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UNEMPLOYED STEELWORKERS, SOCIAL CLASS, AND THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF MORALITY

by

Paul A. Carruth

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Sociology

Brigham Young University

August 2009

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Paul Carruth

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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## ABSTRACT

# UNEMPLOYED STEELWORKERS, SOCIAL CLASS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MORALITY

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Master of Science

This thesis explores the dynamics of economic relations and distributive outcomes according to displaced steelworkers' own accountings of deindustrialization and job loss. Whereas class analyses tend to investigate consciousness according to "true" versus "false" preferences and "post-class" scholars assert that "post-materialism" is replacing "materialist" social concerns, the author abandons these dualisms to demonstrate that workers use cultural codes of "purity" and "pollution" to represent and evaluate individuals, interests, and relations. The findings buttress the continuing relevance of social class for explaining social identity, consciousness, and antagonism.

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## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

### *Research Problem*

According to conventional Marxist and Weberian definitions, class is a relational phenomenon involving the asymmetrical distribution of control over society's productive resources in ways that affect individuals' lived experiences and identities (see Held and Giddens 1982; Wright 1997; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). While class researchers have increasingly turned their attention to individual-level class outcomes (see review in Grusky and Sorensen 1998), many of these studies obscure the relational dimensions of class by substituting social position for concrete experience and divorcing ideational data from the situational contexts that imbue them with meaning (cf. Fantasia 1995). Furthermore, conventional class analyses generally examine class subjectivities according to imputed categories of "true" interests undistorted by extant ideas and institutions, and "false" interests attributable to some variant of social determinism (Somers and Gibson 1994, Vanneman and Cannon 1987).

On the other hand, a burgeoning literature claiming the "death of class" argues that property and employment relations no longer constitute axes of identity or interest formation (Pakulski and Waters 1996; Kingston 2000; Pahl 1989). These "post-class" scholars claim that postmodern class deconstruction has shifted social interests from materialist concerns related to society's distribution of material goods to "lifestyle" issues emphasizing self-actualization and enhancing one's quality of life (Giddens 1991; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Beck 1992; Clark and Lipset 1991). Rather than emanating from one's class location, this perspective asserts that social consciousness is founded on one's categorical "identity" such as age, marital status, or sexual orientation. However,

empirical investigations assessing the displacement of materialist with post-materialist interests generally suffer the same shortcomings of conventional class analysis by ignoring how situational contexts function to “activate” identity-related consciousnesses (e.g., Inglehart 1990; Clark and Lipset 1991).

By relying on the dualisms of “true” versus “false” consciousness and “materialist” versus “post-materialist” interests, these perspectives fail to capture the complexities of contemporary class relations and individual subjectivities. The empirical task of exploring the micro-level dynamics of inequality in ways that capture these complexities requires a shift away from assessments of putative attitudes and towards investigations of how individuals account for concrete conditions of existence and economic relations in ways that demonstrate social consciousness and antagonism. Drawing on the tenets of narrative analysis, I explore blue-collar workers’ descriptions of their “class experiences” through an analysis of displaced steelworkers’ accountings for deindustrialization and job loss. The findings suggest that employment relations remain an important source of social antagonism and that workers appropriate ideas and institutions associated with “false consciousness” to express their discontent with the status quo.

After providing preliminary information regarding deindustrialization and the case of the Geneva steelworkers below, I discuss the utility of investigating consciousness according to “narrative reality” rather than according to putative attitudes in Chapter 2 and describe the data and methodology in Chapter 3. The analysis in Chapter 4 presents the steelworkers’ causal accounts. These accounts suggest that the workers understand their plight as a social phenomenon attributable to relations of control at the

point of production and fiscal politics in the civil sphere. After relating these findings to the relevant literature in Chapter 5, I discuss possible applications of this data for future research in the concluding chapter.

*Deindustrialization and the Case of Geneva Steel*

The technological advances and neoliberal policies that have emerged since the 1970s, coupled with the decline of Fordism, have destabilized many skills, jobs, and firms that were once considered indispensable. Furthermore, the economic crises during this period have accompanied the restructuring of capitalism in ways that undermine the “accord” established between labor and capital during the Great Depression and the post-World War II expansion (see Arrighi and Silver 1999; Bowles and Ginitis 1982). Despite the implications these economic and political changes present for inter- and intra-class relations, extant research has relatively little to say about the “mental maps” and “modes for living” (Lamont 2000; Geertz 1973) of those groups for whom these changes arguably affect the most, including displaced blue-collar workers.

The United States’ steel industry experienced a “crisis” during the late 1990s and early 2000s as the price of steel plummeted and the “dumping” of foreign metals increased. Employment in the steel industry dropped from almost 235,000 to about 191,000 between January 1998 and March 2002. Between March 2000 and March 2002 over 50 steel plants and steel-related firms closed their doors (Metal Center News 2002). Geneva Steel, located in Vineyard, Utah, filed for bankruptcy in 1999 and borrowed a \$110 million government-secured loan to reorganize operations. Although the plant emerged from bankruptcy in January 2001, management began “temporarily” shutting down operations and laying off employees by November 2001, and ultimately filed for bankruptcy

protection again in January 2002. Geneva Steel dismissed approximately 1400 employees between January 2001 and March 2002 (Oberbeck 2002; 2001). After failed attempts to secure additional funding, the plant's management sold the company's remaining assets and what was left of the structure was demolished in 2005.

The Geneva steelworkers whose careers spanned the final decades of the 20th century witnessed dramatic changes in the economic subfield of industrial manufacturing, particularly in terms of waning economic protections, increased modernization, and the general decline of the blue-collar workforce. By the 1970s increasing global competition tipped the class struggle in employers' favor, weakening public support for government or union intervention on the behalf of workers (Blau 1999; Jacoby 1997; Mischel et al. 2005) as well as contributing to the manufacturing sectors' steady decline in employment levels (Brady and Denniston 2006). Along with several steel plants in the East that shut down during the 1980s, the USX plant in Utah closed in 1986. Local businessmen purchased the plant and reopened it in 1987 under the moniker Geneva Steel, saving a substantial number of manufacturing jobs in Utah while making the new owners multi-millionaires (Stewart 2004). However, the ascendancy of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism throughout the 1990s continued to threaten blue-collar workers. For example, the Keynesian ideal of full employment lost favor in public policy compared to notions that unemployment is self-inflicted, social protection exacerbates unemployment levels, job loss (or "flexibility") is an acceptable cost of maintaining competitiveness in a global economy, and that a healthy economy should expect "structural unemployment" (Somers and Block 2005; Baxandall 2002; Lamont 2000).

Despite the limitations of the generalizability of case studies, exploring the causal accounts of a specific occupational group facilitates the examination of ideational patterns related to temporally- and spatially-contingent relations that a representative sample would likely obscure (cf. Fantasia 1995). Furthermore, the data I present below suggest that these steelworkers face various issues that characterize the economic crises of late capitalism including the state's attention to foreign concerns and the related consequences on the domestic economy, public disapproval of executive wealth during times of organizational downsizing, and the potential disruption that the failure of a firm or industry present to a local or national community (see Przeworski and Meseguer Y. 2005; Murphy 1995; Wright 1978).

## **CHAPTER II: Literature Review**

Marx argued that the perennial bankruptcies endemic to the capitalist system would lead workers to challenge the competence and efficacy of the capitalist class, intensify working-class consciousness, and ultimately result in a politically organized proletariat (Harvey 1989). Although most contemporary analysts reject this teleological reading of class formation, much of contemporary class research also lacks an engagement with the concrete problems of social life. Conventional class analyses (e.g. Wright 1997; Marshall et al. 1988) largely treat "class location" as a static position with which the analyst may impute rational interests, and view "class consciousness" as a stable mental state independent of the contexts from which social attitudes emerge. Accordingly, the primary task for the analyst is to create the appropriate "class map" and investigate the attitudinal variations among social categories. There are two notable

shortcomings to this approach. First, analysts generally exclude populations that fail to fit into established class maps--including the unemployed and other “classic proletarians— or place them into categories that do not appropriately reflect their market position (Breen and Rottman 1995; Fantasia 1995). Second, analysts tend to explain attitudes that fail to correspond with putative interests with references to overly-deterministic notions of “false consciousness” (Vanneman and Cannon 1987; Somers and Gibson 1994).

Kluegel and Smith (1986), for example, attribute lower-class individuals’ propensity to agree with survey items involving justifications for distributive inequality or individualist explanations for achievement to their submission to a “dominant ideology” that distracts them from recognizing their rational self-interest. The result, Kluegel and Smith argue, is the depoliticization of inequality. Although Wright (1985:248) acknowledges the limitations of survey methods on assessing the relationship between “class experiences” and “class subjectivities,” he attributes workers failure to agree to “pro-worker” survey items to “some kind of mechanism” that “blocks” what a person “really wants” such that “[t]he preferences that are subjectively accessible—that are part of the individual’s ‘consciousness’—are ... different from the preferences the individual would consciously hold in the absence of this block.” Although a variety of “mechanisms” may function to distort workers’ “objective interests” (see Westergaard 1970), the “block” ultimately occurs within the realm of meaning. In both of these typifications of false consciousness, the authors frame culture as distorting what people really want and suggest that “true” consciousness is something essential, “deep down”, and outside the realm of culture. As I demonstrate in the analysis below, economic activity is not governed solely by primordial self-interest, but also by collective concerns

of aggregate welfare and social order. Therefore, individuals' material wants are conditioned by moral discourse in the form of publicly available norms and cultural codes pertaining to the economic activity.

While advocates of the death-of-class thesis contend that “false consciousness” and other class “anomalies” are characteristic of the post-industrial social order, this perspective generally suffers from the same shortcomings of assessing subjectivities according to imputed dualisms and independently of lived experience. Scholars within this tradition tend to argue that the rise in micro- and macro-level affluence, the increase in occupational differentiation, and the ascendancy service-oriented economies in Western countries has replaced the realm of production with the realm of consumption in forming personal and political identities. Consequently, what people “really want” has shifted from concerns regarding material well-being to post-materialist concerns (Inglehart 1990; Giddens 1989; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Clark and Lipset 1991; Bauman 2001). While this body of literature demonstrates that social change alters the dynamics of social inequality, the assertion that socio-technical and economic developments replace previous patterns of identity-formation and social antagonism neglects the complexities of social stratification and human subjectivity. How would workers explain inequality or economic misfortune in concrete circumstances in which the role of property or employment relations are paramount? While some post-class authors claim that workers in late capitalism interpret economic hardship as personal rather than as social problems (Beck 1992; Offe 1985; see also Schlozman and Verba 1979), this explanation falls into the same trap of ascribing “false consciousness” to workers and thereby “blaming the victims” for their failure to perceive the “true” sources

of economic crises (see Vanneman and Cannon 1987, Holton 1987). In Wright's (1996) affirmation of the continuing relevance of social class, he aptly argues that

[o]ne would be hard pressed to convince a group of newly unemployed workers from a factory that has closed because the owner moved production abroad that their lack of ownership of capitalist assets has no significant consequences for their lives. If the workers themselves owned the firm as a cooperative, or if it were owned by the local community, then different choices would be made. The same international pressures would have different consequences on the lives of workers if the distribution of capital assets—i.e., in the class relations within which they lived—were different.

