits: oligarchic, technocratic, and digital. According to Copilaș, oligarchic capitalism aligns with a waning anti-communist ideology, increasingly supplanted by nationalist rhetoric aimed at counterbalancing the influence of foreign capital and oriented toward monopolistic control within the domestic market (Copilaș, "Capitalismul românesc" 197). Sociologist Florin Poenaru argues that "[a]nti-communism was meant to justify and perpetuate the class privileges and possibilities of accumulation (of financial, symbolic and cultural capital) for a particular class segment after 1989"[8] (Poenaru 143). During this phase of oligarchic capitalism, capital accumulation for these segments stems not from "innovative service sectors, but rather from trade," as "[i]nward investment is concentrated in

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[6] "Dacă în Europa celor 15 membri inițiali câștig de cauză va avea „modelul social european", atunci reflexele acestui câștig vor genera consecințe în modul de construire a relațiilor de muncă din România. Dacă va avea câștig de cauză „modelul neoliberal european" - care încearcă să facă din România un caz de succes -, atunci acest succes politic al dreptei europene asupra socialiștilor europeni va influența, la rândul său, modul în care se va desfășura tranziția spontană în constituirea pieței forței de muncă în România" (67).

[7] "favorizează angajatorii în dauna angajaților, iar politicile de sănătate, de educație, de asigurări și de asistență socială ale statului favorizează pe cei din treimea superioară a scalei veniturilor etc.".

[8] "[a]nticomunismul a fost menit să justifice și să perpetueze privilegiile de clasă și posibilitățile de acumulare (de capital financiar, simbolic și cultural) ale unui segment de clasă după 1989".

smaller, less efficient economies"[9] (Zamfir 399). This distinction is critical, as technocratic capitalism, by contrast, is "based on the provision of various services rather than on the production of commodities"[10] (Copilaș 198).

Romania's integration into the EU facilitated a shift from anti-communism to a technocratic anti-corruption ideology, resulting in:

> Anti-corruption has become an updated form of anti-communism, adapted to the internal and external transformations Romania has experienced since joining the EU. Its primary tenets include a relentless push for a minimal state, deregulation, reduced budget allocations for social protection, an emphasis on meritocracy, competitiveness, flexicurity, increased military spending, and, broadly, policies of austerity and low wages for the lower classes — measures intended to enhance their appeal within the European labour market (Copilaș 198-199).

A critical turning point in this regard was the 2008 global financial crisis, whose effects reverberated in Romania by 2009, disproportionately impacting the working class and salaried employees. In 2011, under Emil Boc's technocratic government, the Labour Code was revised, leading to a 25% reduction in wages, a 15% decrease in unemployment benefits and pensions, and the elimination of various public sector benefits. The stated rationale for these austerity measures was to boost Romania's local competitiveness and international attractiveness for foreign investment (Guga 156-158). Sociologist Ștefan Guga views these reforms as a classic case of "crisis as opportunity," noting that, as early as 2004, foreign investor representatives had called for the dismantling of worker protections (Guga 161).

The third trend Emanuel Copilaș identifies is digital capitalism, characterised by an "ideological opacity" and coinciding with the post-pandemic rise of anti-statist ideology. Public confidence in the state's role in securing job stability has diminished, as reflected in recent changes to the Labour Code. Copilaș argues that "digital capitalism increases the insecurity of vulnerable employees, such as corporate entry-level staff, probationary workers, call centre operators, food delivery agents, part-

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[9] "[i]nvestițiile interne se plasează mai mult la nivelul unor economii mici și mijlocii, cu eficiență scăzută".

[10] "bazat mai degrabă pe furnizarea de tot felul de servicii decât pe producerea de mărfuri".

time employees, etc."[11] (Copilaş, *Capitalismul românesc* 195). Moreover, public discourse has increasingly turned to neoliberal self-transformation projects — personal development, spirituality, wellness — echoing broader shifts in the capitalist ethos (see Gog and Simionca). Our analysis connects these conceptual and historical developments to the representation of labour in contemporary poetry, reflecting capitalism's metamorphoses in Romania's post-socialist decades. We contend, building on these sociological and economic frameworks, that the realist formula in recent poetry faces inherent challenges in aligning private experience with the broader social structure, pushing the very foundations of realism into a state of crisis.

