

Desperate Responsibility: Precarity and Right-Wing Populism

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Abstract

This essay explores the mutual reinforcements between socioeconomic precarity and right-wing populism, and then envisions a politics that contests Trumpism through workers' organizations that create alternatives to predominant patterns of subject formation through work. I first revisit my recent critique of precarity, which initiates a new method of critical theory informed by Paulo Freire's political pedagogy of popular education. Reading migrant day laborers' commentaries on their work experiences alongside critical accounts of today's general work culture, this "critical-popular" procedure yields a conception of precarity with two defining characteristics. First, precarity is *socially bivalent*: it singles out specific groups for especially harsh treatment even as it pervades society. Second, precarity constitutes subjects through *contradictory experiences of time* in everyday work-life, exacerbated by insoluble dilemmas of moral responsibility. Antonio Vásquez-Arroyo's conception of "political literacy" and Bridget Anderson's notion of "migrantizing the citizen," in turn, help us understand how precaritization blocks workers from developing the critical dispositions toward time needed for democratic citizenship. This analysis then makes it possible to elucidate, in dialogue with Daniel Martinez-HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, how precaritized worker-citizenship facilitates the cross-class and multiracial appeal of Trumpism's white supremacist discourse of national economic decline and resurgence, while normalizing the temporal affects

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of shock and violence characteristic of Trumpism, as theorized by Lia Haro and Romand Coles. Day laborers' worker centers, I argue, refunction precaritized time, regenerate political literacy, and migrantize the citizen. A large-scale alternative to right-wing populism thus could emerge if the worker center network were expanded throughout the economy.

Keywords

precarity, populism, time, day labor, citizenship, migration

Introduction

A loose consensus exists among academic political analysts and journalists that intensified socioeconomic precarity has driven the worldwide expansion of right-wing populism. The common perspective holds that especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, parties and civil society organizations with belligerently nationalist, openly racist, and staunchly capitalist policies and rhetoric have enhanced their political fortunes by both stirring and responding to popular feelings of insecurity and anger as institutional supports for mass economic well-being have been steadily withdrawn. Many writers have issued dire warnings about long-simmering discontent in economically depressed, rural, white working-class American communities to explain the rise of Trumpism and its antecedents. Widespread political disaffection from neoliberalized party cadres of the center-right and center-left, others add, has opened opportunities for Trump and authoritarians across the Atlantic to remold classic right-populist themes to fit the present moment.

Despite the prevalent certainty that socioeconomic decline and political neglect have bolstered right-wing politics in recent times, a dearth of writing explores how precarity and right-wing populism relate in ways that treat both elements with sufficient care and critical sensibility.¹ This essay excavates the mutual reinforcements between precarity and right-wing populism at substantial depth and with attention to the inter-animating specificities within each component of this dyad. I first review the critical account of contemporary precarity proposed in my recent research, which reads US Latino migrant day laborers' commentaries on their difficult work-lives in conjunction with recent critical theory on more general circumstances of precarity.² This exercise in what I call "critical-popular analysis" draws on Paulo Freire's theory of popular education to stage an experimental innovation in critical-theoretical method. The result is a conception of precarity aptly designated by day laborers as a syndrome of "desperate responsibility," with two defining

characteristics. First, precarity is *socially bivalent*: it both exceptionalizes and generalizes, such that even as precarity singles out specific groups for especially harsh treatment, it also spreads throughout the working world. Second, precarity structures the constitution of subjects through *contradictory experiences of time* in everyday work-life, exacerbated by insoluble dilemmas of moral responsibility and manifesting in workers' habits of mind and body, alike.

The essay then newly elaborates the political implications of this formation of socioeconomic precarity for democratic citizenship, setting the stage for my subsequent analysis of precarity's relation to right-wing populism. I discuss the impediments that precaritized existence in the mode of desperate responsibility poses to "political literacy," which Antonio Vásquez-Arroyo conceptualizes as a temporally attuned engagement in collective struggle. Precarity's obstruction of temporally adept political reflection, I further contend, also works against efforts to "migrantize the citizen" in the sense proposed by Bridget Anderson. Next, I show how this enhanced understanding of precarity and its stultifying effects on democratic citizenship yields novel insights into the broad appeal of both the discursive-representational and affective-experiential components of right-wing populism. Engaging Daniel Martinez-HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes's critique of right-wing populist discourse, I argue that grasping the precise contours of daily work-life through which precaritized subjects emerge clarifies why populists' racialized and gendered appeals to America's "losers" find fertile ground among vast constituencies. I then explore how Trump's affective styles of governance, as analyzed by Lia Haro and Romand Coles, offer a harmonious sounding board in the sphere of citizenship for precaritizing experiences in the working world. I conclude by arguing that the convivial and politicizing culture of day labor centers offers a model for a larger-scale politics against precarity that would transform the social and temporal dynamics that feed right-wing populism, thereby rekindling political literacy and migrantizing the citizen.

Some might find it unusual that I turn to the words and experiences of day laborers to theorize how precarity encourages right-wing populist enthusiasm, but my critical method lends itself to this counterintuitive endeavor. To be sure, right-wing populism demonizes migrants, and migrant justice groups have been among the most vehement opponents of Trump since the 2016 campaign. Yet Trump's support among Latinos remained in the 30% range through 2020 and Trump increased his vote percentage among Latinos—and African Americans and Asian Americans—that year over 2016. Any critique of precarity's contribution to right-wing populism must avoid equating precarity with the deteriorating prospects of white working-class men and deal

with Trumpism's solidification as a full-fledged, internally differentiated hegemonic project. Just as importantly, my analysis of day laborers' reflections not only discloses *exceptional* forms of precarity among acutely marginalized workers but also theorizes day labor as a *synecdoche* for precarity writ large. To treat day labor as a part that represents the whole is by no means to claim finality for this provisional interpretation of widely encompassing social trends. Rather, it is to engage in a heuristic act of representational figuration, knowing that critical-popular engagements with other oppressed groups would yield distinct images of generalized precarity and inviting such further efforts. Nonetheless, a central thrust of my critical-popular analysis is to show the capacity of day laborers' themes to spark a politically urgent awareness of precarity that transcends lines of class, racial, and gender domination. I thereby offer an experimental glimpse of real prospects for an antiprecarity politics that can challenge right-wing populism on the broadest scale.

Popular Education and Critical-Popular Theory

My exploration of precarity grew out of field research that I conducted among day laborers at two prominent worker centers in the Pacific Northwest: Casa Latina in Seattle and the MLK Jr. Day Labor Center in Portland, run by the Voz Workers' Rights Education Project.³ My research design drew on Paulo Freire's theory of popular education, an intellectual tradition of political pedagogy that has animated the US day labor organizing network since its inception, just as it has influenced struggles of the poor in many parts of Latin America. The basic thrust of popular education, as Freire articulates it, is to "make oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed," and by others who join with the oppressed in solidarity.⁴ Freire argues that oppressed persons can and should act as full-fledged subjects in analyzing and transforming their conditions of subordination, in conjunction with other people who may not share their specific circumstances of oppression but who still are affected by widely encircling dynamics of domination. "Dialogical" encounters furnish the practical mechanism by which such critique and action-planning takes place: radically egalitarian interactions in which all participants understand their need to learn from one another and reject any hierarchy that elevates those who supposedly "know" above those who are considered ignorant.⁵

For Freire, academics can contribute to these processes by conducting field research to search for "generative themes" in commentaries subjugated people make about their everyday lives. Freire defines a generative theme as a word or phrase that expresses a common situation in a striking way because

it gives a vivid sense of concrete reality, emanates a poetic quality, exudes emotion, and lends itself to visualization. The themes can then serve as “generative” material for dialogue sessions by encouraging people to explore the power relations behind predicaments named by the themes and to consider ways to change things politically. In other words, in Freire’s conception, generative themes foster theoretical innovation from below—from those rarely recognized as critical thinkers, much less as “theorists.” Thus, my aim was partly to identify generative themes that the worker centers, where we did our research, could use in their popular educational programming.