Thus, post-class scholarship's neglect of concrete problems likely obscures the relevance of class boundaries as a source of social identity, consciousness, and antagonism. In contrast to approaches that overlook the role of events and identities, narrative analysis provides the conceptual tools that elucidate the significance of concrete conditions of existence and their relationship with individual subjectivities. According to this approach, human consciousness is related not to categorical attributes (e.g., employment status, occupation characteristic) or isolated events (e.g., job loss) but to spatially- and temporally-contingent self-concepts and images of society that emerge from the cognitive arrangement and evaluation of events (Polkinghorne 1988). As Somers (1994:614) explains, narrative analyses demonstrate that

people construct identities...by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories ... ; people make sense of what has

happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or ...  
integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people  
are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the  
projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but  
ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural  
narratives.

Hence, in addition to locating themselves in culturally-mediated accounts, individuals understand the situations in which they find themselves by connecting disparate events into “causal emplotments” with which they explain and evaluate conditions of existence. The evaluative content of these narratives originates from what Somers (1994) calls “selective appropriation,” whereby individuals arrange and prioritize the myriad events and relations they confront in order to create an account of discrete “happenings” (e.g. a plant closure). As will become apparent in the analysis below, Durkheimian cultural sociology--particularly the notion that people use binary cultural codes to organize information and infuse it with “religious symbology”--provides the starting point for understanding the classificatory and evaluative dimensions of social narratives (see Lamont and Fournier 1992; Douglas 1978; Alexander 1988). Using Douglas’ (1978, 1992) contention that individuals use classifications of “purity” and “pollution” to account for unfavorable events, I demonstrate that displaced steelworkers purify their own traits, actions and goals, and pollute the traits, actions, and goals of those individuals that they represent as having caused their misfortune.

This framework presents a notable divergence from conventional approaches that define consciousness according to individuals’ “want” by also including workers’

representations of what they do not want. After all, workers may have immediate desires for successful profit accumulation since their material survival depends on their employers' ability to appropriate surplus value, but they likely also view their own exploitation as undesirable (cf. Przeworski 1985). Furthermore, the examination of both the desirable and the undesirable dispenses of the "false" and "true" dualism of conventional class consciousness research and illustrates how cultural repertoires, rhetorical strategies, and lived experience interact to shape the ways in which individuals identify class boundaries and articulate their class interests.

Many of the workers' accountings draw upon "public narratives" that provide stories about the reasons for (upward or downward) mobility, the origins of social pathology, normative economic behaviors, and other plots and themes pertaining to the collective good of organizations, communities, and nations (Somers 1994, Alexander 2006). Although publicly available cultural codes provide the discursive tools and the shared mode of communication with which individuals can create causal accounts, they do not determine the form these accountings take. Rather, individuals deliberately construct accounts that legitimize their life strategies, ascribe self-worth when they achieve their goals, and explain failure in ways that "salvage the self" (Snow and Anderson 1993; Swidler 2001; Wuthnow 1987).

In constructing the stories they tell themselves and others, individuals legitimize their own interests and challenge those they perceive as supporting unworthy goals. During times of crisis, two narrative forms in particular are in conflict: the progressive and the tragic (Alexander et al. 2004; see also Jacobs 1996). Progressive narratives explain harmful events as "pains of transition" that will lead to an improved future.

Tragic narratives, on the other hand, explain harmful events in terms of their incompatibility with the “good” and imply that such conditions will result in an undesirable future. These two narrative forms accompany divergent typifications of “perpetrators” and “victims”: the progressive form minimizes the “unworthiness” of hardship and associates the disruptions of change with social progress while the tragic form frames the events and those responsible for them as “polluting” to the collectivity. Whereas the tension between the progressive and tragic narrative forms often take place in the public realm among media organizations and interests groups (Griswold 2004), individuals coping with problematic conditions of existence create accounts that diagnose the situation and identify its causes before any such claims reach the public arena (if they ever do). Even though these “hidden transcripts” develop outside the surveillance of powerful others (Scott 1990), they nevertheless constitute “public performances” utilizing common cultural codes to indicate what individuals “believe to be socially acceptable and desirable” to others (Wuthnow 1996: 95). In the analysis that follows, I examine the Geneva steelworkers’ “performances” as they account for deindustrialization and their job loss.

### **CHAPTER III: Data and Methodology**

The closure of the Geneva Steel plant provides an information-rich case appropriate for investigating individuals’ accountings for distributive outcomes and economic relations. Data collection began in June 2002 with the mailing of surveys to each of the 1177 members of the United Steel Workers’ Union Local 2701, of which 622 (53% response rate) were returned with usable data. The surveys measured a variety of

topics including political attitudes and attributions for the plant closure. Following the receipt of the surveys, researchers developed an interview guide that included prompts for assessing workers' attributions, experiences, and attitudes according to their own accounts rather than predefined responses. These interviews provide the opportunity to examine the workers' social worlds and identities according to their own "narrative reality" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). During the fall of 2002, interviewers met with 66 of the 385 respondents who indicated on the survey that they were willing to participate in an interview. Interviewees were randomly selected from each of nine categories segregated by age (44 years and younger, 45-54 years, 55 years and older) and self-reported level of financial difficulty (low, moderate, high). This thesis utilizes the data from the 57 usable tape recordings of these interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted as miniature focus groups with two former workers, yielding a total sample of 59 interviewees. Only two of the interviewees are women.

Each interviewee received a thirty-five dollar gift certificate to a local grocery store. The interviewers met the former steelworkers in their homes, wore casual attire, and avoided excessive note-taking or drawing attention to the tape recorder. The duration of the interview typically ranged from sixty to ninety minutes, during which the interviewers made an effort to allow the workers to produce their own accounts using their own experiences and evaluations. Although the use of the interview guide (see Appendix A) likely resulted in the omission of topics of particular salience to the individual and/or prompted accountings that would not have emerged independently, the interview guide ensured that each interview followed similar lines of inquiry (Patton 2002) including reasons for the plant closure and attitudes towards the government. In

contrast to more impersonal data collection methods, face-to-face interviews run the risk of gathering responses that the respondents deem socially acceptable. Nevertheless, this shortcoming is in keeping with the present objective of examining the ways in which the narrative accountings of class relations and personal identities are inter-personal “performances” rather than a collection of subjective meanings (see Wuthnow 1996). Members of the research team transcribed the interviews and regularly collaborated on selecting relevant codes (see Lofland and Lofland 1995). The team initially coded the data according to sixty-five “nodes” using QSR N6 text management software, of which “reasons for shut down” was the most applicable for this paper. Transcriptions also included “factsheet” data (Lofland and Lofland 1995) that emerged during the interviews including the respondents’ age and years of employment at the plant. Table 1 displays the pseudonyms and self-reported age and tenure at the steel plant for each of the respondents cited in the analysis below. With the exception of “Suzanne Gordon,” the respondents listed in Table 1 are male.

After the collaborative portion of the data analysis process had ended, I began re-reading the texts and re-organizing the data according to my specific research objectives. I tabulated the relevant factsheet information, causal attributions for the plant closure, and representations of self and other (i.e. managers) for each interview on an Excel spreadsheet. This comprehensive “case record” (Patton 2006) organized the data in ways that facilitates a holistic interpretation of each interview’s content while simultaneously allowing me to ascertain which themes are recurrent across the sample. By grounding the analysis in the workers’ own accounts (see Glaser and Strauss 1967) I formulated additional thematic categories according to the patterns that emerged in the interviews.

For example, I created “nested” categories that differentiated mismanagement of labor from mismanagement of capital. This effort at “open” coding is complemented by a number of “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1969) that I utilize to interpret the dynamics of social class (e.g., Marx’s definition of class as relations of control over labor and capital [Wright 1980]), the organization of production (e.g., workplace norms [Hodson 2001], and social classification (e.g., “pure” and “polluting” cultural codes [Douglas 1978]) that pervade the interviews. The focus of the analysis, however, is the steelworkers’ own “causal emplotments” and evaluations. Accordingly, I include a number of excerpts from the interviews in order to allow the reader to evaluate the utility of these concepts for interpreting the data (see Patton 2006).

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Years of Employment at the Plant	Pseudonym	Age	Years of Employment at the Plant
Aaron Ott	35	13	John Nolan	51	14
Al Blakely	55	34	Joseph Phelps	n/a	30
Andrew Gordon	n/a	33	Kevin Tucker	55	34
Bryan McClean	61	34	Mel Luhrmann	58	25
Charlie Jones	62	32	Michael Gondry	50	26
David Lesuer	49	5	Neil Schneider	59	n/a
Derek Ross	50	26	Nick Pearce	58	29
Elliot Smith	51	25	Oliver Anderson	n/a	22
Frank Jennings	53	33	Richard Oldham	57	29
Greg Davis	n/a	13	Shawn MacKaye	n/a	14
Howard Seawright	45	14	Suzanne Gordon	n/a	n/a
Ian Scallen	62	28	Victor Bergman	54	36
James Holmes	63	41	Will Linklater	58	14

## **CHAPTER IV: Findings**

These interviews allowed the workers to relate a number of causal accountings for their circumstances. The two most prominent attributions for responsibility involve plant managers and government representatives. Ninety-five percent of the interviewees trace the plant's closure in some way to the actions of management, of which the most salient causal accounts pertain to norms of production governing managerial control over the labor process and money capital. Fifty-seven percent of the sample claim that the government is at least partially responsible for their job loss, often citing normative expectations regarding the preservation of American jobs and/or the maintenance of national security and fiscal autonomy. Although the workers' characterizations of managers and politicians vary from insensible dilettantes to vile malefactors, they frame these individuals as capable of preventing or ameliorating their hardship. Even though the steelworkers recognize the structural dimensions of crisis formation and distributive inequality, their emphasis on the traits and actions of human actors frames their particularist interests (e.g., increased control over the labor process) as practically achievable and in accordance with widely-shared values and norms. More importantly, these causal accounts frame the workers' personal problems as a social phenomenon shared with other individuals and emerging from extra-individual sources rather than from an inability to survive according the expectations of the existing institutional order.

### *Causal Accounts: Mismanagement*

In attributing causality of the plant closure to the actions of management, the steelworkers maintain their commitment to the "purity" of work and self-reliance while associating the motivations and behaviors of managers with symbolic "pollution." I begin

my analysis by examining the workers' causal accounts pertaining to the norms of production guiding the labor process, to which two-thirds of the sample made reference.

*Mismanagement of the Labor Process*

John Nolan, who started working at the plant when it re-opened under the new executive management in 1987, explains how the organization was successful when the new managers stayed out of the workers' way:

That first year they made 40 million dollars profit--40 million dollar profit! [...] Well, upper management stayed completely out of the picture because they didn't know what was going on. They had no clue. They didn't even know where to turn the power on to that place. They had to go find all these guys that was there before to start that plant back up. [...] They ran it and they called the shots until upper management stepped back and seen what was going on, 'Oh yeah, even I can do that' you know, so they start getting their noses in it. Then after the first, oh about four or five years, then it started going downhill.