Poetry Meets Labour: Subjects, Politics, Relations of Production

Our premise posits that post-socialist poetry in Romania conceals an "obsession" with labour, a focus that can be attributed to at least two key factors. Firstly, under state socialism, literary production became both institutionalised and professionalised, allowing writers to secure their social existence and livelihood through intellectual and artistic labour:

> if in the 1950s it was the Party that offered substantial honorariums so that "one could make a living from poetry," regardless of its quality, by the 1960s writers tended to believe they were "giving money to the Party," as a result of liberal professionalisation and the growing influence of literature over other arts[12] (Macrea-Toma 58).

Following 1989 or even before[13], "writers began to question the issue of resources in the new conditions of an economy that was distancing itself from the socialist model"[14] (Iovănel 111), and even scrutinised the status of the writer as a profession amid the decline in its prestige. Secondly, the privatisation of the publishing sector

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[11] "capitalismul digital sporeşte nesiguranţa angajaţilor vulnerabili, cum ar fi angajaţii începători ai corporaţiilor sau cei în perioada de probă, operatorii *call center,* agenţii de livrare a alimentelor, angajaţii cu jumătate de normă etc.".

[12] "dacă în anii 1950 Partidul este cel care oferă onorarii însemnate astfel încât 'se putea trăi dintr-o poezie', indiferent de calitate acesteia, în deceniul al şaptelea scriitorii tind să creadă că ei 'dau bani Partidului', în urma liber-profesionalizării şi creşterii ascendentului literaturii asupra altor arte".

[13] Costi Rogozanu argues that the literary field began to deteriorate in the 1970s due to the rising influence of television, which ushered in a dominant visual mass culture that challenged the previously established literature-centric paradigm. See Costi Rogozanu, "Postmodernismul românesc s-a născut din tezele din iulie şi din crizele petrolului".

[14] "scriitorii încep să-şi pună problema resurselor în noile condiţii ale unei economii care se depărta de modelul socialist".

channelled economic and cultural growth toward right-wing intellectual elites, making such advancements both accessible to and influenced by these groups (Stan and Borza, Deetatization 396-397). Furthermore, creative unions, such as the Romanian Writers' Union, have ensured their own sustainability by cultivating the financial capital of their members through "the allocation of paid positions within magazines, through awards, the 2% literary stamp tax, and later, a 50% increase in the pensions of writers who were members of the Union" (Iovănel 140-141). The intellectual-artistic precariat of the 2000s can be traced to the exclusion from the classification of "valuable" literature by the governing authorities of such unions in the 1960s, along with the failure to acknowledge the artistic contributions of a segment of emerging writers at the beginning of the century, which compelled them to publish their works through "underground" publishers (such as Vinea publishing house).

This situation persists to the present day. However, following 2010, creative fellowships for both novelists and poets have emerged, providing financial assistance and residency support. In the contemporary cultural field, fellowships are awarded by various organisations, including *Scena9* (funded by BRD - Groupe Société Générale), Cărturești bookstore chain (supported by 10% of sales), *Familia* magazine (in collaboration with the Bihor County Council and the "Gheorghe Şincai" County Library in Oradea), DLITE magazine (in partnership with the Goethe-Institut Romania), and FILIT-IAŞI (The International Festival of Literature and Translation Iaşi in collaboration with the National Museum of Romanian Literature in Iaşi).

The central thesis we aim to elucidate is that, in the context of an Eastern European state, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain a livelihood through writing. Poetry is no longer acknowledged as a legitimate form of labour within the neoliberal professional landscape. In this environment, representations of labour relations — as ideologies that entail a complex process of transformation of what Jameson refers to as "raw material" (Jameson, Political Unconscious 87) — permeate and are textualised, or even narrativised, within poetry.

The conditions of precarious employment in the 2000s undoubtedly found expression in the poetry of that era. The scarcity arising from changes in labour relations is reflective of a strand of poetry that depicted autobiographically the profoundly negative impacts on individual lives. Furthermore, the disorientation stemming from a spontaneous transition contributed to an "opaque" perspective, i.e.

to a rather vague understanding of the socio-material conditions of existence. Most poets were born in the seventh or early eighth decade, resulting in their debut in the post-socialist context being shaped by an adolescent perspective. This is evident in their engagement with social relations, which often reflects an anarchist, destabilising, and ideologically ambiguous ethos. The "confusion" we emphasise, following Adriana Stan, suggests that "[a] closer look at these texts reveals that many of the post-communist pathologies they document still appear as by-products of the communist past" (Stan 8-9). The remnants of the former regime addressed in the works of these poets intertwine an *anti-communist* with an *anti-capitalist* ideology, both of which have been fostered by the spontaneous transition and the new system's failure to promote social prosperity.