My further ambition was to brush workers’ themes up against critical theory and see what conceptual and political sparks the resultant friction might ignite. The logic for pairing theme and theory in this way stems from Freire’s thought but takes a step beyond it. As I have noted, Freire’s concept of dialogue affirms that all parties to popular education have new things and real capacities to teach one another; it both presupposes and promotes intellectual reciprocity, and it anticipates the tendential broadening of political-pedagogical engagements. Thus, if a theme shows potential to communicate something distinctive about experiences that go beyond the local community that articulates the theme, then perhaps it can open up prospects for wider circles of dialogue and political action. Since its launch around 1990, the day labor network has shown itself to be surprisingly powerful in diverse contexts ranging from campaigns against municipal ordinances banning public work solicitation to direct action against deportation.⁶ Yet the structural forces behind the oppressive circumstances that day laborers’ themes express can only be contested through mass-scale organizing among multiple and diverse working populations. Where day laborers’ themes resonate with concepts developed by critical theory to characterize broadly ranging dynamics of precarity, there may well be opportunities for reciprocal teaching-and-learning as a basis for large-scale organizing. The associations between theme and theory crafted through this “critical-popular” method likewise hold abundant potential to provoke grounded recompositions of critical theory. I mean this both in terms of critical theory’s procedures, which too often neglect vital contact with popular languages of struggle, and in terms of its content, in the sense of substantive concepts of historically specific capitalist dynamics and their imbrication with structural forms of power keyed to race and gender.

My assistants and I interviewed nearly eighty day laborers and conducted several-hundred hours of participant observation, principally by volunteering as job dispatchers at the former and English teachers at the latter.⁷ The interview transcripts provided rich material for distinguishing generative themes. Our interviews also reflect a particular limitation of this study in that nearly all our interviewees were men. Day labor in the United States is an almost

exclusively male occupation and neither worker center had an active program for women at the time, although Casa Latina has a vibrant domestic workers' program now. Thus, our participants' themes exhibit masculine features, and this gendering is a reminder that we should see the themes' synecdochal relation to generalized dynamics of precarity as a prod to more strenuous theorization and research with other groups of workers rather than as a conclusive elucidation of precarity. Still, my critical-popular investigations suggest that day laborers' themes resonate with, and hence can further illuminate, society-spanning practical and moral dilemmas of precarity with which women and men, alike, wrestle.

Participant observation fostered the personal relationships, cooperative experiences, and familiarity with everyday affairs at these worker centers that made it reasonably possible for me to discern themes in the interviews and aptly characterize their meaning for the workers before reflecting on their valences with critical theory. As a white professional who did not grow up in a working-class Latino community, speaks English proficiently, and holds US citizenship by birth, I certainly do not claim to have grasped these meanings in anything close to their fullness. No doubt, I missed important themes workers were trying to express and was oblivious to "hidden transcripts" through which workers communicate in ways meant to be opaque to more powerfully situated people.⁸ That said, the efforts my assistants and I made to develop sustained and reciprocal relationships with the workers and their organizations gave us all an acceptable baseline level of confidence in my interpretations, which I also tested in popular education workshops at Casa Latina. Another key aspect of reciprocity involved collaboratively determining interview questions with worker center leaders, thus yielding our ultimate focus on members' experiences of seeking work and finding community at worker centers, pursuing jobs on street corners, and grappling with occupational safety and health risks.

Precarity and the Time of Desperate Responsibility

As I demonstrate in *The Fight for Time*, one central theme in workers' comments underscored the "desperate" state of their individual circumstances while resolutely affirming personal "responsibility" for improving things and doing right by family members, coworkers, and employers.⁹ Workers frequently invoked the notion of "desperation" to describe what it was like to be constantly on the move looking for jobs and shifting between jobs and yet also frozen, day after day, in a kind of paralysis waiting for job lottery results at Casa Latina or the MLK Center, which usually were discouraging. Day laborers typically only find work two or three days a week, although

they perpetually search for wage-earning opportunities, often not only in the centers' hiring halls but also out on street corners or on sidewalks near Home Depot stores.¹⁰ We asked Alberto Guerrero why more workers did not come to skills training classes when they had no luck in the job lottery. He replied: "It's that sometimes people get desperate because they aren't working. Because sometimes there's work, and sometimes not."¹¹ Juan Carlos Garza explained how desperation felt internally and why it drained his motivation to attend English classes even when he had no job: "How can I put it—it's the worries. I think that if I had a job where I worked until the evening, I'd get organized enough to study. . . . My mind doesn't rest. I'm worried, thinking about it, so my head doesn't let me rest."¹²

As these statements illustrate, the workers' sense of desperation had a great deal to do with everyday experiences of time, which were often contradictory. On the one hand, things were always changing for day laborers in unpredictable ways; time-flows were riddled with discontinuities. Each new job brought material conditions and employer demands that were different and hard to foresee, especially in terms of work's pace. The random, stop-and-start timing of jobs, along with the lottery's uncertainty and the prevalence of wage theft, aggravated the feeling these workers had that they never knew what would happen next. On the other hand, and paradoxically, time also flowed with a relentless and oppressive continuity for the workers. They were perpetually anxious about having enough work, earning enough money, and securing a place to sleep. Thus, they continuously exerted themselves to stave off such personal catastrophes by working at any job, at any wage, they could get. When we asked Diego Flores what he most wanted, he answered, without a pause: "Just work. Working wherever it may be—it doesn't matter where. If you don't work, there's no money, there's no food, there's no house, there's no nothing if you don't work."¹³

Ironically, given the degree to which day laborers felt dominated by fate, most also affirmed an ethic of personal "responsibility" to which they likewise gave a distinctly temporalized cast. Workers avowed that they sought to use time on the job conscientiously and aimed to "take advantage of the time" when they had no job to scour the city for work.¹⁴ Many contrasted "good workers" who acted in such ways with "bad workers" who were lazy, drank, and disappointed employers. (Here is an example of masculine attributes in the workers' comments, in their silence about household reproductive activities, their stress on the manly appetite for hard work, and their common references to notions of manhood when discussing alcohol use and abuse.) As Roberto Mendoza put it sardonically: "I've gone to work with people who just want to sit there talking. If [the employers] tell you that it's a six-hour job, they want to do it in twelve."¹⁵ These workers insisted it was vital to

always “give it their best” and to demonstrate this stout work ethic to employers in visibly unmistakable ways. There was thus a jarring misfit between workers’ hopelessness about controlling the existence or conditions of work and their stalwart embrace of personal responsibility: exercising such responsibility seemed to presuppose a level of autonomy to make prudent choices that their desperate circumstances precluded.