John argues that the plant would have run "just as smooth as glass" if management had limited their involvement to non-productive activities such as those pertaining to "all the legal ins-and-outs of selling steel or moving steel or shipping it." Otherwise, managers should have remained

out of the picture entirely and let the management – the lower management that's right with the men, just let them run the plant. [...] Every time they come out of that plant and start poking their nose in, all they do is mess things up for a week to 10 days. [...] It just frustrated you.

Just wanted to say, “You guys go back up to your nice padded cell or whatever you’ve got up there in the front office and just stay there. Don’t come down here and bother us. Just let us do our job and you guys take care of selling the steel.”

John’s “reactive attitudes” (Strawson 1974) reflect a view of managers as responsible agents capable of limiting the workers’ misfortune by adhering to normative expectations related to their respective roles: upper management should “take care of selling the steel,” lower management should “run the plant,” and the workers should be granted the autonomy to “do our job.” Thus, proper “management citizenship,” to use Hodson’s (2001) term, includes cooperating with the individuals in the lower echelons of the organization’s hierarchy in order to capitalize on their skills and practical knowledge.

In keeping with Hughes’ (1958) assertion that employees derive a sense of dignity from their labor by interpreting their work in terms of saving those with greater power and prestige from their own mistakes, the Geneva workers assert their superior knowledge and skill compared to the abilities of managers, whose involvement in the production process would often “mess things up.” John even claimed that the workers’ efforts (often outside of managerial surveillance) made the plant run “in spite of management” over the years. However, the salient themes in the Geneva workers’ causal accounts reflect a tragic narrative emphasizing the insuperability of managerial mistakes emanating from their authoritarian control over the labor process. In this way, the workers account for organizational failure while maintaining their moral commitments to self-actualization. For example, Ian Scallen describes how he was committed to giving the company “an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay” for the twenty-eight years in

which he worked at the plant (just two years shy of becoming eligible for a full retirement), sometimes working “twenty, twenty-four hours before I’d come home” in order to “put in some money to my 401k and get a better social security.” Despite his dedication and discipline, the actions of individuals over which he had no control caused the plant to go bankrupt: “I gave 110 percent, you know? I was really working. [...] I don’t think it’s any of my fault that they went under, I’ll tell you that.”

According to Wuthnow (1989), the “morality” of the market system is culturally sustained by providing not only the venue for symbolic activities in which individuals can demonstrate moral responsibility, but also the means by which individuals may maintain moral responsibility despite market-related failures. He emphasizes that moral codes draw boundaries between “intentionality” and “inevitability” such that the codes of the marketplace provide explanations for failure in terms that preserve self-worth by attributing undesirable outcomes to economic “laws” that are impervious to human manipulation. However, since the workers blame the actions of powerful others instead of themselves or an autonomous economic system, perhaps the dichotomy of “pure” and the “polluted” more appropriately captures the classificatory and evaluative functions of cultural codes (Douglas 1978, 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). In other words, market failures result from the actions of individuals motivated by values that are inconducive with the “good.” Alexander and Smith (1992:158) argue that negative behavior in cultural analysis beginning with the classical theorists and continuing through functionalism and neo-Marxism “is understood only in terms of what threatens value coherence and what instigates social conflict, either as undersocialization, which indicates a distance from the cultural order, or as rebellion, which indicates antagonism to

it.” The Geneva steelworkers, however, symbolize the bad as the antithesis of the good. Using the codes typifying on the “pure” side of public narratives that associate the market system with self-discipline, personal responsibility, collective well-being, and individual freedom (Alexander 2006; see also Wuthnow 1987) the workers represent themselves as pro-social and responsible. Conversely, the workers use the codes on the “pollution” side of these narratives—those typifying recklessness, irresponsibility, inequality, and tyranny--to represent managers as anti-social and careless.

Therefore, not only do the Geneva steelworkers maintain a sense of self-worth by drawing moral boundaries between themselves and management (cf. Lamont 2000), they also represent managers as polluting to a predictable and cooperative social order characterized by the adherence to widely-accepted norms (cf. Elster 1989). In this way, the workers frame managers’ and workers’ the antagonistic interests (cf. Wright 1985; Sorensen 1996) in terms that evaluate their respective desires in relation to intersubjective expectations. For example, James Holmes explained that the Geneva managers did not inspect their steel, which he asserts drove customers to other steelmakers and resulted in “thousands and millions of dollars of claims to companies that had bought [Geneva] steel.” He denounces managers’ interests in earning short-term profits not because they are opposed to his own interest in the long-term viability of the plant, but because these interests are antithetical to widely-accepted norms of management citizenship:

They had the idea that just get out the door and things will take care of itself. And I wrote a letter to [the owner] when they first started up and said, “You know, you really should inspect the steel,” you know, I was just a peon so to speak, so they didn't listen to me. [...] And so I knew

they wouldn't be in business very long because of the really poor managers. They were a bunch of lawyers that knew how to manipulate things, but when it come to running a business, these guys could care less. [...] And you couldn't tell them nothing. These guys knew it all, so they thought. [...] All they wanted was those big dollars, you know “management dollars,” and it was really a sad situation.

Management's indifference (“could care less”), conceit (“knew it all”) and avarice (“All they wanted was those big dollars”) presents risks for customers (and by implication, the employees) and therefore are polluting to a predictable and cooperative social order both within the organization and within the marketplace. Thus, mismanagement is not the result of valuelessness, but the consequence of adherence to polluting values. Michael Gondry's comparison of the management under USX with the management under Geneva Steel also demonstrates the symbolic generalizations of the good and the bad with which the workers characterize the antagonistic interests of labor and management:

Actually, I enjoyed my job for the first ten years out there when it was USX, quite well. We had a good camaraderie out there. It seems like the management cared about us a little bit, you know. I mean we had to have the union to help us do things that were unfair. Just take our views to them, but it seemed like they were a lot more open-minded about working with us and stuff. I have no respect for the last management. They're the ones that put the plant towards bad, in my opinion. [...] There were too many, too many times when the decisions were made just fairly out of

putting profit in their pockets and not worrying about us. [...To them] it wasn't even a long term situation. It wasn't. It was more like, "If we can make a buck right now, we're happy." You know, I think the plant would be viable and running right now if they hadn't made such stupid decisions. And too many...too many of the management had too many of their cronies—buddies--in there, and friends, and relatives, and stuff to where they just were covering people that they liked, and you know, [their attitude was] "Who cares about the actual people that were doing the steel working?" [...I] felt like they were just totally the wrong people to be guiding the place. And I apparently was right.

In contrast to the cooperative and reasonable labor-management relations under USX, Michael Gondry frames the Geneva management as exclusionary and irrational. They are the "wrong people to be guiding the place" not because they are motivated by egoist interests instead of societal values or because their conceptions of the "good" conflict with those of the workers (e.g., cronyism versus impartiality); rather, Michael interprets management's blameworthiness in terms of an adherence to "polluting" values that are antithetical to the "purity" of relations conducive to collective well-being and social order. Whereas Przworski (1985) argues that capitalist societies conflate universalist and capitalist interests (i.e. that which is good for the capitalist class is good for all classes) and claims that the working class must demonstrate that each class's interests are particularist in order to broaden the acceptability of their goals, the Geneva workers' comments suggest that socially acceptable accounts equate working-class interests as compatible with the public good and capitalists' interests as threatening to the

public good. In other words, the workers frame opposing class interests in ways that associate that which is good for workers with what is good for everyone and that which is bad for workers with violations infringing on the public good.

The workers' representations of appropriate labor-management interactions as characterized by cooperation, respect, and reason resembles Durkheim's (1972) discussions of organic solidarity within an organization, in which the individuals occupying complimentary social roles adopt a shared vision of the moral order and cooperate to achieve common objectives. It is important to note, however, that the workers' generally portray these ideal typifications of order at the site of production in terms of the subordination of the interests of management to the interests of labor. According to the steelworkers, the lack of quality control, cronyism, or (as I discuss below) inappropriate investments perpetuated disorder and conflict by violating implicit rights and commitments. As Michael Gondry's comparison of USX with Geneva demonstrates, many workers articulate such predictable and cooperative relations through references to previous arrangements. These definitions of social normality characterize mismanagement as aberrant to the existing institutional order rather than a socially-acceptable prerogative of the capitalist class. Therefore, solutions to this "crisis" are not only feasible without reorganizing the social totality, but represent a return to conditions of social normality that were once acceptable and advantageous to both workers and managers.

This does not necessarily mean that the workers long for a return to a traditional social order. Rather, these references to the previous arrangements represent an intersubjective "collective memory" (Halbwachs 1992) that provides a cultural tool with

which the workers associate management's actions with polluting norms that threaten an established normative order. The workers' ideal typifications of organizational functioning do not require the reinvigoration of traditional commitments as much as the institution of a more egalitarian organizational order. Will Linklater, who enrolled in a management program following the layoff, comments on how social order would emerge from shared norms based on interdependent organizational roles:

From my point of view, you can't manage any company from the front office. [With] everything that goes on in the company, it's simply impossible. So you have to let the people use the manager. Find the people that know how to do the job, and then let them do their job. Know what I mean? They take care of it for you. But they [management] interfered too much. They wouldn't listen to the people that did know what they were doing [...] and they simply didn't understand the business at all.

Will's radical notion of worker and manager citizenship--in which workers "use the manager" rather than vice versa--is congruent with the traditional meritocratic ideology supporting the market system and division of labor in which the worker and manager roles are awarded to individuals "that know how to do the job" and cooperate with each other in order for the firm to operate effectively. Will delegitimizes management's interference with shopfloor activities, refusal to cooperate with the workers, and lack of respect for worker's skills and knowledge not by challenging a dominant meaning system with a subversive ideology, but by appropriating publicly available norms and cultural codes to associate an egalitarian arrangement with publicly available notions of social normality:

[The managers] blame it on the hourly employees, but the reality was [that with] all the decisions they made, changes they made in the process, and stuff like that, they're the ones that caused the problem. But they never understood that. And anybody that dared to even attempt to point it out to them, it was absolutely suicidal to your career. So it got so [lower-level] managers simply didn't say anything because number one, they weren't going to get listened to anyways, and if they did say anything they were probably in trouble. In fact, if you know anybody that's in business, if you want to study a very good case study to make sure that you don't fail as a manager, study Geneva carefully.

In contrast to an ideal firm characterized by organic solidarity in which organizational actors work interdependently and pursue common objectives, Will frames the workers at Geneva Steel as alienated from the labor process. Regardless of whether or not the arrangements prior to the "changes they made in the [production] process" were more conducive to economic success, Will's causal emplotment explains the "reality" of the plant closure by attributing it to workers' exclusion of participation and influence at the point of production. This lack of control is perhaps best understood as a political issue, albeit within a capitalist firm rather than within civil society. Although power within the private sphere is typically understood in terms of the rights of property rather than the rights of people, the workers' comments suggest that their rights as owners of labor power entitle them to expect managers to uphold their duties and responsibilities as managerial citizens.