For instance, in the poem "Manifest anarhist," ["Anarchist Manifesto"] included in the volume published in 2000, Marius Ianuș asserts, "Capitalism is a fellatio in the street! / You are better than the others, so / make money!"[15] (Ianuș 9). This type of rhetoric — seemingly a phallocentric one — is foreseeable, as the emergence of post-socialist capitalism has been characterised by an oligarchic tendency. This tendency has, on one hand, privileged the new capitalist class, while on the other hand, it has relegated the remaining segments of society to a struggle for survival, marked by heightened competition amid rising unemployment. Another rhetoric that is indirectly linked to pauperisation is that of "starvation" in a world unable to support individuals, thereby relegating them to the periphery of social existence and excluding them from new labour relations: "I'm going crazy, Romania/ I'm starting to lose control between my inner self/ and the outer world, Romania/ I would have been a poet of the inner self/ if I had something to eat/ Romania/ I'm hungry, Romania/ Why am I still hungry, Romania?"[16] (Ianuș 11) "Hunger," both in its autobiographical and metaphorical sense, symbolises the lack of essential resources and opportunities necessary for personal and creative fulfilment. The poet implies that, had he been afforded basic material conditions, he might have evolved into a poet of introspection. In contrast, intellectuals of the 1980s were presented with employment opportunities in universities, publishing houses, and other sectors following the fall of the Iron Curtain (Dumitru, Presa literară românească 5). The

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[15] "Capitalismul e o felație în stradă!/ Tu ești mai bun decât ceilalți, așa că/ fă bani!"
[16] "Simt că înnebunesc, România/ Încep să pierd controlul între lumea interiorității/ și exterior, România/ Aș fi fost un poet al interiorului/ dacă aș fi avut ce mânca/ România/ Mi-e foame, România/ De ce mi-e foame, România?" (11).

artistic labour in Marius Ianuş's poetry manifests as an absent cause; his texts addressing the poem "that will destroy the psyche" — more so its absence — encapsulate an imaginary of literary impotence stemming from a challenging socioeconomic situation. To put it differently, the notion that writing is unattainable serves as a rationale for composing poems that explore themes of economic and psychological instability, as well as the conflict between "old" and "new" literary forms. This represents a textual manifestation of class struggle, and serves as a critique of Mircea Cărtărescu, who expends considerable effort addressing the stylistic inadequacy that stems from existential crises:

> There are people who do not earn in a month/ money for a coat/ If I were one of those poets/ sprung from libraries and universities/ made poets of higher education/ I would speak of who knows what imagined complexes/ I would elaborate various discourses/ probing their protean capacities/ I would talk about the poem-universe or/ the library-world... / but in the long waits of unemployment/ in the waves of stress from selling bread/ I have seen:/ there are people/ who do not earn in a month/ money for a coat[17] (Ianuş 44).

"Hunger" is also present in one of Ruxandra Novac's poems from her November 2003 collection, this time explicitly connected to the theme of labour: "we are the workers, and our hands build/ the world/ we are the blessed of this world do you not know that/ we are the blessed of this world we are hungry we know"[18] (Novac 43) The conditions faced by the artistic precariat are distinctly illustrated in Ruxandra Novac's autobiographical poems, which also reflect anarchist rhetoric. Moreover, these themes are intertwined with either the condemnation of work or its outright rejection, exemplifying an "anti-work" political philosophy. In any case, labour is not depicted through direct social representations but is present solely at the discursive level, as it is, as previously mentioned, negated in verses such as "You sleep a lot now/ you don't work. Sirens outside call you to life"[19] (Novac 29), or even vilified:

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[17] "Sânt oameni care nu câştigă pe lună/ bani pentru o haină/ Dacă aş fi unul dintre acei poeţi/ izvorîţi din biblioteci şi şcoli superioare/ făcuţi poeţi de şcolile superioare/ aş vorbi despre nu ştiu ce complexe închipuite/ aş elabora felurite discursuri/ sondându-le capacităţile proteice/ aş vorbi despre poemul-univers ori/ lumea-bibliotecă.../ Dar în lungile aşteptări de la şomaj/ în valurile de stres ale vânzării de pâine/ am văzut:/ Sînt oameni/ care nu cîştigă pe lună/ bani pentru o haină"