The competing tugs between responsibility and desperation were especially acute when workers discussed their struggles with occupational safety and health hazards, which they did through themes that extended the notion of desperate responsibility.¹⁶ Workers stressed that day labor unavoidably involved facing “risk on all sides,” but that one could tame the uncertainty by resolutely keeping “eyes wide open.”¹⁷ Again, a temporal dilemma defined this thematic pairing. On the one hand, time’s oppressive continuousness manifested in the way these workers felt compelled to stay vigilant for bodily threats as job types, worksites, and employers’ personalities and demands perpetually shifted. On the other hand, such changes irregularly disrupted work’s time flows, as did unpredictable trauma events of bodily injury. Workers sought to mitigate this contradiction by invoking an ethic of personal responsibility premised on carefully managing embodied time. Keeping “eyes wide open” meant staying focused on the task at hand, ever alert to emergent dangers and committed to self-protection as another criterion of moral differentiation between “good” and “bad” workers. Yet the desperate quality of this bid for embodied responsibility in the face of relentless corporeal risk was evident: most workers admitted they commonly violated their own ethical resolve because they could not resist employers’ pressures to work dangerously and their work circumstances shifted too frequently.

In one sense, the theme of desperate responsibility points to a form of precarity that applies in an *exceptional* way to day laborers and other highly marginalized migrant workers. Desperation is a constant for day laborers because they staff the lower rungs of the residential housing construction and related industries, which are especially prone to economic crises in the financialized neoliberal economy as well as uncommonly dangerous for workers.¹⁸ Desperation also comes from occupying the position of “illegality” that constitutes the migrant subject as perpetually deportable, hyper-exploitable, and available for the most hazardous jobs.¹⁹ Constrained and disciplined in these ways, day laborers understandably reach for a stabilizing story of personal responsibility, with its reassuring promises of control over everyday events, sustained bodily integrity, and individual progress over time. Unauthorized workers also face abundant pressure to embrace this story: to show visibly, and say audibly, how conscientious and hard-working they are, in a political atmosphere where both major parties and most migrant

justice organizations dichotomize between “bad” immigrants who are criminals and “good” immigrants who just want to work and support their families. Thus, day laborers cling to the discourse of personal responsibility even as their economic and legal circumstances single them out for exceptionally erratic employment and shockingly high job-related injury rates.²⁰

Yet the theme of desperate responsibility also signals a conundrum that workers throughout capitalist societies face today, as I emphasize throughout *The Fight for Time*. Day labor not only illustrates how precarity *exceptionalizes* certain groups by applying to them with special cruelty but also serves as a *synecdoche* for dynamics of precarity that extend across society as a whole. Consider how the self-conflicting temporality of desperation described by day laborers pervades daily life for legions of other workers, although differently if one is spared looming threats of hunger and deportation. Critical theorists of work have analyzed how time flows in perpetually uniform ways for those who perform immaterial labor, affective labor, and gig labor, even as these same processes fracture time into disconnected bits of experience. The kinds of productivity expected in such jobs blur divisions between work and nonwork time; work, or preparation to work, seeps into every moment of life.²¹ Yet because the calls to work can come at any time, especially with the ubiquity of portable digital devices, work becomes both incessant and randomly interruptive.²² The spread of gig employment beyond ride and delivery services to professional fields such as software development, law, and journalism amplifies the play of these contradictory temporalities throughout most of society. Meanwhile, the embodied experience by which crisis moments erratically puncture long stretches of distressed continuity extends across the general population as work becomes more dangerous in similar ways for nearly everyone. Escalating hazards in work-environments related to poor air quality, ergonomically dysfunctional work processes, and the stress effects of corporate restructuring permeate the employment economy today.²³ As these tendencies unfold, workers in virtually all occupations suffer protracted etiologies of bodily debilitation, marked at uneven intervals by new diagnoses. In the more immediate and compressed temporality of activity on the job, in turn, workers must constantly assess the “risk on all sides” and brace for impact even as risk factors haphazardly shift and moments of trauma sometimes ensue when injuries actually happen.

The affirmation of inordinately burdensome personal responsibility constitutes another point of connection between day laborers’ generative theme and widespread social experiences. The hyper-responsibilization of subjects associated with the ethos of postindustrial professionalism, the neoliberal culture of human self-capitalization, the gig economy’s untethering of work

from reliable support for human needs, and austerity regimes' retraction of social benefits has been much discussed.²⁴ In parallel movements in occupational safety and health, the economy's leading firms have off-loaded institutional liability for preventing job-related hazards onto individuals through strategies of workplace "fissuring" and the corporate "wellness" culture. In such ways, as *The Fight for Time* contends, the composite theme of "desperate responsibility" names a widely encompassing social condition of precarity, notwithstanding its peculiar intensity for unauthorized migrants and other starkly vulnerable groups.

Precarity as Pedagogy of Political Illiteracy

Moving forward from this previous critique, I now want to interrogate how precarity in this form affects people's capacities for freedom and responsible citizenship. Let us look closely at the *temporal* implications that stem from doggedly embracing individual responsibility while facing desperately contradictory work circumstances. An aura of desperation engulfs the compulsive effort to subordinate all time to the demands of work and its pursuit, even as cohesive structures of time in everyday life come apart. Responding to this unresolved predicament with a pat narrative of self-advancement through personal responsibility is another desperate move: a despondent leap beyond the vexing frustrations of the present into an individualist fantasy of the future's orderly unfolding. The leap abandons the task of reflecting on why the time of everyday life is so intolerable, how this syndrome has materialized through operations of social power, and how *collective* efforts could *make* the future turn out otherwise. The cost is not only the impoverished desire for freedom that disturbs Weeks, in the sense of losing the ability and motivation to imagine free life-activity in terms other than those sanctioned by the dominant work ethic. Precarity also trains the desperately responsible subject to assume a distinctly noncritical attitude toward time-transits between daily struggles and horizontal possibilities. The subject forfeits freedom, both by clinging to a threadbare vision of free action and by undergoing the disabling of the temporal-critical consciousness needed to bring unrealized prospects into existence.

This process of cultivated disability with respect to navigating experiences of time critically and collectively also impairs precaritized subjects' abilities as citizens. *Desperate* responsibility works overtime to disengage people from the practices of *political* responsibility that Antonio Vásquez-Arroyo construes as vital to democratic citizenship, particularly citizenship involved in struggles for social democracy. Instead, precarity activates what one might

call, drawing on Vásquez-Arroyo, a pedagogy of “political illiterate” citizenship within working life. Contemplating the “discourse of catastrophe” at the twentieth-century’s end that lamented the perceived closure of an era of hope for “an alternative system to capitalism,” Vásquez-Arroyo argues that a properly politicized approach to experiences of “loss” requires treating them as periods or moments of “defeat,” thereby conceptually locating incapacity and suffering within a field of contending political forces.²⁵ This makes it possible to exercise “political responsibility” by critically analyzing the historical dynamics that led to present defeats and assessing the prospects for reengaging struggles in ways that could make the future turn out differently. To negotiate between retrospective, prospective, and presently attentive thinking is to demonstrate and build “political literacy”:

