Message from the Chair

Nature, Machine, or Information System?
Missing the Signs of Economic Collapse*
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As early as 2003, the legendary investor Warren Buffett had issued apocalyptic warnings that derivatives were “financial weapons of mass destruction.” In the summer of 2004, former U.S. Fed chairman Paul Volcker claimed that “there’s a 75 percent chance of a financial crisis in the next five years.” In prose drafted in late 2007, when the Dow was at an all-time high, the financier George Soros asserted “we are in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the 1930s” (2008). All these prophecies were widely reported in the press. Although many if not most business reporters on cable television operated as shills for Wall Street, priming the stock market and housing bubbles with their boosterism, the corps of business reporters in The New York Times and other serious newspapers soberly assessed the perilous state of the economy for years before the great crash of 2008.

Why, then, did the recent global stock market crash come as such a surprise? The widely proffered explanation—that some mix of greed, folly, and corruption was secretly operating on Wall Street on an unprecedented scale—is at best only partial. The claim is in a certain sense comforting, since it implicitly exculpates the wider public from failures of common sense prudence. Yet the history of greed, folly, and corruption on Wall Street is a long one. And given that famous investors and the business pages of leading newspapers had long warned of the specific financial risks that have now come to pass, there had to be a form of denial at work, constituted in part by a loss of collective memory. Although the events of 2008 recapitulate in essential respects those of 1929 and 1987, why even to this day have financial actors and wider publics repressed the memories of those earlier great crashes?

Culture and Cognition

One reason has to do with the culture of scandal, as part of a larger form of social disorganization that I have called (at the suggestion of Gerry Sutliffe) the “no-fault society.” The three dimensions of the no-fault society—constrictive individualism, blurring

Department Feature

An Invitation to Culture at Carolina
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As part of our ongoing series aimed at spotlighting loci of cultural sociology in departments across the country, we here at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, or “Carolina” as we Tar Heels call it, would like to give our colleagues an overview of cultural sociology in our department.

Though a number of prominent culturalists have passed through our halls over the preceding decades, the present is a very exciting time for us. The transfer of editorial responsibilities for the Culture newsletter to our university, under the auspices of Andrew "Andy" Perrin, is one such reason for, as well as index of, our burgeoning program in culture. In the past five years, the department has also established a lively Culture and Politics workshop, which meets bi-monthly to discuss research-in-progress presented by faculty and graduate students within the department, as well as the occasional guest.

Furthermore, over the past several years we have recruited a number of faculty and graduate students interested in cultural research and these interests have begun to coalesce into several key areas of culture-related research. These areas are media studies, health, social movements, and migration. In the remainder of this spotlight, we would like to briefly detail some of the research in these areas. We hope you all enjoy the brief overview.

Media Studies

A focus on newspapers is one of the

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of “public” and “private,” and laxity of the rule of law—encourage practices of contentious evasion by parties with shared responsibilities of all sorts, making it difficult to enforce (or even conceive) accountability for failure (Jacobs 1990). I have applied this perspective to explain the relative lack of scandal surrounding the U.S. savings-and-loan crisis that surfaced in the late 80s. For the most part, societal reactions only normalize patterns of underlying corruption. Full-blown scandals erupt only from dramas of coverup and revelation that eventuate in the discovery of “smoking guns.” What we remember are those dramas, rather than the states of ongoing corruption. “The hollowing out of our collective memory of scandal shapes the dramatization of subsequent scandals. . . . Scandals that become sensationalized . . . divert attention from those that do not, and trivialize subsequent scandals that do” (Jacobs 2005:378).

Another reason is that new situations are unrecognizable as repetitions of older ones. The “facts” of the still-unfolding financial crisis echo those of past crises: market bubbles leading to credit squeezes; absurdly leveraged risk; regulators missing in action; foreclosures, bankruptcies, and failures; bank runs; “bear rallies”; suspicions of short-sellers; bailouts; banks “too big to fail”; privatizing profits while socializing risks. But the form of factual accounts always emerges from the ground of figuration. And in perhaps the most fundamental respect—the very conception of what an economy is—the figurative ground shifted architectonically from 1929 to 1987 to 2008.