[18] "noi sîntem muncitorii şi mîinile noastre clădesc/ lumea/ noi sîntem fericiţii lumii acesteia nu ştiţi că/ sîntem fericiţii lumii acesteia ne e foame noi ştim"

[19] "Dormi mult acum/ nu munceşti. Sirenele de afară te cheamă la viaţă"

"work is something that poisons, like when you eat/ belladonna./ it's something, a bad taste, a rotten animal, that always ends up/ in the trap and dies/ work is the devil they say and the devil dresses up nicely"[20] (Novac 27).

The poetry of Marius Ianuș and Dan Sociu, characterisable as student poetry, highlights, in certain passages, the labour of parents and grandparents. In contrast, the works of Elena Vlădăreanu and Miruna Vlada depict a subject engaged in domestic labour shaped by gender roles, exemplifying the theme of motherhood in their poetry. Central to this polarisation between "self" and "the Other" is the concept of the *gaze*, as it encompasses the politics of the subject's situatedness and carries an ideological weight. As Žižek states, "imaginary identification is always identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*" (Žižek 117). The Slovenian philosopher poses a critical question in this regard: "For whom is the subject enacting this role? Which gaze is considered when the subject identifies with a certain image?" (Žižek 118). Building on these considerations, the working women depicted in the poetry of Sociu and Ianuș are constructed in a symbolic relationship to a masculine "Other."

The female figures depicted in labour relations are not represented through the lens of domestic or reproductive labour but rather from the standpoint of salaried work. They are assigned a masculinised image, exemplified by the portrayal of the mother as a substitute for the father figure in Dan Sociu's poetry. Such an image is explicitly presented in the poem "Imagista de la urgenţe" ["The Emergency Imagist"] (Sociu 90), where the poet's mother facilitates communication with the medical staff, utilising the symbolic capital of the deceased father to secure appropriate care. The internalisation of neoliberal values centred on individual self-optimisation and the profitability of human existence manifests as a sense of guilt associated with productive incapacity (the poet's inability to work in a manner that allows him to afford health insurance) and the deterioration of the body due to precarious living conditions. These elements ultimately overdetermined the lack of virility he displayed toward the imagist at the conclusion of the poem.

However, even when women's reproductive labour is present in Dan Sociu's poetry, it is not fully represented; that is, it lacks informative, descriptive, or narrative substance. Instead, it is merely referenced as a "debt" that must be repaid in a mechanical manner: "My mom. When I started working as an employee/ I kept

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[20] „munca e ceva care otrăveşte, ca atunci cînd mănînci/ nebunele./ e ceva, un gust rău, un animal putrezit, care ajunge mereu/ în capcană şi moare/ munca e diavolul se spune şi diavolul se îmbracă frumos"

thinking about getting her an automatic washing machine/ for everything she washed by hand for me./ In fact, I only thought about it for a few days/ I flipped through brochures, calculated instalments./ Then I forgot"[21] (Sociu 119). From an ideological perspective, the gap between "the self" and "the Other" highlights the disconnection between the need for equitable distribution of reproductive labour within the family unit and the individual aspiration to "reform" women's roles within the context of capitalist and patriarchal exploitative reproduction. In fact, this is a glimpse of what we term the crisis of realism in this particular case. In other words, rather than "helping" to emancipate women from unpaid labour, the poet prefers the reformist or liberal approach. This approach focuses on alleviating working conditions by investing in means to automate domestic labour.

Comprehensive analyses of the mode of production are infrequent, unless its dynamics are critically explored through a gender-focused perspective. Critical discourses addressing reproductive labour within capitalism, countering the previously discussed "male gaze," are gaining traction, as evidenced by the works of Miruna Vlada and Elena Vlădăreanu. This shift indicates a symptom of moving beyond the prior ideological "confusion." The concept of reproductive labour emerged in feminist discourse during the 1970s, where it specifically began to designate "unwaged domestic work including cleaning, cooking, shopping, home-making, and the care and socialisation of children." (Walton&Luker 7) Following the 1970s, on a macro scale, the role of women from the Third World, as well as women in general, within the capitalist global economy is diminished to that of an underpaid or unpaid labour force that is essential for capitalist accumulation through cost reduction (Mies 112-144; Bessière&Gollac). Maria Mies examines the exploitative process of "housewifization," in which:

> [w]omen are the optimal labour force because they are now being universally defined as 'housewives,' not as workers; this means their work, whether in use-value or commodity production, is obscured... and can hence be bought at a much cheaper price than male labour (Mies 116).