Politically speaking, defeat involves neither perpetual melancholia nor mourning understood as *moving on*, but the acknowledgment that in its aftermath one needs to resist it and its corollaries as the sole alternatives. . . . [T]he alternative way of reckoning with these predicaments is to understand defeat not as the ultimate failure of one’s project, but as the situational outcome of a particular struggle. These outcomes demand reflection, resistance, and a sense of hopeful stillness—the last is best conceived as sober anticipation—for a future reckoning with the victor, the imperatives and forms of what the victor has sought to inaugurate and/or perpetuate, and what their overcoming demands.²⁶

Configured as desperate responsibility, precarity mightily discourages such anticipatory reckoning with loss as situation-specific defeat. The maddeningly distracting counter-tugs of time in the grip of everyday desperation (“my head doesn’t let me rest”) make assuming a disposition of “hopeful stillness” supremely challenging, especially given that reevaluating the struggle is necessarily an embodied practice that precaritized body-time (“risk on all sides”) further hinders. Invoking responsibility then becomes a gesture of escape that, for practical purposes, means acquiescence—“moving on” rather than assessing the present and its antecedents with “sober anticipation” and thus discerning untried paths forward.

Desperately responsible subjects are particularly hamstrung when it comes to exercising political responsibility in ways that take account of precarity’s social bivalence. This is because temporally agile and expansive forms of thought are crucial to collective action that *integrates* general solidarity against widespread precarity with advocacy for and by those worst afflicted, rather than condemning marked groups for causing the deepening plight of great masses. Bridget Anderson’s provocative concept of “migrantizing the

citizen” speaks to this daunting challenge while suggesting how it also involves a temporal sensibility that precarious conditions inhibit.²⁷ Anderson criticizes the persistence of an unreflective migrant/citizen dualism in public and academic discourses that figures the migrant as the economically needy border-transgressor who always potentially threatens the national citizen. This dichotomy, Anderson contends, ignores rising spatial mobility within nation-states as well as nationals’ subjection to the same economic hardships that plague transborder migrants. She proposes the following response: “Migrantizing the citizen excavates the connections between exclusions within citizenship and exclusions from citizenship realizing the potential to complicate arguments that set up a homogenised ‘migrant’ in conflict with a homogenised ‘white working class’ in a ‘natural’ competition for resources and status.”²⁸ Unearthing homologous experiences between white and non-white, national and nonnational, requires the skill and the will to spy within present afflictions the legacies of power struggles that have transpired over time, akin to the political literacy theorized by Vásquez-Arroyo. Doing this means not just lamenting *precarity* but tracing *precaritization*, making the effort “to recognise differences between nationals and non-nationals at the same time as demonstrating structural and historical links between the experiences and relations of both.”²⁹ Yet the desperately responsible subject’s temporal confusion and exasperation stymie such exertions of critical thought. Instead, this subject may tend to react to the ways their current experiences uncomfortably mirror those of despised migrants and other racialized subaltern groups by defensively reasserting conventional hierarchies and celebrating, even perpetrating, the exceptional precaritization of society’s “others.”

Vásquez-Arroyo directs his critique against the politically fruitless *pas de deux* between activists who worry that it is irresponsible to advocate for socialism when it no longer can be achieved and theorists who seek to reorient political action, in a time of left disorientation, by defining imperatives of moral (Kantian) or ethical (Levinasian) responsibility. Anderson similarly seeks to reverse a de-historicizing and de-radicalizing dynamic on the left abetted by academics, in her case an increased inclination by social-democratic parties to voice nativist appeals, as in the shrill “new Labour” demand to preserve “British jobs for British workers.”³⁰ These arguments, however, also suggest new ways to interpret the rising power of right-wing populism. If, as I have argued, precarity as *desperate* responsibility thwarts the development of temporally keyed forms of *political* responsibility that the left urgently needs, then could precarity also enable the right’s advance by rehearsing the temporal dispositions of politically illiterate citizenship?

Socially Bivalent Precarity and Right-Wing Populist Discourse

Having defined precarity as the syndrome of desperate responsibility and reflected on its general political consequences, we are now in a more advantageous position to understand the political opportunities it furnishes to right-wing populism. Again, precarity is structured by two distinctive features. First, precaritization constitutes social populations bivalently, such that even as it singles out certain despised and exploited groups for peculiarly harsh treatment, it extends its reach throughout the working world. Second, as a near-universal mode of subject-formation, precarity constitutes desperately responsible individuals through contradictory temporalities of everyday work-life, as oppressive continuity coexists and clashes with shocking discontinuity. Let us now consider how each component of precarity has enabled strikingly effective right-wing appeals, and how the concepts of “political literacy” and “migrantized citizenship” sharpen our understanding of these dynamics.

Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes highlight the pivotal role of historically rooted but fungible discourses of racial and gender identity in drawing white loyalties to the Trumpist project and its precursors, in the context of epochal political-economic shifts. Such shifts involve well-known elements of “neoliberal economic structuring,” especially social service cuts, wage stagnation, and ballooning household debt.³¹ Yet “economic conditions alone,” the authors insist, cannot explain the expanding political prospects of the right since the 1970s.³² Rather, the right’s growing power has hinged on strategically mobilizing a racialized and gendered discursive imaginary, with antecedents stretching to antebellum times, that pits “producers” against “parasites”:

Producerist ideology posited not an opposition between workers and owners but a masculine, cross-class assemblage connecting factions of the elite with poor whites both in cities and on the frontier . . . in opposition to those cast as unproductive and threatening, including bankers and speculators, slaves, and indigenous people. As such, producerism provided a template for subsequent political intersections of whiteness, masculinity, and labor that would include different groups and target different foes, but was always secured by a logic that described a fundamental division in society between those who create society through their efforts and those who are parasitic on, or destructive of, those efforts.³³

According to HoSang and Lowndes, the producer–parasite polarity invigorated right-wing populist backlashes against the Great Society, fueled the rise

of Reaganism and antitax movements, and facilitated attacks on public sector unions.³⁴ By repeatedly calling up and modifying this discourse, the right has deflected popular hostilities from neoliberal-capitalist forces that have reduced economic prospects for masses of workers.

HoSang and Lowndes note a twist in the racial logic of contemporary producerism that characterizes right-wing populism's entanglement with precarity today. Through a process of "racial transposition," public intellectuals and political leaders on the right have recast as descriptors of poor whites the tropes previously advanced to stereotype black families and communities as dysfunctional and riven by social pathology.³⁵ Socioeconomic conditions have set the stage for this most-recent discursive torque of white-right populism: "[T]oday there are millions of people whose whiteness no longer indemnifies them, their families, or their communities from crisis. . . . On the one hand, whiteness continues to be associated with a range of advantages across all levels of household income. . . . On the other hand, these privileges are relative rather than absolute."³⁶ Yet, for HoSang and Lowndes, the waning economic security of whiteness does not exclusively account for the growth of the right's populist appeal. In their view, more decisive effects follow from the antagonisms constructed through populist discourse, which warn that the social dysfunctionality long considered endemic to communities of color has taken hold among "low- and middle-income" working whites.³⁷