Thus Wall Street, Main Street, and Capitol Hill missed the clear warnings in large part for reasons of culture and cognition. Cognitive frames are both made of mnemonic stuff and provide the stuff of memory. Just as our economy and ecology create the limit conditions for our culture (as Marshall Sahlin’s 1976 has convincingly argued), our culture provides the very categories for understanding—and remembering—our economic and ecological choices. Culture may be conceived as the medium of lived experience through which we conduct our everyday life (economic and otherwise). As Gerry Suttles demonstrates in his forthcoming monograph Front Page Economics, we can capture the texture of that medium by making explicit the figurational basis of the language of economics, and the dramatistic forms of the economic narratives we construe. In this way, apparently abstruse types of literary analysis have urgent practical economic significance.

Lagged Shifts in the Figurative Ground

In comparing newspaper coverage and more general public understanding of the two greatest crashes of the last century (in 1929 and 1987), Suttles discovers that the modern usage of the word “economy” (as a system of production, consumption, and exchange) did not even exist in 1929. Indeed, according to his revealing linguistic research, “economy” did not assume its modern usage until Keynes introduced it in 1934. (It is relevant to my larger argument that within two years of coining that usage, Keynes also found it necessary to issue a warning—which went largely ignored—against running the economy as a “casino.”) Discursively then, the 1929 crash was a matter not of the “economy,” but only of “the business.” The social landscape of business was conceived according to the metaphor of nature—a sphere of activity naturally occurring and naturally self-correcting. By contrast, by 1987, the social landscape of the “economy” was conceived largely according to the metaphor of a machine, amenable to social engineering. But it was a compound metaphor: perhaps as a vestige of the earlier metaphor grounded in the figuration of nature, the economy was also conceived to be “sick,” in need of therapeutic intervention.

Suttles intended his monograph primarily as a reflection on social cognition and its study. He brings to life the operation of Kenneth Burke’s pentad—act, actor, agency, scene, purpose—in the day-to-day life of business. The manuscript was completed well before the Great Market Crash of 2008. Yet it turns out to have great contemporary practical relevance, as I shall try to demonstrate by extending Suttles’s line of inquiry to the present. I have used a series of Lexis-Nexis searches (conducted in March, 2009) to trace the frequency and usage of various keywords in the New York Times’s financial reportage of recent years. Replicating Suttles’s method of tracing figuration and dramatisms in this coverage helps us understand the cognitive frameworks contributing to today’s crisis. Since the crisis became evident, the figurative grounding of the economy has been shifting yet again. But as Wiliam Ogburn’s old theory of cultural lag would suggest, the process of adapting this conceptualization remains lagged. Like the proverbial military strategists, financial analysts always seem to be preparing to address the last crisis.

In 1987, the economy was viewed as if it were a “marvelous machine,” although a “sick” one. Those images would have made better sense of the 1929 crisis than the ones available at the time. But by 1987, the “machine” was no longer “marvelous”: a significant portion of economic activity was taking the form of “cash for trash,” “daisy-chain land flips,” and “busting out” banks. The combination of unlawful risk-taking, collective embezzlement, and cover-up suggested that a more apt image of the economy was that of the casino (Calavita and Pontrell 1999). One of the best accounts of the transformation of the economy over the past quarter-century was given by the

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deconstructionist art critic Mark Taylor: “By the 1980s, the combination of deregulation and privatization as well as new technologies, financial instruments, and markets had turned Wall Street into a casino (2004:174).”

A Casino Economy?
The term “casino economy” never gained much currency in the US, despite the relevance it has had to this day. Business Week published a cover story about “The Casino Society” in September 1985, leading with an epigram from Keynes: “When the capital development of a country becomes a byproduct of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done.”