The conventional employment contract in capitalist economies entails the transaction of the productive assets between owners of capital and the owners of labor power so that both parties enhance material welfare (see Sorensen 2000). Nevertheless, both parties retain a substantial amount of control over their respective assets. Much of industrial sociology and organizational behavior scholarship address “worker citizenship” in terms of the employees’ submission of their residual control over labor power to the interests of capital but has generally overlooked worker attitudes regarding managers’ control over organizational assets (cf. Hodson 2001). As these interviews demonstrate, workers are profoundly interested in the submission of managers’ residual control over organizational assets to the interests of labor. Much like a public official, managers hold an “office” that is “both a social function and a personal career” (Walzer 1984:155; see also Alexander 2006; Hughes 1958); accordingly, the workers expect that the incumbent of the managerial office possesses the appropriate qualifications and they demand that the position remain free of corruption or negligent self-seeking. Derek Ross’s comments demonstrate that the ideal incumbent of the managerial office be an individual with steel-making experience, exhibit a commitment to producing a product of high quality, demonstrate a disinclination to use the position to enhance their personal wealth at the expense of keeping the plant viable, and acts within the bounds of his/her duties and qualifications:

My feelings toward the whole things is, is that someone who is actually in steel and worried more about making steel than lining their pockets with money, would come in and take this out, buy it out and start it back up. We could make a profitable steel mill out of it. But let the hourly steel

people do the steel making. And let the other people, [...the ones who] bring the money, they should be the ones staying out of it and letting the hourly people do it. [...] Like I said before, we can go in there and do it. We don't need the managers standing over us and tell us how much to put in it and where to put this piece or where to cut this. We don't need that; we know what we're doing.

In contrast to this ideal typification, Aaron Ott's causal account provides an example of the characteristics—including those of the owner "Rick Johnson"—that pollute the managerial office:

As far as why did Geneva close, they [the management] made a lot of mistakes, a lot of big mistakes. One of the biggest mistakes they ever made was getting Adam Long involved in the place. I have no use for Adam Long at all, none. I don't think he's good person, but that's my opinion also. I don't think that he cared truly about anything but himself. He didn't make decisions that were beneficial to the longevity of the place. Rick Johnson is probably a really good person. I think that he is, but he has no business running a steel mill. He needed to have somebody more qualified to run a steel mill doing it. He could own it, that's fine, but running it wasn't his niche in life. They made a lot of bad decisions that weighed the camel way down. Imports and stuff were just the brick that broke the camel's back.

Aaron's assessment of Adam Long's performance as a manager reflects Lamont's (2000) findings that blue-collar workers determine the "real value" of a person according

to moral criteria rather than socioeconomic indicators. However, Aaron Ott and other Geneva workers invoke these moral criticisms not only to create symbolic boundaries between the worthy and the less-worthy, but also to create causal accounts indicating blameworthiness for collective misfortune. In other words, they desire that managers not possess the traits or perform the actions that they identify as infringing upon their own life strategies and welfare (cf. Sher 2006). While Aaron may also believe that Adam Long transgresses “much-valued aspects of traditional morality” or that he is missing “what is truly important in life” (Lamont 2000:110), he frames the consequences of Adam Long’s selfishness in terms reflecting the social functions of his office including an expectation to promote “the longevity of place.” Similarly, even though Aaron believes that Rick Johnson is “probably a really good person,” his passivity and incompetence as the plant owner, and his “bad decisions” are among the “mistakes” that caused the closure. Therefore, regardless of his intentions his lack of practical knowledge meant that “he had no business” in attempting to perform the duties of his office.

The workers often express discontent with management by associating their actions with undesirable *collective* outcomes including organizational profitability. In this way, the workers connect mismanagement with violations against intersubjective--rather than subjective—notions of the good. Even though workers may prefer increased autonomy at the site of production in order to enhance their sense of self-worth (cf. Burawoy 1979; Halle 1984; Nichols and Benyon 1977), the rationale for their “wrongness” was more often expressed in terms of inhibiting the success of the company. For example, Shawn MacKaye frames the failure of the “high-up bosses that didn’t know anything about the company” in terms of economic efficiency: “they didn’t allow my

managers, the workers' managers [i.e., low-level managers] to manage the way they needed to be productive." Similarly, Richard Oldham states that when workers were treated with respect, "productivity was really great, and the attitudes were great, and the people worked together to solve problems and make the place a more profitable institution." But as management became more self-serving and reluctant to cooperate with employees, workers stopped "offering any suggestions or [suggesting] changes that might have even made things more productive." Richard goes on to express the consequence of workers' reticence in terms of increasing the costs of production:

If you're gonna make things happen, you need to listen to the people who run the equipment, the people who maintain the equipment, and try to take into account all entities of those involved with what has to be done to make a particular line of, say, when you take any one of those out of the picture or you don't care to listen to what they have to say, then it's gonna cost you down the line [...]. There's gonna be problems that maybe could've been avoided if...if more people had a say, or at least could express their thoughts to the point where they'd be listened to.

Just as the worker do not refer to "objective" interests to characterize themselves, managers, or the plant closure, neither to they cite personal preferences to characterize organizational relations or outcomes. Indeed, failing to listen to workers and disrespecting their knowledge and skills may directly or indirectly lower individual feelings of self-worth, but the workers' accounts suggest that authoritarian managers are blameworthy because they infringe on collective objectives. Ontological narratives conveying working-class dignity, therefore, involve more than just the "internal goods"

such as deriving pride in one's labor or extra-productive relations (MacIntyre 1981; Lamont 2000; Halle 1984); they also entail the characterizations of "positional goods" such as economic power, income, or employment. This becomes even more apparent in accounts involving the mismanagement of money capital.

*Mismanagement of Money Capital*

While the workers admit that objective forces including competition, demand, prices, and costs play important roles in inducing industry-wide crisis, they also recognize that "there's still companies out there making steel" and characterize the sustained viability of those plants as the result of proper management. Nick Pearce supports the plausibility of this interpretation by relating a conversation he had with "one of the bosses that's quite high up:"

He said, "If they'd had somebody that knew something about steel, making steel, in charge of the plant, it would still have been operating and making it profitable, like some of the other companies are." Like California Steel came in and was thinking about buying half the plant, and they're really profitable.

Kevin Tucker draws on his family's experience in both the steel and the automotive industries to illustrate his view that economic conditions do not wholly determine a firm's success:

We've lived through foreign imports, it be from Australia and Canada.  
We've lived through Japanese cars coming in and taking the market.  
When it gets down to, if you manage your business right, you stay in business. If you don't manage your business right, you go broke. There's

no sense in trying to blame it on foreign economics or steel dumping from Timbuktu. Them boys at the top mismanaged the plant dramatically, and that's why it's in the position it's in.

Many interviewees associated the plant's inability to withstand declining rates of profit to mismanagement of the firm's money capital. Mel Luhrmann stated that, "if it'd been run right, [if] the money that they had would've been spent appropriately, we would still be there." Again, such attributions of capital mismanagement frame the plant closure in ways that place accountability on the activities over which management retained exclusive control: "I don't know that you can blame it on the workers. The workers were there and did their job, made the money, [the] money disappeared."

Workers' causal accounts of mismanaged money capital fall into two themes: norms of compensation and norms of investment. These themes appeared in roughly half of the interviews (fifty percent and forty-five percent respectively) and generally indict managers of misappropriating the company's surplus funds.

*Compensation.* The workers' comments reflect a cyclical view of economic growth: the steel industry experiences ups and downs, and firms with managers who are only interested in short-run profits will not survive while those with managers interested in longevity can endure the hard times. Oliver Anderson, who started working at the plant in 1979, explained how imprudent managers can experience success when market conditions are favorable, but only prudent managers can keep a plant operating throughout an economic downturn:

When Rick Johnson first opened it up [in 1987], the industry was high. I mean, you could...you could be the dumbest person in the world and

make money in the steel industry. And he made a lot of money right off then, and he spent it all. He didn't put any aside for the down cycle. So when the market went on a down turn, he didn't have anything in his pocket. He had to start borrowing money, because there was expenses there, and he just couldn't pull it through [by] waiting for the market to go back up.

The workers frame upper management as having used their strategic positions to gain short-term economic benefits at the expense of long-term organizational success. According to Howard Seawright, the reason for which the plant could not endure the steel crisis was that the managers were motivated by personal success rather than successfully contributing to the steel industry: "If they would have had business managers...managers that cared about the steel industry instead of putting that dollar into their pocket... I mean, they would still have been hurt, they would have been financially in trouble, but it still would have been possible [to survive]."

When the plant re-opened in 1987 Geneva had a profit-sharing program in which workers received a portion of the company's surplus. However, the workers explained that the new owners quickly expanded management personnel and subsequently wanted to diminish workers' compensation package by discontinuing profit-sharing and cutting hourly employees' wages and benefits. As James Holmes' comments illustrate, the revocation of profit-sharing appears to have solidified hierarchical boundaries of economic power within the firm and instilled feelings of alienation and exploitation among workers:

[While profit-sharing was in place] we were working along about 16 hours, you know, and actually working 23 hours one night, and then the next night work 16 hours, and really it was all getting around to 20 hours in the stressful jobs and stuff, but it felt pretty good because they paid us pretty good. And then, something happened, they got some new managers come in [... and they] didn't want to give us the extra money. [...] And from that time on, we didn't get profit share like we used to. And everybody--from then on the morale so to speak went down the tube. [...The CEO] made four-hundred and seven thousand [dollars] from incentive and the other managers--he had nine managers and all of them guys made two-thousand, three-thousand [dollars]; and they got their profit share besides that. And these guys are so overpaid and under worked, but they cut our wages. They give it all to them and cut our wages. So people really get hard feelings about that. Anybody would, you know? [...]. So these guys felt like they were "family," so to speak, like we did for the first couple years. But not anymore, these guys are taking the cream off the top and giving us, you know, what they want to give us. And so that was a hard thing too, people didn't feel like working like we worked the first few years because they just felt like they were "cutting your throat," so to speak.

Since the profit-sharing incentive rendered the workers' remuneration more directly related to the company's success, the workers consented to profit-maximizing behaviors and plant relations were analogous to that of a "family." Furthermore, the

workers frame the favorable personal and organizational outcomes as the result of their purposive actions. The revocation of profit sharing, on the other hand, degraded the status of labor to a commodity, generated “hard feelings” and a decrease in “morale” in which workers viewed their efforts as subordinating their time and energy to the will of a rapacious management, and resulted in a disinclination to maintain the same levels of toil they exhibited during “the first few years.”