This argument poses a puzzle that the authors do not entirely solve. As HoSang and Lowndes point out, Trump's 2016 campaign rhetoric bullied followers into blaming themselves for their own social malady: "Unlike the leaders of past populist revolts, Trump seemed less a champion of the working people than a figure who confirmed their debased status, reveling in such terms as 'disgust,' 'weakness,' 'losing,' and 'pathetic.'"³⁸ Why would those branded as "losers" rally to those who so revile them? The writers suggest a partly satisfying answer when they analyze the disturbing proliferation of black, Asian, and Pacific Islander boosters for Trump in mass entertainment and social media. These "multicultural right-wing populist" celebrities win enthusiastic receptions by validating white male grievances and reasserting the normative primacy of the traditional racial hierarchy, siphoning the seemingly inexhaustible discursive resources of a superficially race-neutral producerism.³⁹ The Trumpist formula of success thus has a perverse but efficient logic. First, Trump, Charles Murray, and other elites alert working-class whites, through racially transposed put-downs of pathologized "losers," that the boundaries separating them from nonwhite dysfunction have blurred. Right-wing multiculturalism then restages a comforting national drama that affirms America as racially and ethnically diverse but with whiteness as the

pinnacle expression of political, social and cultural citizenship, confirming the hegemony of whiteness all the more adeptly by sounding the consenting voices of the racially subaltern.

Notwithstanding the potency of these discursive dynamics, however, the specific dilemmas associated with precarity as desperate responsibility make such plays of discourse effective in decisive ways that elude HoSang and Lowndes's analytical framework. As I have demonstrated, precarity takes shape in a zone of *subject-constituting everyday experience* that cannot be fully captured by the notion of "economic conditions," as gauged by aggregate metrics like household incomes and public service budgets. Within this zone, in temporally immediate terms, white men in low- and middle-income occupations engage in a subjectivating schema of laboring life that increasingly amalgamates with that endured by society's most detested groups (even as white male workers also see, with some but not enough relief, that they are spared the worst dangers of the new economy, as nonwhite workers' disproportionate deaths from COVID-19 have graphically symbolized). The producer comes to resemble the parasite, not only as a matter of demographic figures and racial-transpositional rhetoric but also on the level of working experience, which is constituted in temporal, bodily, and moral contradiction. Thus, the reassertion of racial and gender hierarchies offers a welcome respite from the nagging sense of humiliation generated by the increasing indignity of ordinary work-life, which forces together mundane experiences that by convention should be sharply group-differentiated.

This ahistorical recitation of white supremacy finds abundant receptive minds, moreover, because precarity has schooled Americans from widespread class and racial locations in a pedagogy of political illiteracy. Central to precarity in the mode of desperate responsibility, as I have shown, is an inducement to flee work's temporal contradictions by abruptly "moving on" to the stock story of economic advancement through personal responsibility. This peremptory shift of temporal registers deactivates reflection on *how* the misfit between traditional racial-hierarchical distinctions and current conditions *has arisen*, because it more generally trains precaritized subjects to be impatient with any such historical-critical thinking. Reinvoking white-supremacist citizenship works, in other words, not just because it dovetails with Trump's rhetoric of ridicule, and not only because white working-class people read the numbers and see their economic fates merging with those of society's most detested groups. The discourse sticks because precarity, as desperate responsibility, discourages America's working subjects from developing the temporally adept political literacy needed to migrantize the citizen rather than demonizing the migrant and other figures of racial threat.

The interplay among precaritized work time, political illiteracy, and Trumpian discourse also sheds light on the growing appeal of Trumpism across lines of class, race, and ethnicity recorded in 2020 exit polls. Taking note of these trends should not prompt the conclusion that precarity is a less powerful motivator of Trumpist loyalty than commonly supposed. Nor should it lead analysts to posit a dubious distinction between material and psychological sources of support for Trump, as HoSang and Lowndes do by contending that “feelings of estrangement” and “anxieties about the declining value of whiteness” rather than “lived experiences” explain why votes for Trump in 2016 did not correlate with low income, unemployment, or exposure to financial detriment from immigration or trade.⁴⁰ To the contrary, the increasingly broad and inclusive base of Trumpism signals the need to understand that precarity permeates lived experiences in the working world as a whole, in all the ways that day laborers’ generative themes indicate. As desperately responsible subjectivity proliferates, in turn, the temporal-critical capacities that could expose the indifference to history at the core of right-wing populist discourse dwindle among the precaritized multitude.

Thus far, I have considered how precarity’s subjectivating dynamics lend persuasiveness to, and impede criticism of, right-wing populist discourse, with its signature features of racial transposition and reactionary multiculturalism. Yet both Trumpist politics and precarity in the mode of desperate responsibility also have specifically affective components, and interactions between these prevalent configurations of affect further illuminate the figure of the Trumpian worker-citizen. The making of precaritized subjects occurs through affectively multifaceted processes in which clashing sensations of time, pressing moral sensibilities, and risky bodily behaviors combine and interpenetrate. Right-wing populism in the time of Trump, too, has a distinctive affective profile. Let us therefore broaden our analytical gaze further to consider how right-wing populism enacts a politics of affective incitement attuned to experiential elements of precaritized working life.

Trumpist Affect and Precaritized Temporality

Lia Haro and Romand Coles provide an insightful critique of Trumpian affect-politics with an accent on popular experiences of time. For these theorists, Trump’s affective politics principally include the “hyper-intensification of shock politics,” a “nominalist” form of sovereignty that induces perpetual disorder, and the activation of violence throughout society in resonant response to ramped-up state violence and the president’s goads.⁴¹ Haro and Coles describe the first component as follows:

The disjointed, unpredictable tempos of Twitter-like communications and unvetted executive actions disorient all who are geared toward ordinary political reasoning and conduct. The chaos of Trump-shock distracts, disorients, and disorganizes the polity in ways that work to overload the circuits of critical response and create political whiplash. By incessantly provoking frenetic scrambles to interpret and react to each appalling new event, Trump-shock seeks to disable proactive movement and effective oppositional initiative.⁴²

Amplifying shock-political governance and intensifying its temporal effects, for Haro and Coles, is “a distinctive and extreme form of sovereignty that employs a sheer chaos of unpredictable and unaccountable disruptions and contradictions.”⁴³ The style of sovereignty performed by the nation’s leader “admits of no otherness to which it is accountable, not even [the leader] himself an eye blink prior to the present”; it is “bound by no law, not even one made by the sovereign himself”; thus “law can be none other than the sovereign’s interpretive event at each instant.”⁴⁴ For ordinary citizens, this sense of living under arbitrary rule becomes still more acute through their immersion in a psycho-physical environment that emits “ubiquitous and unanswerable” violence from all quarters:

[T]he resonant violence of shock-sovereignty overflows the formal channels of the state (themselves horrifying) as energized nodes of neo-fascist subjectivity and will to power proliferate in response to touted threats and exercises of violence that erupt in response to the communications of the leader . . . Just as Trump-shocks come anytime and all the time – these expressions of resonant violence can emerge explosively from anywhere and everywhere.⁴⁵

In interrelated ways, the politics of Trumpism thus randomly and recurrently doses the population with jolts of shock, normalizes the sense that no basis exists for holding power accountable, and fuels a pervasive culture of violence where participants mimic state violence with brutal outbursts from below.