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[21] "Maică-mea. Cînd am început şi eu să fiu salariat/ mă tot gîndeam să-i iau o maşină automată/ pentru tot ce mi-a spălat la mînă. De fapt doar cîteva zile m-am gîndit/ am răsfoit broşuri, am calculat rate./ Apoi am uitat".

However, reproductive labour is inadequately represented in the poetry of the 2000s, which is predominantly authored by men. In response to this inadequate representation in Romanian poetry, Elena Vlădăreanu published the autobiographical volume *Non Stress Test* in 2016, which intertwines the themes of motherhood, reproductive labour, and the artist's creative work. The poet is critical of the neoliberal rhetoric that seeks to naturalise housewifisation, hiding work under the imperative of "enjoyment." In this way, labour is not labour anymore, it is "less-than-labour," even a self-fulfilling game: "On the escalator! In the car! In the kitchen! When you're cooking!/ When you're cleaning, when you're shopping, when you're jogging./ Play!"[22] (Vlădăreanu 47). Elena Vlădăreanu critically identifies and sharply ironizes the ideological apparatuses underpinning this rhetoric of naturalisation, including "parenting specialists," "actors who have discovered their vocation," "bloggers, perfect mothers, childless friends, and the psychologists featured in books from the Trei publishing house" (Vlădăreanu 47). The volume *Prematur* [*Premature*] by Miruna Vlada, published in 2021, begins with the line "I don't want my ovaries" from the poem "Manifest extrauterin (după 16 ani)" ["Extrauterine Manifesto (after 16 years)"], directly confronting motherhood and the mental burdens imposed by patriarchal tradition, while advocating for "the refusal of the womb"[23] (Vlada 11). Motherhood encompasses not only trauma, sexism, and misogyny but also delineates the issue of reproductive work as "non-work," particularly in a context where the competitive socialisation of the individual prompts choices such as "how to choose between another deadline and a child?"[24] (Vlada 22). Furthermore, artistic creation is subordinated to the living conditions of women, who must "be oppressed" in order to write: "all I can write are the clinical records of a hysterectomy/ with the precision of minimally invasive robotic surgery// what does a happy and fulfilled woman bring to literature?/ nada/ she must be oppressed"[25] (Vlada 26).

Wage initiates a discussion regarding artistic labour and its "liberating" potential. In *Poetry and Work*, theorist Lisa Jeschke questions whether writing poetry can serve as "a model of an activity at the very edge of the wage relation, and a model of labour free of capitalist logic" (Jeschke 15). In this context, it is essential to

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[22] "Pe scările rulante! În maşină! La bucătărie! În timp ce pregăteşti masa!/ Când faci curat, când eşti la cumpărături, când faci jogging./ Joacă-te!".
[23] "Nu îmi vreau ovarele."; "refuzul uterului"
[24] "cum să alegi între un alt *deadline* şi un copil?"
[25] "tot ce mai pot să scriu sunt fişele clinice ale unei histerectomii/ cu precizia chirurgiei robotice minim invazive// ce aduce în literatură o femeie fericită şi împlinită?/ nada/ ea trebuie să fie asuprită"

examine how writers engage with their artistic production, particularly since Elena Vlădăreanu published the volume *bani. muncă. timp limber* [money. work. free time] in 2017, in which she criticises the discriminatory nature of capital toward so-called unproductive labour, according to utilitarian logic. This volume serves as a manifesto that challenges the naturalised perception of artistic work as "non-work" or "less-than-work," a perspective perpetuated by both the national and international literary industry. This includes literary festivals and creative grants that often conceal practices of gatekeeping, as well as unpaid public readings. Some of Vlădăreanu's poems "transcribe" emails she received in response to her applications for creative writing grants:

> Dear Elena,/ Thank you so much for your application to the Sustainable Arts Foundation. Unfortunately, we are not able to fund your application, but we want you to know that we are inspired by your dedication to your craft and by the sacrifices you're making to pursue it. We know that it is hard enough to create time for artistic work while parenting, let alone to work on grant applications, and we do appreciate the effort you put into your submission. Sincerely," (Vlădăreanu, bani, muncă, timp liber 27).