In contrast to research reporting that blue-collar workers view their work in instrumental terms and find dignity in activities outside of the realm of production (e.g., Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Nichols and Benyon 1977; Halle 1984; Lamont 2000), the Geneva workers’ comments on both the labor process and compensation suggest that they seek non-alienating work in which they use their time, knowledge and skills to contribute to success of the organization. While a number of factors may account for the discrepancies, I posit interpreting “positional goods” within the context of spatially- and temporally-contingent identities may explain why economic power, income, and employment pervade the Geneva steelworkers’ accounts of the self. In Swidler’s (2001) investigation of the cultural dynamics of love, she argues that individuals utilize different cultural tools to legitimize their “strategies of action” such that when one tool (e.g., marital commitment as a rational choice) fails to create a coherent legitimization, actors use another cultural tool (e.g., marital commitment arising from powerful emotional forces). In contrast to the subjects in the aforementioned class studies, reconciling the daily submission to exploitative work relations with the themes and plots that convey a dignified life is presumably less imperative than accounting for unemployment in ways that salvage the self. Thus, employed workers (understandably) favor detached or

instrumental attitudes toward the delivery of their labor power and a greater emphasis the realms of family, friendship, and consumption as the source of dignity. These interviews with displaced steelworkers, on the other hand, suggest that when giving an account of unfavorable personal or organizational outcomes, the distinction between instrumental and ideal concerns becomes blurred; again, a more appropriate classificatory dichotomy is that of “purity” and “pollution.”

Consider the comments of Andrew Gordon and his wife Suzanne--both former Geneva Steel employees--who claim that the plant’s problems largely arose from management’s mistreatment of the workers. Andrew stated that the workers “didn’t agree with what management did, but we had to support our families and our families mean a lot to us.” However, even though he legitimizes workers’ consent to alienating work relations by referencing the instrumental exigency of supporting their families, Andrew and Suzanne’s cross-temporal explanations and evaluations of these relations demonstrate that mismanagement challenged the conditions that both their livelihoods and their self-concepts:

I: What is it about management that you think that made the problem?

A G: Just morale. They promise one thing and then turn around and do something else.

S G: Management...they promised us a lot of things and then they never do it.

A G: They tell you when you’re going to get a bonus and that you’re going to get this and you’re going to get that. Well, as soon as they started modernizing, the first couple years, they was true to their word. And ever

since that we just been SOL! They just say, “Well, you either do it our way or you’re out of a job.” And we just continually give, give, give and then [get] nothing in return. For twelve years we just kept giving them parts of our wages and our benefits and vacations that we had to give up and you know. And before we was getting all of the vacations, we was getting bonuses and they made money, and there was hundreds and thousands of tons of steel run out the end of the them mills every day. And they say, “Well, our management is the one that made that go out.” The management didn’t do that. The working man’s the one that made their money. They had nothing to do with management. [...The manager would say] “I’m sitting in the top job. I’m making 200 thousand dollars or 150,000.” And all he’s doing is spouting out orders, but he’s not helping the product go out the door. It’s the working man that made the product go out the doors. And that’s why it lasted for 50 something years. It wasn’t because of management, it was because the men enjoyed working out there. And they made [a] good life-style and a good living for everybody that worked there.

Even though the workers must consent to undesirable arrangements established by management or be “out of a job”--which they valued for the opportunity to provide “a good life-style and [earn] a good living”--material interests regarding positional goods constitute an important component of workers’ identities and images of society. Again, the representation of the material interests in these accounts does not reflect rational objectives or personal preferences; instead, workers’ representations of material interests

take a symbolic form as they frame exploitation in terms of the hardships and dangers associated with managers who adhere to polluting values such as dishonesty and self-seeking. These interpretations arise as workers construct causal emplotments that frame their toil-leisure-income package in relation to that of management, in relation to the arrangements of previous periods, and in relation to the “imagined” arrangements promised by management:

A G: Before we all made good wages. [...] And the steel went out the door. Everybody was happy. Management was happy. But when Johnson came in [and changed the contract], he promised all this stuff and then just reneged on everything that he promised. You know, and that just makes havoc for all the employees. You know, even the morale just went right down the sewer.

By referencing the equitable arrangements of the past and their positive social consequences, Andrew and Suzanne Gordon and other Geneva workers suggest that increasing workers’ economic welfare is practically achievable and congruent with the existing institutional order. Moreover, instead of pitting an oppositional meaning system against a dominant ideology, the workers appropriate elements of the “pure” narrative claiming that economic rewards result from hard work, responsibility, and contribution to others’ well-being (see Gilder 1981) to delegitimize the notion that the workers and managers received their deserts:

S G: So we would compromise, you know, a little bit. The thing was, they never compromised with us. They always took it away and never returned it.

A G: And as soon as we would settle our contract they would give all upper management a big raise.

S G: Yeah.

A G: And not give the working man nothing.

I: So you think they took your money away just so that they could make higher wages or because the plant was really suffering?

A G: Well, I think the plant was suffering, but why give it to your upper management instead of giving it to the men that needed it majorly? They give it to upper management instead of the man that was making the wages. We were the ones that made them millions of dollars. [...] It wasn't management that made the steel go out the doors, it was the working man, and the working ladies that worked out there. Management didn't have nothing to do with it other than they were management. You know, they were sittin' there and their wages didn't get cut none, but ours did. They didn't lose any of their benefits, but we've kept losing all of ours. [...] They just kept taking, taking, taking, not giving us nothing back.

Although opinions are hardly uniform across and even within social groups, extant literature on distributive attitudes demonstrates that most Americans agree that income inequality is legitimate, often supporting their claims with notions that present or past hard work, ambition, or some other personal characteristic merits greater compensation (see Kluegel and Smith 1986; Hochschild 1981; Lamont 2000). These studies provide valuable insight into the relationship between social position and

individuated attitudes regarding distributions among abstract groups such as “the rich” or “the poor.” However, they either overlook or give inadequate attention to the key relations that are relevant in individuals’ experiences with distributive outcomes and are difficult to translate into thin, overarching attitudes of distributive justice. Although distributions based on norms of equality or need violate the ideational assumptions of the free market economy (cf. Walzer 1984; Katz 1995; Somers and Block 2005) as well as the prevalent individualist ideology among American workers (see Wuthnow 1996; Bellah et al. 1985; Lamont 2000; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Scholzman and Verba 1979), the interviews with the Geneva steelworkers suggest that discontent with distributive arrangements at the organizational level entail delegitimizations in accordance with norms of desert. Therefore, the fact that management was “not helping the product go out the door” but still earned “millions of dollars” from the fruits of the steelworkers’ labors suggests that the inequitable decline of the workers’ compensation package in relation to that of management render the managers undeserving of their material rewards.

As I discussed in regards to control over the labor process, managers’ power over *things* often becomes power over *people*, for which owners and their delegates are expected to act with moral restraint (cf. Walzer 1984). Notions resembling that of a “social contract” pervade the interviews, suggesting that normative values constitute a fundamental component of workers’ perspectives on the labor-management relationship. Oftentimes the workers articulate these expectations by referring to actual contracts (e.g., the agreement with the union to pay health insurance premiums for qualifying employees up to six months after a lay off), but more often these expectations take the form of implicit economic norms. For example, many interviewees described how the workers

conceded to the relinquishment of profit-sharing under the auspices that management would use the profit to ensure the vitality of the plant and enhance job security through investments in physical capital. Since the workers sacrificed immediate claims on the company's surplus in exchange for long-term security, they expected management fulfill their obligation to keep the plant viable. Many cite their failure to do so as evidence of symbolic pollution:

Bryan McClean: I think that they cheated us in certain ways, and in certain times and places. And they used some deceptive practices with us when it came to contracts and the way they set things up. And I say deceptions, not illegal, but they're deceptive; and they took advantage of us in certain ways. But...

I: What kind of ways?

B M: Well, for example, they...when they were negotiating the contract, they got us to say that part of the pay that they were giving us--part of the incentive pay that they were giving us--could be reduced if they would do certain things to make capital improvements. And, of course, that went a lot farther than we expected. [...] That value went to their pockets, not ours.

Whether or not the misrepresentation of their intentions or their failure to uphold their commitments is a violation of a physical contract, Bryan McClean characterizes management's "deceptions" as having violated widely-accepted norms of trust and respect. Richard Oldham's makes a similar point, but he more explicitly recognizes the

role of property rights when he claims that “because of their control and their ability to manipulate, in my opinion, [managers] were able to exploit the workforce:”

R O: I think that there was too many circumstances where moves made by management may be legal, but I kinda question if they’re morally ethical.

I: Anything specific that you’d care to mention?

R O: Well, if you had a company and it was going broke, would you think that you would invest more of your assets and your money in it? Or would you stuff your pockets so that when it did go down you would have something to run out on?

I: I see.

R O: That’s exactly what happened.

Again, although their actions “may be legal,” Richard casts skepticism on the morality of their choice to disinvest. He supports this contention by suggesting that management’s claim that they would transform the workers’ decreased compensation into increased productive potential was disingenuous:

Records were set in steel production [while profit sharing was in place].

While it was there, things were going great. But when management decided that that was not a good way to reward the employees and used the excuse of modernization as a way of getting out of doing that. It supposedly was supposed to put the money back into the company to make it more of a competitive steel mill, therefore ensuring our jobs in the future. They did not do that, as I see it. [...] They always used the reason that benefits need to be cut because they weren’t making enough money,

they weren't doing this, they weren't doing that, things weren't working out the way they'd planned it. But always upper management seemed to come out with the money that they sought and there's a real attitude problem among all steel workers concerning that.

Richard's comments suggest two important dimensions of agency in the creation of causal accounts. First, although managers' structural position within the organization enables them to "manipulate" and "exploit," the workers' often attribute managers' blameworthiness to their purposive actions (cf. Jackall 1988). Second, even though causal accounts assert the *reality* of a sequence of events in creating a state of affairs, causal accounts are the product of human *agency* as individuals create plausible explanations within a normative frame of reference. Although the workers are not privy to much of the information regarding profits or capital within the firm, "social facts" including the disconnection between managers' claim that "they weren't making enough money" and the workers' observations that "upper management seemed to come out with the money that they sought" provide the narrative resources that support their claim that the plant was mismanaged.

A \$110 million government-secured loan Geneva Steel received around the time they filed for bankruptcy provides an often-cited example of money capital that should have gone towards revitalizing the plant but ultimately found "its way into upper managements' pockets." As John Nolan explains:

When they went into Chapter 11 the first time, they turned around and gave the upper management people a bonus because they went into bankruptcy. [...] When they come out of bankruptcy they turned around

and paid themselves another bonus for bringing it out. It was fifty percent of their annual gross yearly income. Both times. [...] So in a little over a year, upper management got just a little over two years worth of salaries out of that plant.

Most workers echoed Mel Luhrmann's claim that management "squandered away" the loan and "didn't spend it where they was supposed to." Instead, "all the big wigs down there got their bonuses. I mean, that was more important to them then keeping the plant running apparently." These workers frame the bonus pay outs as the illegitimate use of the managerial office to gain advantages at the expense of the longevity of the plant and the welfare of the employees. Victor Bergman explained that while the company was in bankruptcy, the company revoked the paid time-off that workers had already accrued and discontinued paying their health insurance premiums; that management could pay themselves a bonus while "taking our vacation and our health care away" demonstrated their adherence to polluting values: "I mean, what a slap in the face. I believe if any of the bosses were sincere and wanted to make this thing go, every one of them would've turned down that bonus and put it into operating capital to keep the place going."