By characterizing in such precise and palpable terms the sensory activations and embodied emotions of Trumpism, Haro and Coles open an additional way of understanding how right-wing populism relates to precarity in the form of desperate responsibility, especially in terms of precarity’s constituting of daily experience in temporally contradictory terms. For legions of precaritized working people, right-wing populism *makes sense* not only because of what it says but also because it *feels familiar*. The temporal flows and fractures in the Trumpist sensorium exhibit the same inharmonious combination of oppressive continuity and bewildering discontinuity to which most workers already are acclimated through the precaritized conditions of

laboring life. True, Haro and Coles accentuate the feature of rupture, but their account makes it plain that under the current regime, disruption is paradoxically ongoing. Every new interruption is as utterly predictable as it is unforeseen, acquiescence to the sovereign's chaos-wreaking becomes a habitual disposition, and exposure to the rising threat of violence yields an omnipresent sense of dread even as the moments when someone pulls the trigger never lose their sudden horror. This temporal-affective (dis-)organization of political experience is isomorphic with the subject-making schema of desperately responsible work-life. As day laborers experience acutely, and as workers throughout the economy know and feel, "shock" is now a "normal" part of working life. Ordinary working experience oscillates without warning between periods of restless idleness and bouts of frenetic activity, between waged and unwaged time-segments, between the "crisis-ordinary" of non-stop worrying about job loss and occupational injury and the crisis-event of a layoff or physical trauma.⁴⁶

From this perspective, a signature strategy of right-wing populism is not just the discursive transposition of racial signifiers but the *affective transposition* of everyday work-temporalities into the mundane experience of citizenship in the Trumpian polity, including the temporalities associated with claiming responsibility as an expression of despair and avoidance. For both the precaritized worker and the Trumpian citizen, acting responsibly is both impossible and compulsory. Subjected to the conditions that make work and its pursuit desperate and dangerous, precaritized laborers lack the autonomy to make responsible choices even as they are increasingly tasked with doing just that. Similarly, citizens ruled by the nominalist sovereign are commanded to revive the republic's greatness but deprived of the basis for achieving this in democratically responsible ways. In the affective zone coconstituted by Trumpian shock politics, resonant violence, and precarity as desperate responsibility, prospects for settling into the disposition of hopeful stillness needed for political literacy become ever more remote. Likewise, the time for reflection required to excavate parallel fates and migrantize the citizen becomes harder to find. In these respects, precarity encourages right-wing populism not only through facilitating the uptake of populist symbolic representation but also by creating a societal structure of feeling that makes the palpable contradictions of citizenship in the Trumpian polity seem natural, inevitable, just the way things are. This polity thrives both on the content of white-supremacist and belligerently masculine neonationalism and from the climate of inchoate popular frustration at never being able to live up to the demand for responsible action, whether as worker or citizen.

This trend establishes itself even as the socially differentiating dynamic of precarity operates in tandem with populism's gendered white supremacy

politics to make these conditions much more terrorizing and less tolerable for some groups than others. A presidential tweet announcing the shutdown of all immigration jolts the nation at large, while migrants sleeping in close quarters in farm labor camps catch the virus and die. Race-baiting goads to answer “looting” with “shooting” put the whole public on edge, but black bodies are the ones swinging from trees in southern California. Republican governors declare their states “open for business”; offices open faster than schools; and women, having done an unequal share of home schooling in lockdown, must decide between leaving children unsupervised and quitting their jobs. Precarity exceptionalizes, and these markers of how bad precaritized circumstances can get are part of why the more encompassing forms of precaritization are so deeply unsettling to relatively privileged groups, and thus partly why right-wing populist discourses that reinstall a solid racial and gender hierarchy have such pull. At the same time, the situation whereby precarity extends its reach throughout the working world creates a fertile substrate in lived affective experience for the expansion of right-wing populism’s cross-class, multiracial, and gender-inclusive appeal. The tethering together of citizen and worker, bound in shared incapacitation and exasperation as desperately responsible “losers,” tightens accordingly.

Worker Centers: For All Workers, Against Right-Wing Populism

What does this account suggest about the kinds of political action that can best contest the tenacious hold of right-wing populism on the loyalties of legions, no matter how incessant the lies from those in authority or how lethally incompetent their response to a pandemic? For HoSang and Lowndes, such action involves “coalition work” to rearticulate “heterogeneous” identities into new and “different identifications,” such that “those marked as white recognize in their own precarity the origins and structures of a system predicated on the death of racialized others.”⁴⁷ They drive the point home with these acid lines by Fred Moten: ““The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly.””⁴⁸

I sympathize with HoSang and Lowndes’s argument, but the foregoing analysis suggests that challenging right-wing populism requires forms of struggle that transcend coalition politics and discursive innovation to construct new political identifications. Precarity is a distinctly temporalized formation of subject-constituting experience in domains of everyday

work-life. To recognize in one's own precarity the degradation borne by others, one needs incitements from a political movement based in organizations that make precarity's subjectivating dynamics palpable and politicize them. *Antiprecarity politics* must be a *politics of precarity* that directly addresses the syndrome of desperate responsibility and grapples with its spread, just like Trumpism, across differences of class, race, and ethnicity. Such a politics thus must actively seek to migrantize the citizen and promote political literacy.

As I argue in *The Fight for Time*, worker centers respond to the temporal and moral riddles of precaritized daily experience by cultivating what day laborers call relations of "conviviality" and "pathways" toward politicizing such connections.⁴⁹ Drawing on culturally embedded practices of mutualist aid, workers at Casa Latina and Voz's MLK Center share: time to listen to one another's "sufferings," tips about free meals and abusive employers, bus tickets, and what little money they have. This convivial culture turns the workers' predicament of precarity into the basis for acts of reciprocal care and social cooperation. Such care manifests, for example, in workers' voluntary efforts to keep the grounds clean, canvass local neighborhoods to attract employers, and lead cultural programs and occupational safety and health workshops. Speaking through tears as he explained how he had struggled to find work in the United States and sorely missed his family in Mexico, Héctor Molina emphasized how social bonds at the center fortified him and how he planned to participate even more actively "because it would be a coming together [*convivencia*] with people I know, so I wouldn't have to be alone."⁵⁰ Jesús Martínez acknowledged that volunteering with Casa Latina's neighborhood flyer program gave him an advantage in the employment lottery but stressed: "I do it so that there's more work for everyone, for all the people, for all of us who go looking for jobs."⁵¹ In such ways, worker centers cultivate a sense of responsibility that is shared rather than loaded on the lonely individual; responsive to material need but not fixated on wage-earning; and able to connect present to future in patient, granular ways rather than leaping despairingly from one to the other. That ethos of responsibility then opens a "pathway," as Luís Fernando Chávez put it when excitedly describing Voz's leadership workshops, to collective action.⁵² Such political assertion occurs through regular democratic assemblies, where workers set center policies on wage rates and membership expectations, as well as in direct action and local and national policy advocacy.