Given that the autobiographical realist mode is not actually surpassed within the new model of poetry (but rather dialectically integrated), we observe a significant shift in the production of poetic discourse. While the 2000s were characterised by proletarised poetic "narrators" (such as those of Marius Ianuş, Dan Sociu, Ruxandra Novac and even later on Miruna Vlada and Elena Vlădăreanu), contemporary discourse is predominantly shaped by a new progressive intelligentsia that is notably theoretical in orientation. The ideological confusion of the previous generation dissipates, resulting in what Teona Farmatu terms the "radicalisation of the postmillennials," or the achievement of a heightened political consciousness expressed through the abstraction or conceptualisation of social relations in literary texts. Within this context, *the crisis of realism is evident in the encoding of these relations using primarily (auto)theoretical language and, in fact, through a practice of autotheory*. In other words, "the transparency of this ethos (whether positioned as paratext or integrated into the poetic body) tends to seal this network in a rather autotelic, minimally exploratory form, that is, primarily serving the role of

accessorising the local poetic discourse"[26] (Farmatu 32). This observation supports our notion of reducing socio-material experience to abstract languages. In Marxist terms, social totality is reified and reduced to phenomena that can be explained through theory, revealing a crisis in the realist formula. The key distinction between the poetry of Elena Vlădăreanu and Miruna Vlada — which exhibits a narrative impulse —, and subsequent types of autotheoretical poetics that directly engage with abstract concepts from the theoretical sphere, lies in the fact that the autobiographical narrative is mostly converted in statements with militant connotations (in Lukács's terminology, this might pertain to the distinction between "intensive construction" and "extensive reflection"[27]).

For instance, in Yigru Zeltil's "fragmente din fagure" ["fragments from the honeycomb"] (Cenaclul X 57-61), the experience of contemporary capitalist labour is deconstructed through a collage of theoretical reflections and quotations, resulting in a conceptual aesthetics or even an autotheoretical practice. The poem examines the dialectics of labour and identity, where individuals are called to "precisely define" themselves within the context of the consumer market, even as corporations create new needs. This situation generates a paradox between simulated autonomy and structural constraint. The poet critiques the limitations of the "affective body of cognitive labour," as articulated by Franco "Bifo" Berardi, noting that the psychic and emotional capital of individuals is depleted in the attention economy, thereby transforming labour into a solitary and repetitive spectacle of consumption and competition. At the same time, the poem examines the precariousness of biographical identity and social relations, portraying the worker as isolated from his collegiate "family." By combining theoretical reflexivity with subjective alienation, the text critiques a capitalist ethos that reduces life to an economic equation: "devotion without voting" (Cenaclul X 58). The poem positions itself within the realm of conceptual poetry by encoding experience in theoretical language, transforming the socio-material context into a mere "accessory." Consequently, "fragmente din fagure" reduces social totality to a theoretical discourse that confines the phenomenological experience of labour within a self-referential sphere, suggesting that art itself becomes a form of subsistence labour.

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[26] "transparenţa acestui ethos (fie că e poziţionat ca paratext sau e integrat corpului poetic) tinde să sigileze această reţea într-o formă destul de autotelică, minimal exploratorie, adică prin excelenţă cu rol de accesorizare a discursului poetic local".

[27] See Kornbluh, The Order of Forms 48.

In her radical feminist poetry, Medeea Iancu articulates a cohesive project of collective solidarity while providing a sharp critique of patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, and precarisation, all while addressing issues of class, gender, and racial discrimination. Notably, through her queer-feminist poetry, Iancu engages in a dynamic interplay between identity and alterity, where the collective memory of women manifests as a grammaticalized "we" in the first-person plural, thereby reflecting an abstract collective identity. This construction deliberately suspends individual histories to ensure that transgenerational struggles and various forms of oppression related to class, race, sexual orientation, and disability are not erased. The perspective thus established transcends personal biographies and emphasises accountability for invisible labour and enduring social suffering: "I am interested in working conditions and labour protection. I am interested in who pays and how much. I'm interested in who cleans up after the daily violence. I'm interested in who cleans up after novelist privilege. I'm interested in who cleans up after historical violence."[28] (Iancu 82-83)