*Investment.* Nearly a century ago, R. H. Tawney argued that [a]t the present day, the workman takes risks...but he has not got the prospect of exceptional gains, the opportunities for small speculation, the power to direct his own life, which makes the bearing of risks worthwhile...[T]hey do not decide what risks they shall bear. It is decided for them by their masters. They gain nothing if the enterprise succeeds:

they have neither the responsibility of effort nor the pride of achievement; they merely have the sufferings of failure. No wonder that, as long as this is so, they desire above all things security (cited in Walzer 1984: 118-119).

Security is as much a concern for the working men and women of today as it was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Lamont 2000; Smith 2001). The preceding discussion demonstrates that the Geneva workers have an interest in investments that strengthen the plant's viability and their job security; however, since these decisions are relegated to managers, the consequences of investments that fail to enhance productivity are placed upon the workers involuntarily. Since "the hourly people never had a voice in it" when management "overspent, over-budgeted and they also didn't plan right" and otherwise "didn't put their money where they should've been," the workers tend to place the control and accountability of failed investments on management.

Howard Seawright's comments regarding misinvestment on a project he "was directly involved in" demonstrate workers' powerlessness over the imposition of risks that affect their job security:

But what do you do? Your boss is standing next to you telling you to do this. What can I do? "This is just how its going to happen. I am the boss. I am the one in charge. This is what you're going to do." What do you do? You do it. You stand back and watch. And you watch millions of dollars washed away.

The workers' inability to assert their own will reflects Collins' (1975) contention that class at the micro level is enacted through power relations within an organization as

“order takers” experience domination from “order givers”. As John Nolan’s criticisms of managerial ambition demonstrate, the blameworthiness of management’s domination is founded on their polluting behaviors and motivations as “order givers:”

They tried to be on the cutting edge of technology all the time. They tried stuff even though the advisors that they’d hired to come in had told them ‘No, it won’t work.’ All of the previous research on what they was wanting to try was against it. It didn’t matter how much negative it was against whatever they wanted to do; well, they’d go ahead and try it anyway.

Whereas American workers with “settled lives” equate ambition among the wealthy with either intelligence and legitimacy or with dishonesty and illegitimacy (Lamont 2000; Kleugel and Smith 1986), these interviews with displaced steelworkers suggest that workers coping with involuntary unemployment associate ambition among “order givers” with obstinacy and imprudence, and frame the consequences of their ambition in terms of how they affect the well-being of the “order takers.” For example, when describing how management “spent money when they shouldn’t have done, and on things they shouldn’t have done,” Michael Gondry complains that “they spent millions and millions of dollars” on “equipment out there that’s never ever used” despite having been

told by the people that actually knew how to make steel, which is the workers, that it wouldn’t work. And it didn’t. It didn’t work. I don’t know, but that’s bad that so many people’s lives got affected by just a small portion of the people’s decisions that were greedy.

A few interviewees even suspected that some of the capital procurement decisions were the result of “inside, unethical things that were going on.” For example, after criticizing management’s lack of reason in their investments, Richard Oldham questions management’s motivations for leasing idle equipment from a fellow member of the upper management team:

It seems like there were gross errors made, you know. Some equipment purchased was obsolete before it was ever installed type thing. Or should have been researched better before it was ever bought to find out if it really [...] would make any real change to the process that we were involved with out there. Sometimes thousands, if not millions of dollars were spent to buy equipment that really didn’t do much for the company. Cupola was one of them; from what I understood, they didn’t really buy the Cupola, but they were paying rent on it. [It was costing] megabucks and it just sat there and was not being used. Why didn’t they get rid of it at the time [...] rather than sit there and stuff someone else’s pocket who happened to be part of upper management because he was the one that bought the Cupola, so to speak, and was renting it to Geneva? I think there’s a lot of underhanded dealings and back door arrangements that may never be brought to light. I think it’s pathetic, I really do.

Not only do the workers frame their own circumstances as the consequence of involuntary risks imposed on them by the actions of management, they also represent managers as using their strategic positions to evade (or at least postpone) bearing the consequences of their own risks. At the time of our interviews, Geneva Steel was still not

officially closed and interviewees reported that dozens of managers were still on the company's payroll. Kevin Tucker explains that he was one of the few hourly workers that remained at the plant for about six months after the other workers were laid off and questions how managements' continued employment and income is justified given the obvious decline in managerial labor power:

I was out there, and there were eight of us hourly still out there, and sixty two total. The others were all upper management. They have yet to take a cut in pay. They are still drawing, lost of them, hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, and there's nobody to manage. How do you justify that?

[...] That's the type of managers they are.

Workers such as Jeffrey Moore referred to the managers still employed after the hourly workers were laid off to demonstrate that managers use their power to "make the decision of who stays and who goes" to ensure that they are still "drawing a paycheck" although the plant "ain't even being run." For Richard Oldham the fact that so many managers are on the payroll just selling the company's assets is an example of management's tendency to do things that "don't seem quite ethically right" and views it as "a matter of legal maneuvering to make sure that those who worked out there ended up with as little as possible, and that upper management came out with as much as possible." Likewise, for Frank Jennings the fact that the current CEO is paid "30,000 dollars a month to sit out there on his duff" is evidence that the executive and management only wanted to "fatten their wallets" and "milk it dry."

In sum, the Geneva workers clearly do not blame themselves for the closure of the steel plant; instead, they largely attribute their job loss to the plant management by

associating their characteristics or actions with moral codes indicating symbolic pollution. Class plays a prominent role in the workers' narrative identity since they recognize control over the labor process and money capital is a source of social distinction and constitutes a fundamental source of distributive inequality. By defining their job loss as a collective phenomenon and connecting the issues related to their plight to widely-shared values and norms, the steelworkers' accounts of mismanagement represent their particularist interests and personal preferences as congruent with public interests and social well-being. The steelworkers' accounts of government irresponsibility, to which I now turn, further expand the circle of the "we" to suggest that the steelworkers not only share the same goals and expectations of the broader society, they also share the same fate.

#### *Causal Accounts: Government Responsibility*

Just as the workers link organizational outcomes to the actions of powerful agents within the firm, they also link the outcomes of the industrial sector to the actions of powerful agents within the civil sphere. Fifty-seven percent of the interviewees attributed the plant's closure to the actions of government representatives. Among this group, forty-five percent indict government as failing to fulfill their obligations to protect American jobs, and thirty-five percent claim that they failed to fulfill their obligations of maintaining national security or fiscal autonomy.

#### *Government Responsibility to American Workers*

Since other countries can "dump" their steel "for prices we can't even make it for," Joseph Phelps claims that "the market was the main contributor" to the plant's "demise." However, his comments suggest that such outcomes are the result of

government intervention rather than the product of a self-regulating market: “[O]ther governments [...] subsidize their steel mills [...] and they’ll dump their prices just to keep everybody working and you just can’t compete with that.” By failing to take aggressive action to help domestic steel mills “compete with the foreigners on level ground,” Joseph claims that “the [U.S.] Government allowed the foreigners to cut the domestic producer’s throat.”

Generally, when the workers suggest that the government should protect industry from the maladies of global trade, they do so in ways that suggest that intervention would merely create the conditions that more adequately resemble that of a perfectly competitive market. In fact, Elliot Smith asserts that the Geneva plant was far more competitive than those that are supplying most of the world’s steel and claims that the plant ultimately shutdown for political--not economic--reasons:

A lot of people blame Geneva being an old, outdated plant. It’s actually quite modern by world standards. The year that we shut down, 70 percent of all steel in the world was sold under cost, and most of that steel was produced in places like China, and the steel comes from old dilapidated plants that are really bad for the atmosphere. And so [it’s] just economics, well not economics, but politics.

Many interviewees represent political and economic elites as apathetic to the well-being of the workers in their own country. Just as in their evaluations of managers, workers frame government representatives’ apathy in terms of adherence to polluting values. For example, Charlie Jones characterizes the federal government as negligent and duplicitous toward the steel workers: “They did not support us. They gave the appearance

of doing something for the steel workers, but they were very slow. They dragged their feet on purpose because they didn't want to upset the world applecart: it was world politics." Likewise, Michael Gondry's criticism of the Clinton Administration suggests that political leaders in an increasingly globalized economy deflect responsibility for their own constituents and instead seek to appease foreign governments:

They've been too worried about trying to make friends with all of these other people and letting all of this stuff happen that has a real direct effect on us. [...] And I blame Clinton for a lot of the steel problem, because he just would not have an ear for nothing about it.

Wuthnow argues (1996:12, 9) that the discourse regarding "the moral limits of economic life" have steadily declined as the themes of "economistic thinking, consumerism, and narrow concerns about profitability, efficiency, 'getting ahead,' and 'making it'" have suffused "our collective thought processes." While Wuthnow demonstrates that moral discourse allows individuals to understand the ramifications of economic choices on their personal goals and identities, and therefore have few (if any) implications for policy formation, the interviews with Geneva workers demonstrate that moral discourse includes questions of how policy choices affect public interests and collective well-being. When asked to share his understandings of what caused the shutdown, David Lesuer replied:

Just the market operating the way the market operates. And, the Republicans are not going to stand in the way of anything that slows business down in the country, so you get the promise from President Bush: "Here, I'm going to put tariffs on all of these [imports]," and then as soon

as you let your guard down, he lifts the tariffs on two hundred of those products. And our competition was all of our previous foes, I guess, that are subsidized by the government: Korea, China, the Ukraine...places like that. [...] And they're also subsidized by the government, but yet our government will not equalize the playing field. So there's a lot of people, I think, that are aggravated over that, but not enough to do anything about it. Because we want cheap goods. I mean, that's what rules. [...] But it's basically, in my opinion, it's just the market at work. The international community, where there's no protection for American jobs anymore, because we all "one big happy family" now. So, rather than bring them up to our level, they're just gonna, I think they just let the rug get pulled out from under whoever, so whoever's making the money can make the money.

Regardless of how the choices of consumers, politicians and "whoever's making the money" affect their personal identities, David's comments beg the question: Does current trade policy reflect how we want the national and global economies to operate? Thus, David Lesuer's perspective of "the market at work" entails moral choices among government representatives that affect the well-being of workers in both developed and developing countries.

Of course, whether the consequences of these choices will yield desirable or undesirable results is a matter of the cultural encodings of human agents. The steelworkers appear well-aware that deindustrialization is compatible with a number of "desirable" ends (e.g., importing "cheap goods," appeasing potential "enemies overseas,")

reducing pollution-producing industries, promoting “bigger profits” among American corporations, etc.). The steelworkers delegitimize these progressive narratives by constructing tragic narratives in which they associate the injuries of change with a future that is worse-off for steelworkers and non-steelworkers alike. This is perhaps most salient in workers’ representations of the consequences of deindustrialization on national security and fiscal autonomy, to which David Lesuer alluded when he mentioned that the U.S. imports steel from “previous foes.”