Having considered precarity's implications for right-wing populism in this essay, we now can see that as worker centers remold the condition of desperate responsibility in these ways, they transpose conviviality into political literacy and thereby challenge the temporal culture of right-wing

populism. Convivial responses to suffering, shared care for a common place, and worker assemblies foster both the *idea* and the *sense* of how responsibility can be a matter of solidarity rather than (only) the individual quest for economic security. These activities “occupy” and refunction desperately responsible time in everyday social interactions, breaking the hold of precarity’s double-binds and sensitizing workers to alternative temporalities of work and nonwork life. Additionally, through such activities, participants acquire practical familiarity with the sustained mutual commitment that Vásquez-Arroyo calls “fidelity.”⁵³ These effects are embattled: an insistent counter-current sees the centers’ convivially politicizing endeavors as dangerous distractions from the essential business of training a “workforce” of dutiful individuals. Thus, one day laborer demands that the centers dispense with assemblies and exercise muscular top-down authority to “weed out the bad workers”; another shakes his head over what he (as a self-described “Latino” and “Mexican”) avers are Latinos’ and Mexicans’ constitutional and cultural aversions to hard work and cooperation.⁵⁴ Against such racial-authoritarian manifestations of desperate responsibility in their own midst and in American political culture at large, worker centers encourage the trust in others, the regard for democratic processes of collective autonomy, and the “hopeful stillness” in the midst of crisis needed to view suffering and loss as defeats that can be reversed by critically reappraising the historical conditions of struggle. A clear example occurred as Seattle’s migrant and Latino communities braced for Trump’s inauguration. A mood of horrified disbelief at what seemed an explosive and total transformation of the political universe prevailed among white progressives. Yet in public events and email newsletters, Casa Latina’s organizers emphasized that battles against deportation and for workers’ rights had been underway for decades and that although matters would worsen under Trump, the community had learned lessons, most recently by fighting the Obama deportation program, that they could adapt to new circumstances. In contrast to the reigning tonalities of grief and desperation elsewhere, here there was fidelity to the struggle as open to reevaluation and strategic alteration over time.

The critical pedagogy of popular education, furthermore, continuously foment an intellectual culture in worker centers that uncovers historical sources of contemporary oppressions and nourishes day laborers’ and collaborators’ capacities to become makers of history. Rachel Meyer and Janice Fine argue that worker centers’ common reliance on Freirean popular education in their member activities makes “critical analysis” a defining feature of the distinctive form of “grassroots citizenship” fostered by these organizations among unauthorized migrants. Popular education equips participants “to place their own and others’ experiences within larger historical, political

and economic contexts, and to be able to imagine alternatives to the status quo”—for instance, through the imaginative cultural programs through which Casa Latina and Voz invite workers to learn about migrants’ and workers’ struggles throughout the western hemisphere.⁵⁵ Fueling this disposition to navigate critically between distinct political-temporal (and spatial) contexts is the fact that many founders of day labor organizations imbibed popular education sensibilities and learned its methods in struggles of the poor in Central America and Mexico.⁵⁶ In my observation, day labor centers could ground their popular education activities more firmly in Freirean theory, pursue them in more planful ways, and intensify their focus on critically conceptualizing protracted struggle in the manner proposed by Vásquez-Arroyo. Yet national day labor leaders recently have begun developing a renewed vision of popular education, and this holds promise for the future vigor of political literacy in the network.

Popular education at worker centers also models concrete practices for migrantizing the citizen in the social conceptions and dispositions of ordinary working people. Another observation from the field illustrates this process: at a popular education workshop that I conducted with Casa Latina community volunteers on day laborers’ occupational safety and health problems, workers’ themes of “risk on all sides” and keeping “eyes wide open” generated the connective thinking about different social groups’ linked fates that Anderson, Hosang and Lowndes, and Moten all advocate. Presented with these phrases, volunteers from diverse occupational and racial backgrounds eagerly shared how day laborers were naming temporal, physical, and moral predicaments that suffused their own jobs in nursing, journalism, and other areas. Admittedly, the workshop ended before we could pose pivotal questions about how volunteers, who were legal citizens, and unauthorized day laborers had ended up in such similar circumstances. Still, the moment daylighted a path toward migrantizing citizenship in this historical-critical sense.

Were practical alternatives to precaritized work-life and the Trumpian political sensorium like those at day labor centers to become available to workers throughout the economy, a formidable basis would arise for fighting the generalized precarity that fuels right-wing populism. *The Fight for Time* ends with a rousing call for worker centers for *all* workers; here, I will conclude by considering how such a program would offer indispensable means for contesting Trumpism’s durable power. The worker center movement has proven capable of providing a versatile institutional rubric for workers in diverse occupations, places, and racial and ethnic communities. Day labor organizations in urban Latino communities comprise the largest contingent among the two-hundred-plus worker centers founded by 2012, but rapid growth since 2000 has occurred among Filipino, African, and South Asian

workers and among food industry workers in rural areas.⁵⁷ Analysts differ in their judgments about worker center networks' abilities to scale-up their investments in local struggles such that they could exercise more coordinated power nationally and transnationally; my research supports Meyer and Fine's positive appraisal of the networks' "multiscalar" capacities.⁵⁸ Labor scholars also hotly debate the relative roles that unions and "alt-labor" organizations such as worker centers should take in rebuilding the labor movement. They note the early antagonisms between these two contingents and observe that even after watershed agreements between worker center networks and national union organizations, collaboration focuses on policy campaigns and rarely includes "actual joint organizing."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the trend toward cooperation suggests that complementarity rather than competition is possible, in ways that an ambitiously expanded consortium of worker centers would only strengthen. Worker centers also have activated burgeoning populations of migrants and other workers in informalized sectors that the mainstream union movement has excluded and that must be prime constituents of any broad revitalization of organized labor.

As essential as worker centers are to the labor movement's resurgence, just as promising are their implications for reinvigorating democratic citizenship among the precaritized multitude in the eye of the Trumpian tempest. In addition to spreading opportunities to gain political literacy throughout the working world, worker centers for *all* workers would multiply exponentially the sites for exercising those capacities in ways that migrantize citizenship, especially if popular education remains at the core. This means, as Anderson reminds us, attending to both the differences and the overlaps between nationals' and nonnationals', and white and nonwhite, historically and structurally rooted experiences. With worker centers throughout the economy, participants would have a sturdy basis for meeting this dual challenge: negotiating difference (the logic of exception) while discerning the presence of generally shared histories and imperatives within particular groups' dilemmas (the logic of synecdoche). On the one hand, distinct groups need separate spaces to express their specific circumstances and genealogies of precarization, work out their own vernaculars of social critique, and develop bespoke ways of refunctioning precaritized time. The thematic textures of precarity will sound and feel different, for instance, when they are proposed by non-Latino black people who are spared ICE's brutality but subjected to daily police violence, or when the themes come from Filipinas who labor for wages in others' houses and for no wages in their own homes.

On the other hand, a society-wide network of worker centers would create practical opportunities for different groups of workers to "recognize in their own precarity" the precarity of others and discover dynamics of

precaritization that envelop all in common conundrums of antinomial time and moral frustration. For political theory, this betokens enhanced capacities for further critical-popular inquiries of the sort I have presented here as a provocation to such research. Worker centers for *all* workers also would furnish extensive organizational scaffolding to enable the discursive rearticulation and coalitional innovation that HoSang and Lowndes advocate. Finally, a vast network of worker centers, if they could reproduce the affective climate of day labor organizations, would give working people throughout the economy respite from, and experiential alternatives to, the toxic affective culture of right-wing populism: cooperative impulses amid crisis rather than paralysis by shock politics; rhythms of collective autonomy instead of the arrhythmia of nominalist sovereignty; convivial physicality as refuge from resonant violence.