Michael Lewis used the phrase in his best-selling exposé Liar’s Poker (1989); the criminologists Kitty Calavita and Henry Pontell used it during the 90s in a series of scholarly articles and books about the savings and loan crisis. But the phrase doesn’t appear in the news pages of The New York Times until 2009, except in articles reporting anger in the UK, France, and Germany over the importation of irresponsible US-style financial speculation. The Los Angeles Times, as reported by Calavita and Pontell, quoted (on October 26, 1989) a French Nobel Prize winner, Maurice Allais, using the term to refer to the pursuit of windfall profits from speculative wagers rather than from the production and sales of goods and services.

Suttles’s comparison of the investigations and prosecutions of wrongdoing in 1929 and 1987 suggests one reason why the casino metaphor never made it into the civic consciousness. The widely-publicized Pecora hearings exposed the collusion of politicians and bankers in the reckless speculation and looting that preceded the Great Depression. The skillfully elicited revelations spun a convincing—and memorable—dramatism of a “web of influence” that exposed the systemic nature of the corruption and led to legislative reform. This dramatism emerged, however, before the economy itself could even be conceived as a system. By contrast, the hearings and trials of the late 80s focused on exposing the wrongdoing of particular individuals, diverting attention from the systemic character of the financial corruption.

Spreading Virally Through the Shadow Banking System
Although the image never gained widespread traction, the casino economy has over the past quarter-century further attenuated sound economic practice, to the point of creating what Mark Taylor calls the “s spectral economy.” Wall Street investment banks exploited downturns in the academic marketplace to recruit PhD mathematicians and physicists (“quants”) to produce computer-designed financial instruments so abstract and abstruse that they could not be fully explained discursively. Until they started to unwind, these derivatives, collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps, and other undecipherable instruments seemed to generate unheard-of profits—even though economic exchanges had lost their materiality and the money exchanged electronically had become an empty signifier. The Obama bank bailout plan has been persistently delayed because the best political, financial, and economic experts cannot even agree on a method to start valuing the “toxic assets” on the books of financial institutions around the world that represent the fallout of this spectral economy. Again, the deconstructionist Taylor provided the clearest economic explanation of what was to come:

With the fever of speculation spreading, new products and the investment strategies with which they were traded created a crisis in which more and more financial assets rested on a dwindling collateral base. As derivatives became more abstract and the mathematical formulas for the trading programs more complex, markets began to lose contact with anything resembling the real economy. To any rational investor, it should have been clear that markets were becoming a precarious Ponzi scheme. Contrary to expectation, products originally developed to manage risk increased market volatility and thus intensified the very uncertainty investors were trying to avoid (2004:8).

The “shadow” or “stealth” banking, financial, or credit systems consist of the complex of unregulated, secretive institutions—including divisions of certain investment banks, hedge funds, private equity funds, insurance companies, special purpose vehicles, offshore banks and the like—that have engaged in intangible financial speculation rather than genuine investment. Yet it is only since 2008 that the New York Times has called the shadow economy by name, even though those institutions have been recklessly leveraging risk for decades. The spectral economy has been hiding in plain sight.

The vicissitudes of the applying a “virus” metaphor to the economy provide yet another example of cultural lag in comprehending the full dimensions of economic transformation. A Lexis-Nexis search of the New York Times confirms Suttles’s claim that in the 80s, economic problems were figuratively represented as a form of “illness.” Thus, addressing the nation about economic worries in October 1982, Ronald Reagan said, “Inflation is like a virus in the economic bloodstream, sometimes dormant and sometimes active, but leaving the patient weaker after each attack.” In those days, the metaphor of the virus was reassuring, since viruses were routine and passing. A few months after Reagan’s speech, for example, the vice-president of American Express attempted to calm jitters about a relatively large stock market decline by declaring that the market had “only a 24-hour virus.”