In the poetry of Mădălina Oprea (*Curriculum: refrene ale recuperării și memoriei*, [Curriculum: refrains of recovery and memory] 2023), which is closely related to that of Medeea Iancu, a dialectic emerges between the working subject and the female alterities within the poet's family. This dialectic reflects an integration of her own history and the memory of domestic, affective, and aesthetic labour into the broader narrative — in other words, into the "History" — of women's oppression, while honouring the historicity of these forms of social reproduction: "In many ways, I'm doing better than my mom. In many ways, my mother did better than my grandmother and so on. This realisation doesn't necessarily make me feel relieved, because it's not all about me. It won't get better until we're all better."[29] (Oprea 181) In the poetry of Medea Iancu and Mădălina Oprea, as well as in the works included in the anthology *Cenaclul X: Zilele muncii, corpurile muncitoare* [Work days, working bodies], the reference to labour relations is of the "postwork" type[30]. These projects

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[28] "Mă interesează condiţiile de muncă şi protecţia muncii. Mă interesează cine şi cât plăteşte. Mă interesează cine curăţă după violenţa zilnică. Mă interesează cine curăţă după privilegiile romancierului. Mă interesează cine curăţă după violenţa istorică".

[29] "Din multe puncte de vedere, o duc mai bine decât mama. Din multe puncte de vedere, mama a dus-o mai bine decât bunica şi tot aşa. Această realizare nu mă face să mă simt uşurată neapărat, pentru că nu e numai despre mine. Nu o să fie mai bine până când nu vom fi toate bine".

[30] "Postwork represents one kind of opposition to precarity which attempts to move outside of this imaginary. Instead of demanding the renewal of security eroded by post-Fordism, postwork and antiwork discourse challenges the central role work plays in our collective life (Walton and Luker 58)".

regard poetry as edifying work aimed at fostering a communal space — a radical arena for the "disinvisibility" of creative labour.

Mădălina Oprea's case is particularly noteworthy, as her poetry marks the beginning of a potential formal and ideological alternative to what we term the crisis of realism, by means of textualising labour relations within a patriarchal and highly discriminatory society regarding gender conditions. Although her poetic approach still adheres to the "manifesto" style, slightly autotheoretical, it does so without excessive emphasis. Similarly, in his 2022 volume *Cazzo*, Mihnea Bâlici employs an autobiographical narrative approach that aligns with critical and ideological realism. However, it is through a future project that we intend to explore different possibilities as presented in these two volumes and potentially others. As we argue throughout this article, the current landscape illustrates the transformation of poetic realism under the conditions of late capitalism in the Romanian context.

In conclusion, the exploration of poetry in post-socialist Romania reveals a complex interplay between literary forms, labour relations, and the evolving socio-economic landscape. Our article highlights how poetry has become both a reflection and a critique of the changing dynamics of labour and class under late capitalism. Initially, the reflexive mode dominated Romanian poetry, with poets like Marius Ianuş and Dan Sociu using autobiographical narratives to depict the struggles of unemployment and the disorientation caused by the abrupt transition from communism to capitalism. This phase was marked by a lack of ideological clarity, where anti-communist and anti-capitalist sentiments coexisted ambiguously, which represents, for us, a symptom of a crisis of the realist poetic form.

As the socio-economic conditions evolved, so did the poetic responses. The rise of neoliberalism and the accompanying ideological shifts led to a heightened political consciousness among poets. This period saw the emergence of a practice of autotheory in poetry — a fusion of autobiographical realism with theoretical discourses such as feminism, queer theory, and post-Marxism. Beforehands, poets like Elena Vlădăreanu and Miruna Vlada began to foreground issues of reproductive labour and gender oppression, critiquing the patriarchal and capitalist structures that marginalise women's work. Their works represent a move towards a meta-social narrative that seeks to understand and articulate the material and ideological determinants of the current mode of production. However, this shift has also led to a different type of crisis of realism, a formal one which is to be found in the poems of

authors such as Medeea Iancu or Yigru Zeltil, among others. The increasing abstraction and theorisation in poetry risk distancing it from the concrete realities it seeks to engage with. While autotheory provides a means to dissect and critique social structures, it can also result in a form of "utopic" practice that neglects the experiences of individuals within the labour system.

Thus, the trajectory of Romanian poetry reflects not only the crises of its historical and socio-economic context but also the resilience of its creative and ideological imagination, continually negotiating the boundaries of form, labour, and social critique.

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