*Government Responsibility to Maintain National Security and Fiscal Autonomy*

Just as workplace norms and market-related discursive tools shape the workers’ cultural representations of mismanagement, the steelworkers articulate their political interests using the intersubjective social meanings and expectations applicable to the civil sphere. In contrast to research suggesting that rational political interests should reflect the immediate benefits related to one’s market position (e.g. Kluegel and Smith 1986; Schlozman and Verba 1979), the Geneva steelworkers avoid framing their interests according to particularist needs and instead articulate their interests in universalist terms. When discussing whether the government did all that it could do to help the plant or the individual employees, the interviewees generally exculpate political figures and highlight managerial irresponsibility and/or their own responsibilities to continue providing for their families. On the other hand, when discussing the government’s role in causing the shutdown, the interviewees hold the government representatives accountable and highlight their responsibilities to the citizens they represent.

As scholars including (Ellewood 1988) and Starr (1992) argue, policy often has the effect of stigmatizing certain groups as fundamentally distinct from the rest of

society. A policy that helps the unemployed, for example, may label the unemployed as unable to survive according to mainstream expectations. As I discussed above, the interviewees assert that trade policy, not the qualities of the steelworkers or even the steel industry, deviates from established expectations. By locating the reasons for their downward mobility in public officials' failure to fulfill the expectations of their office, the workers convey notions of the "good" that apply to the national community rather than a single occupational group. Consider Al Blakely's comments on how steel tariffs buttress national defense and "the backbone of America:"

We asked President Bush--the nation as a steel industry--to put tariffs on this unfair dumping. I mean, they're dumping steel at prices less than we can even manufacture it for. And so he said "Yeah, we'll do this...we'll put this much on this product..." I mean he picked and chose, "...except Canada and Mexico, we'll still let them do what they want..." And so all these people that buy the steel say, "Oh, that's a bunch of bologna; you're going to run us out of business." So they took it back off, most of it. [...]

So, we're supposed to just let everything go to heck I guess and then buy steel from our enemies. "We need to build some tanks so we can shoot you guys. Will you send us some steel?" I mean I'm just kidding around, [but] the steel industry has always been the backbone of America and they're just breaking the back.

Al frames government intervention on behalf of the steel industry not in terms of preserving his material welfare but in terms of preserving the strength of the nation. In this way Al, like many other steelworkers we interviewed, frames the causes of the

steelworkers' plight as a social problem worthy of other social groups' efforts to address it.

Many workers' comments appear to draw upon the norms found in the post-war public narrative legitimizing the state's promotion of large-scale industry in order to ensure long-term prosperity and national security (see Baxandall 2002). For example, Elliot Smith, who was 51 years-old when we interviewed him in 2002, appropriates elements of this "collective memory" (see Halbwachs 1992) to reaffirm an image of a strong manufacturing sector as integral to national progress:

When I was younger and growing up, [...] they was always kind of saying [that] the strength of the nation was directly related to the strength of the industry, you know, and now they've kind of exported that through the years overseas. So, yeah, I'm pretty disgusted with it. [...] I do think that it's a shame that the government is just letting the industry just totally die. [...] Just in the last three years there's been, it's probably up toward 40 companies now that's went into bankruptcy. And probably 20 of those is liquidated. [...] So it's pretty sad to let the government see this go. And I can't understand them, can't understand it. You can't have a strong country and run it all on service jobs.

The state's previous commitments to industry provide the cultural reference point against which Elliot evaluates the worthiness of government's negligence to the national community. Moreover, since a "strong country" requires a strong industrial sector, the victims of deindustrialization include non-steel workers who should "be outraged:"

And the old Homestead steel mill back East, it made a lot of the steel plates that helped defeat Japan, and they totally tore that down ten years ago. [...] A year and a half ago, the United States did not have the capacity to produce the steel they would need. It was under 90 percent [capacity] two years ago. [...] But it's scary. People don't know about it, but they ought to, and they ought to be outraged at what's happening. And it's not just the steel, it's a lot of things.

In Elliot's version of the tragic narrative, he associates the stability of the national community with the country's capacity to produce steel. Thus, the "scary" and anger-inducing aspects of deindustrialization are not relegated to a specific group that in many ways does not represent the rest of the country; rather, the circle of the "we" (Alexander et al. 2004; Coser 1969) threatened by the country's reduced capacity to produce steel and "a lot of [other] things" includes the citizens of entire nation.

Again, references to the past do not necessarily reflect conservative nostalgia. For example, Greg Davis appropriated elements the discourse representing steel production as constitutive of "the good" in times of past conflict in order to illustrate the immediate and future threats of deindustrialization to national security:

This is going to sound really horrible--I don't like war; I don't want war; I don't think we should go to Iraq for any reason whatsoever—but [if] you lose your ability to make steel, you lose your ability to wage war. In the Second World War, they closed the Atlantic. They couldn't get steel to Great Britain, okay? We just about lost Europe, okay, because Great Britain lost their ability to produce steel. And right now, we're in the same

situation here. I'd like to have seen them—I'd like to see them salvage the steel industry in the United States.

Another expectation regarding the state's involvement in the economy that the steelworkers drew upon to represent their political interests was that of protecting the people against price increases. Generally, the state has protected consumers from price gouging among domestic corporations, but with a growing dependence on foreign steel many steelworkers caution that the U.S. government will be powerless to combat deliberate price increases. In addition to a pessimistic view of the future (“We've lost jobs--[which is a] loss of opportunities for families to grow and have a good livelihood--and we've lost national security”), Neil Scheider's tragic narrative elucidates the implications of deindustrialization in terms of price-setting: “Pretty soon we won't have a steel company in the United States. [...Importing countries] can raise the price as much as they want since we got rid of all the steel companies in the United States. Now they just raise the price [to] whatever they want.” Michael Gondry makes this same point by appropriating the social meanings from public debates on the U.S.'s reliance on foreign oil to elucidate the dangers of relying on foreign steel:

It's part of our national security, part of—it only makes sense that you have your own integrated steel mills and stuff like that in your own country. You can't rely—it, it's like the oil thing. We've relied for so many years on these places like Iraq and Iran and all that for oil. But then you have disturbances or problems or whatever, or whatever causes those situations over there to become whatever, and then once you do that, it's, if they shut the oil off to us, or if they decide to whatever, we're pretty

much—you know, sitting here with egg on our face. Well, it would be the same way as far as steel goes, as far as I'm concerned. And it only makes sense that if you're going to try to keep a country strong and, and the people working, and the economy good and whatever, that you ought to be able to do it within the walls of your own country.

In contrast to research arguing that an individualist ideology depoliticizes unemployment or low socioeconomic status (Schlozman and Verba 1979; Jahoda 1982; Kluegel and Smith 1984), unemployment and downward mobility is a very political issue among the Geneva steelworkers. While they may not support redistribution policies, the Geneva steelworkers' call for government involvement involves the redistribution of benefits and burdens by advocating for policies that they interpret as advantageous for strengthening the nation as a whole rather than a specific population. In this way, they express their dissatisfaction with government in ways that extend the circle of the "we" sharing a common fate to include the entire nation.

## **CHAPTER V: Discussion**

The objective of this thesis is to explore the economic relations and class subjectivities among blue-collar workers coping with job loss according to their own accounts. Since the most salient causal accounts ascribe responsibility to plant managers and government representatives, the data complement a number of writings on class consciousness at the point of production and within the civil sphere. Table 2 presents a succinct summarization of the extant views on class consciousness (items 1 and 3 correspond with arguments found in the post-class literature while items 2 and 4

correspond with arguments in the class literature) as well as the contributions that the present findings make towards re-conceptualizing micro-level economic and political subjectivities in late capitalism (items “a”-“d”).

Table 2: Extant conceptualizations and re-conceptualizations of “Class Consciousness”

Sphere of justice	Extant conceptualizations in class and post-class literature	Re-conceptualizations in light of present analysis
The point of production	(1) Post-materialist issues have replaced materialist issues.	(a) Post-materialist interests constitute an analytical component of materialist goals.
	(2) A "dominant ideology" distorts workers' "true" consciousness.	(b) Workers appropriate ideas and institutions with "dominant ideology" to advance particularist interests.
The civil sphere	(3) Class fragmentation individualizes economic hardship.	(c) Unemployed steelworkers expand the circle of the "we" to frame occupational problems as a public issue.
	(4) A "dominant ideology" depoliticizes economic hardship and promotes self-blame.	(d) Unemployment is highly political issue; workers' political interests resonate with mainstream values and goals.

Post-class theorists claim that post-industrial social trends have displaced work and class as axes of identity- and interest-formation (Bauman 2001; Giddens 1991). Consequently, individuals’ concerns and interests have shifted from issues related to material well-being to post-materialist issues of self-actualization and one’s “quality of life” (item 1 in Table 2). While class researchers tend to view the possibility of class-oriented consciousness as inherent in the class structure and something “deep down” within individual, they also view external “mechanisms” including rising affluence and

occupational differentiation as shifting the “center of life” to the non-productive realms of social life (item 2 in Table 2; see Westergaard 1970).

The analysis I present in this thesis dispenses with the dualities of “materialism” versus “post-materialism” or “true” versus “false” consciousness, drawing instead upon a neo-Durkheimian framework of social classification (Douglas 1978; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Alexander 1988). In many ways, this analysis extends Lamont’s (2000) examination of the “mental maps” and “modes for living” among working-class men with “settled lives” to those with “unsettled lives” (see also Swidler 1986). Using Douglas’ (1978, 1992) discussions of binary cultural codes and repertoires of causality as a frame of reference, I demonstrate that concerns over material well-being and quality of life are not necessarily two separate realms of social consciousness (item “a” in Table 2).

The steelworkers often refer to asymmetrical power relations at the point of production to demonstrate that class barriers infringe on both instrumental goals (e.g., acquiring or protecting income levels and employment) as well as “lifestyle” goals (e.g., self-actualization or attaining a sense of self-worth). Just like their continuously employed counterparts (Lamont 2000), displaced steelworkers adhere to life strategies and express definitions of worth that constitute an alternative status hierarchy with which they view themselves as on par with or superior than the persons of higher socio-economic status (i.e., managers). However, the Geneva workers’ symbolic boundaries between themselves and the plant managers reflect ascriptions of “blameworthiness” (Sher 2006) more so than “unworthiness:” that is, the steelworkers do not simply disapprove of managers’ “styles of life,” they desire that managers not possess the traits or perform the actions that they identify as infringing upon their own life strategies and

material welfare. Faced with these irreconcilable preferences (e.g., managers' preference for short term profit versus workers' preference for long-term plant viability), the workers express practical, "materialist" reasons for which managers' behaviors and intentions are socially undesirable. The workers characterize management's motivations and behaviors as inconducive with outcomes such as efficiency and profitability. Therefore, these causal accounts include claims with which an audience can assess whether managers' motivations and behaviors impede the achievement of the organization's "instrumental" objectives in addition to individuals' "ideal" goals.