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Notes

1. Chantal Mouffe's argument that the right's antistate discourse succeeds because of its "democratic nucleus," as a veiled protest against the state's failure to respond to mass "precarization," lacks persuasiveness because her account of precarity is limited to a cursory story of rising austerity, job loss due to "deindustrialization," and the amorphous "sentiment of being left behind" (*For a*

- Left Populism* [London: Verso, 2018], 18–23). William E. Connolly examines right-wing affect rather than discourse but similarly attributes Trump’s appeal to industrial decline and downward mobility and describes these problems with no greater precision (*Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017]). Albenaz Azmanova moves in a more promising direction: she theorizes precarity as a contradictory structure of everyday life that originates in “precarity capitalism’s” structural antinomies, manifests practically as “the perpetual effort of becoming and remaining employable,” and registers emotionally as “the acute, widely spread sense of *insecurity*” (*Capitalism on Edge: How Fighting Precarity Can Achieve Radical Change without Crisis or Utopia* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2020], 147, 159). Yet she casts populism’s response to precarity in overly simple terms as offering risk-reduction measures (trade protectionism, immigrant exclusion) to allay widespread anxiety.
2. Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
 3. Both centers were founded around 1990 and are core members of the National Day Labor Organizing Network (NDLON). On the history and functions of worker centers, see Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); “Worker Centers: Entering a New Stage of Growth and Development,” *New Labor Forum* 20, no. 3 (2011): 44–53. On day laborers’ employment and social circumstances, see Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Nik Theodore, Edwin Meléndez, and Ana Luz Gonzales, “On the Corner: Day Labor in the United States” (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2006).
 4. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 48. For a more extensive discussion of Freire’s theory as it informs my method of analysis, see Apostolidis, *Fight for Time*, 37–71.
 5. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 43, 132–33; *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 67–69, 75–81.
 6. My fieldwork brought such activities to light through supplementary interviews and participant observation with day labor organizations in Los Angeles, Washington DC, and Chicago as well as with NDLON. See also Paul Apostolidis and Abel Valenzuela, Jr., “Cosmopolitan Politics and the Migrant Day Labor Movement,” *Politics, Groups & Identities* 2, no. 2 (2014): 222–44.
 7. We interviewed 78 day laborers in 2008–10. We conducted most interviews in Spanish and paid each worker \$20; all interviews were transcribed for thematic analysis. We conducted 310 hours of participant observation principally by volunteering as English teachers and job dispatchers, and also joining in social gatherings and political events, mainly in 2008–10 and 2015–19.
 8. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
 9. For a thorough critique of the theme of desperate responsibility, see Apostolidis, *Fight for Time*, 73–112.

10. For analysis of workers' generative themes about soliciting jobs on the corner, see Apostolidis, *Fight for Time*, 115–47.
11. Alberto Guerrero, interview by author, Seattle, WA, August 2008. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees to maintain anonymity following research ethics protocols. Interview quotations are my translations of comments in Spanish unless indicated otherwise.
12. Juan Carlos Garza, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010.
13. Diego Flores, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010.
14. Estéban Avila, interview by author, Seattle, WA, August 2008.
15. Roberto Mendoza, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010.
16. For a thorough account of day laborers' themes about occupational safety and health risks, see Apostolidis, *Fight for Time*, 149–84.
17. Gerardo Mejia, interview by Caitlin Schoenfelder, Seattle, WA, August 2008; Jaime Ortega, interview by author, Seattle, WA, August 2008.
18. Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 150–51.
19. Nicholas De Genova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2 (2004): 160–85.
20. Even by conservative measures, day laborers have a 31% chance of sustaining an occupational injury (Noah S. Seixas, Hillary Blecker, Janice Camp, and Rick Neitzel, "Occupational Health and Safety Experience of Day Laborers in Seattle," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 51, no. 6 (2008): 399–406).
21. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 46, 69–72.
22. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 90.
23. Joan Greenbaum and David Kotelchuk, "Got Air? The Campaign to Improve Indoor Air Quality at the City University of New York," in *Worker Safety under Siege: Labor, Capital, and the Politics of Workplace Safety in a Deregulated World*, ed. Vernon Mogensen (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), 97–107; Vernon Mogensen, "State or Society? The Rise and Repeal of OSHA's Ergonomics Standard," in *Worker Safety under Siege*, 108–39; Joan Benach, Alejandra Vives, Marcelo Amable, Christophe Vanroelen, Gemma Tarafam, and Carles Muntaner, "Precarious Employment: Understanding an Emergent Social Determinant of Health," *Annual Review of Public Health* 35 (2014): 229–53.
24. Azmanova, *Capitalism on Edge*; Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); Michael Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009): 21–41.
25. Antonio Vásquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility: Responding to Predicaments of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 210–12.
26. *Ibid.*, 214.

27. Bridget Anderson, "New Directions in Migration Studies: Towards Methodological De-Nationalism," *Comparative Migration Studies* 7, no. 36 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0140-8>.
28. Ibid.
29. Bridget Anderson, "Migrant Domestic Workers: Good Workers, Poor Slaves, New Connections," *Social Politics* 22, no. 4 (2015): 649–50.
30. Ibid., 643.
31. Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 28.
32. Ibid., 45.
33. Ibid., 24–25.
34. Ibid., 27–28.
35. Ibid., 59.
36. Ibid., 54.
37. Ibid., 53.
38. Ibid., 67.
39. Ibid., 103–28.
40. Ibid., 68.
41. Lia Haro and Romand Coles, "Eleven Theses on Neo-Fascism and the Fight to Defeat It," *Theory & Event* 20, no. 1 (2017): 100, 102–3.
42. Ibid., 101.
43. Ibid., 102.
44. Ibid., 102.
45. Ibid., 103.
46. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
47. HoSang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 166.
48. Quoted in HoSang and Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*, 166.
49. For a thorough exploration of these dynamics at Casa Latina and Voz's MLK Center, see Apostolidis, *Fight for Time*, 187–228.
50. Héctor Molina, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010.
51. Jesús Martínez, interview by Caitlin Schoenfelder, Seattle, WA, August 2008.
52. Luis Fernando Chávez, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010.
53. Vásquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility*, 213–15.
54. Sean Garcia, interview by Ariel Ruiz, Portland, OR, June 2010; Cristián Gutiérrez, interview by author, Seattle, WA, August 2008. Both individuals spoke in English, but significant numbers of workers who interviewed in Spanish and seemed less acculturated to life in the United States also viewed the center community in terms of the "workforce" ideal.
55. Rachel Meyer and Janice Fine, "Grassroots Citizenship at Multiple Scales: Rethinking Immigrant Civic Participation," *International Journal of Political and Cultural Sociology* 30, no. 4 (2017), 335–36.
56. Nik Theodore, "Generative Work: Day Laborers' Freirean Praxis," *Urban Studies* 52, no. 11 (2015): 2035–50.

57. Meyer and Fine, "Grassroots Citizenship," 333.
58. Meyer and Fine, "Grassroots Citizenship," 325; Catherine L. Fisk, "Workplace Democracy and Democratic Workers' Organizations: Notes on Worker Centers," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 17, no. 1 (2016): 101–30; Apostolidis and Valenzuela, "Cosmopolitan Politics."
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