In contrast to research reporting that blue-collar workers view their work as a means to an end and find dignity in activities outside of the realm of production (e.g., Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Nichols and Benyon 1977; Halle 1984; Lamont 2000), the Geneva workers' do not consign themselves to an instrumentalist-orientation to work. Their accounts suggest that they seek non-alienating employment in which they use their time, knowledge and skills to contribute to organizational success. In addition to "internal goods" available to everyone (e.g., satisfying interpersonal relationships or pride in one's work), "positional goods" such as situational power and income play an important role in the workers' narratives of dignified lives and desirable futures. Employment relations allowing for greater situational power or income allow the workers to construct stories framing favorable individual and organizational outcomes as the result of their purposive actions, thus affording the self with dignity. Conversely, the decline in compensation or workplace autonomy alters the external conditions that sustain a particular self-concept at that particular place and time. Nevertheless, the workers defend their dignity by

associating their decline in positional goods with management's adherence to polluting values and by attributing the plant closure to forces beyond their control.

Rather than framing class consciousness as interests undistorted by dominant ideas or institutions (e.g., Kluegel and Smith 1986; Wright 1985), I posit that individuals articulate their interests by appropriating publicly-available social meanings related to social order and normative economic behaviors to advance their particularist claims (item "b" in Table 2). The transformation of personal problems into a socially acceptable representation of a social problem (see Griswold 2004) requires a shared medium of communication that associates those who caused it with the "bad" and those who suffer the subsequent hardships with the "good". Whether or not the meanings in "public narratives" are the product of the ruling class or the result of a transition into a late- or post-modern social order, the workers appropriate these values and ideas to legitimize their own goals and delegitimize opposing goals. Admittedly, this emphasis on the conditioning effects of cultural patterns on the articulation of particularist interests fails to capture workers' beliefs in alternative economic systems or their "real" socio-political objectives. But this is in keeping with the present objective of examining the ways in which the narrative accountings of class relations and personal identities are inter-personal "performances" rather reflective of something that is "deep down" and impervious to cultural structures (see Wuthnow 1996).

The workers use various "pro-capital" and "dominant" ideas (e.g. distributions based on norms of desert) in order to express their discontent with the status quo and insinuate that they are the victims of injustice. Using public narratives characterizing positional goods as the legitimate result of one's "intelligence, resolution, hard work, and

...willingness to take risks” (Gilder 1981: 101), the steelworkers delegitimize management’s material and positional advantages by representing managers as incompetent, lacking in commitment, and evading responsibility for the consequences of their risky actions. Moreover, the steelworkers claim that management’s “polluting” behaviors are incompatible with normative (and “dominant”) expectations such as realizing profits.

Thus, despite their adherence to elements of a dominant ideology, the steelworkers are also aware of the structural limitations impeding the attainment of positional goods, which they highlight in order to demonstrate that their loss of autonomy, income, and employment do not reflect personal moral failings. Using publicly available social meanings related to predictable and cooperative economic relations, the workers trace structural inequality to the individuals who personify the social structure and whose actions bring about distributive outcomes. In other words, while they acknowledge that distributive inequality is partly the function of the characteristics of social positions rather than people, the workers also interpret inequitable outcomes as the result of the agency of individuals occupying “strategic” positions.

The identification of “social problems” and “the public good” relies on the symbolic representation of the “we” who benefit or suffer from a given state of affairs (Griswold 2004, Offe 1987, Alexander et al. 2004). Many post-class scholars argue that increased social mobility and class fragmentation, coupled with increased individualization in contemporary society, results in the shrinking of the circle of the “we” (item 3 in Table 2), such that economic hardship is endured as a personal problem

(see Beck 1992; Bauman 2001; Giddens 1989; Offe 1987). For advocates of class, objective similarities within the social structure persist in contemporary society (e.g. see Wright 1996) and workers unable to identify their class location and/or recognize their objective interests suffer from false consciousness. For example, Kluegel and Smith (1986) attribute lower-class individuals' justifications for distributive inequality to an "individualist ideology" that depoliticizes inequality (item 4 in Table 2).

The recurrence of the steelworkers' dissatisfaction with government representatives' efforts to protect domestic jobs challenges research claiming that unemployment or low socioeconomic status is depoliticized in the United States (Schlozman and Verba 1979; Kluegel and Smith 1986). These studies overlook how the articulation of political interests does not emerge from self-interest alone, but is also enabled and constrained by intersubjective norms and common cultural codes. In telling stories to themselves and other people, these workers articulate their interests in terms that resonate with established ideas and institutions, not necessarily rational self-interest (Wuthnow 1996; see also Griswold 2004). In fact, the steelworkers are generally silent on government actions that address their particularist needs or otherwise run the risk of creating a boundary between themselves and mainstream society (item "d" in Table 2). Instead, they express their political goals in terms that broaden the circle of the "we" sharing a common fate by framing their particularist goals, such as protecting industrial jobs, in terms that reflect the public interest, such as sustaining national defense (item "c" in Table 2). In other words, these workers do not advocate government actions that would contradict the prevailing discourses of market fundamentalism and personal responsibility (see Somers and Block 2005) nor do they suggest that the state's

relationship to the economy deviate from the established pattern of restoring stability to the capital accumulation process (see Wright 1978; Bowels and Gintis 1982); instead they appropriate elements of these discourses to advance their claims that tariffs would create conditions more congruent with that of a perfectly competitive system and that deindustrialization threatens a strong and stable nation.

## **CHAPTER VI: Conclusion**

In this thesis I argue that both class and post-class scholarship leave important facets pertaining to the relational dynamics of social stratification unexplored. By ignoring the concrete situations in which social attitudes emerge and by relying on the dualisms of “true” versus “false” consciousness or “materialist” versus “post-materialist” issues, extant literature on the micro-level dimensions of social consciousness and antagonism overlook the complexities of economic and political interests in late capitalism. To address these shortcomings, I adopt a narrative approach to studying class relations and consciousness. By examining displaced steelworkers’ causal accountings for the closure of their plant, I find that workers draw upon themes and plots from public narratives and from their collective memory to associate increased worker autonomy at the site of production and increased protection for industrial jobs with “pure” cultural codes that suggest compatibility with the public good. Conversely, the workers associate behaviors and interests that infringe on these objectives with symbolic “pollution,” suggesting that they threaten a social order characterized by predictability and cooperation.

These results challenge studies that investigate ideational patterns according to variations in “hegemonic” or “counter-hegemonic” attitudes (e.g. Wright 1985; Kleugel and Smith 1986; Schlozman and Verba 1979). In light of the data presented in this thesis, these studies’ failure to connect abstract attitudes to concrete situations may result in misinterpretations regarding the ways in which, for example, an adherence to an individualist ideology can provide the means by which an individual expresses anti-capital sentiments, or how one’s demand on the government to reproduce the class structure is also a call to restructure the capital accumulation process in ways that benefit the non-capitalist classes. This thesis also suggests that the cultural dimension of class does not involve resisting against a dominant ideology with particularist claims, but entails appropriating elements of dominant discourses in order to articulate such claims in universalist terms. In other words, rather than arriving at a “true” consciousness undistorted by extant ideas and institutions, the challenge of achieving class consciousness is to represent one’s class interests as representative of the public interest and to associate (real or imagined) counter-claims as antithetical to widely-shared norms and values. Future research on class consciousness and economic attitudes would benefit by taking into consideration the ways in which the conditions that individuals find problematic structure the form that oppositional meanings take.

In contrast to notions that economic issues in contemporary society are the political concern of atomized individuals (Beck 1992; Offe 1987), the steelworkers expand the circle of the “we” confronting a common fate to include the entire electorate. This is not surprising, considering that the steelworkers’ minority status conflicts with the civil sphere’s logic of majority rule. Thus, while the workers do not advocate for policies

that correspond with their presumed self-interest (e.g., increased social welfare provisions), they are in favor of government actions that resonate with established institutions of self-reliance, national security, and the virtues of a competitive market. While the steelworkers' accounts imply that they are aware that such interventions would not create complete harmony—in other words, that some would benefit (e.g., industrial workers) and some would not (e.g., members of the capitalist class)-- the steelworkers frame their adherence to these political goals in terms that reflect the values and norms of living collectively rather than an awareness of their “true” interests as members of subordinate social class. Accordingly, future research should explore the political goals of the unemployed and the working class according to how they reconcile class-specific interests with mainstream ideas and institutions.

Although this thesis examines the accountings of steelworkers displaced during the recent “steel crisis,” the findings may also prove applicable to understanding other social problems and/or crises affecting other economic sectors. Consider the populist response to the current economic crisis involving mismanagement among sub-prime mortgage lenders, the federal government’s bailouts to these organizations, and the “misuse” of these funds including bonuses payouts for managers. The public’s indignation toward economic actors who use their power to place the burdens of their risky behavior on the greater population and their discontent toward political figures who fail to act in the “public interest” resembles the steelworkers’ contention that they pay the costs of management’s irresponsibility and that the government’s inattention to domestic issues affect the long-term stability of the national economy. In both cases, the underlying concerns appear to be related to individuals’ lack of control over the processes

that affect their day-to-day lives and their frustration with powerful others' freedom from moral restraint despite the social consequences of their actions. Future research should explore the institutional and organizational dimensions of crisis formation. By focusing on the "hidden" and symbolic dimensions of social change, this thesis does not give adequate attention to the processes among organizations that influence public opinion, collective action, new legislation and other political outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis suggests that the populist and labor movement would benefit from recognizing that the current indignation toward economic and political elites may be oriented not only towards inadequacies among extant fiscal policies or the incumbents of political or economic "offices", but also towards a lack of democracy at the point of production and within the civil sphere.

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## **APPENDIX A: Geneva Steel Interview Guide**

### \*Ask about the person's work situation at Geneva Steel:

How long at Geneva?

What kind of work?

Anyone else in the person's family work at Geneva? (parents, siblings, etc.)

Feelings about the job.

Feelings about the lay off

Plant closing and impact on community

### \*Ask about changes in personal and family situations because of the lay-off:

Financial changes/paying bills/making ends meet?

Do you qualify for the extended unemployment recently passed in congress?

Effects on spending habits? On standard of living?

Dreams deferred?

Health issues?

### \*Ask about changes related to finding a new job or meeting family financial needs:

Initial strategies and current strategies?

Priorities?

New job? How qualified?

(Re)training?

(Early) retirement?

Addressing health needs?

Willingness to move?

Attachment to the community?

\*Ask about strategies for meeting needs or coping with changes:

Sources of help (right after the layoff and now)

Friends

Relatives

Community/Organizations

Church/Religion (try to note religious affiliation)

\*Ask about other changes at home related to routines and relationships:

What is a typical day like now?

How have things changed at home for work? (at first and now)

For spouse?

For children?

Use of time?

Decision-making?

Compared to your parents??

\*Ask about how they understand or explain the changes for Geneva Steel workers:

Who is to blame? Reasons for shutdown

Did the government do all it could/should?

Any effect on your political attitudes/outlooks on life?

How has your sense of community changed?

\*Ask about how changes in work situation have affected treatment by others in the community:

Treatment by others since the layoff? (neighbors, prospective employers, etc.)

Change in social status.

Effects on self-esteem.

\*Ask about any final thoughts about experiences related to the layoff:

Anything you might do differently?

Working for Geneva?

Geneva Steel obligation to workers.

What will happen now?