But since the 80s, certain viruses have

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The Future of Cultural Sociology
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On the morning of Monday, August 10, a panel of distinguished cultural sociologists gathered to discuss “The Future of Cultural Sociology.” The panel was organized by incoming section Chair Karen Cerulo and she asked me to moderate. The room was overflowing, and we had a spirited discussion featuring Karin Knorr Cetina, Joshua Gamson, Jeffrey K. Olick, Karen Cerulo, Viviana Zelizer, and Ann Mischer.

The panelists covered questions about what they did and did not expect to be the future of the sub-discipline and its relationship with other disciplines and other parts of sociology. Toward the end, a discussion emerged of just how much of a “big tent” cultural sociology should be vis-a-vis the sociology of culture. Another way of thinking about this dispute is to what extent the varying elements of cultural sociology—or the sociology of culture—mutually inform one another instead of existing in parallel with one another.

Unsurprisingly, we did not have time to finish the discussion in San Francisco, and so we are moving it online to the discussion area of CultureWeb, the section’s website. You can join the conversation at http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/?q-node/29

To open the discussion I asked for suggestions of questions from section members via email. I received over 50 suggestions, and I distilled these into five big questions to get the ball rolling. The original questions are below, but the discussion was wide-ranging and went well beyond these areas!

1.) One member writes that “studies of communication media have become increasingly peripheral to the sociology of culture.” Several others ask how the panel sees media, particularly mass and interactive media modalities, in the future of cultural sociology. On a closely related note, what about the sociological study of language? How does, or should, it relate to cultural sociology?

2.) Another broad set of questions involves what I will call the kinds of culture, or as one questionwriter put it, “where Culture fits into culture.” One writer says that “sociology rarely gives...attention” to “the arts, literature, the mass media, especially film, fashion.” Others ask about areas for development in the sociology of music. I’d like to discuss both the frontiers for the study of these objects but also what affinities and roadblocks there are to combining the study of these cultural forms with the study of cultures as collective, unifying, or symbolic systems. As one writer asks: “What is the role of art, literature, music, etc. in other fundamental social relations, especially race, class, gender, etc.?”

3.) Two writers had

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America’s Collective Memory as Seen by
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Collective memories of Americans appeared often in Barack Obama’s campaign speeches and continue to be important to the vision he conveys to the country. In his most significant speeches, he likes to refer to the opening words of the Preamble to the Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union....” Especially significant for Obama is the phrase “a more perfect Union”—not to imply perfection but rather a continued effort at perfecting.

This explains Obama’s major disagreement with Reverend Jeremiah Wright. In his 2008 speech on race, Obama described Wright, born in 1941, as “coming of age” in the late fifties and early sixties: “a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted.” Wright was in his late teens and early twenties at that point, a time of life sometimes seen as the “critical period” for forming lasting attitudes toward the social world.

Once set in these adolescent and early adult years, the attitudes shape the reality a person sees and responds to in the future. “Even for those blacks who did make it,” Obama claims, “questions of race, and racism, continue to define their worldview...memories of humiliation and fear and doubt have not gone away; nor has the anger and bitterness of those years.”

Obama was born 20 years later than Wright, and sees himself as coming of age in a different America. He regards this experience as having led to the belief that: “This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected.” Not only is he from a different generation than Wright, but he is also aware of the promise of “young people whose...openness to change have already made history in this election.” In his 2008 victory speech, Obama claimed vindication for his view: “If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time...tonight is your answer.” (Other observers may think of factors that shaped Obama in addition to, if not more important than, his generation, including his childhood spent in Hawaii and Indonesia and the love he experienced from his white mother and grandparents.)

Obama’s frequent reference to “the founders” points to another theme that runs through his speeches. He embraces virtually all of U.S. history, not only the parts most appealing to those with a liberal bent. Others might regard George Washington as a remote and aristocratic figure

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similar questions that I think will be very interesting to explore. “What new areas or topics of cultural sociology aren’t we likely to see in coming years? What are the barriers to doing cultural analysis on certain kinds of topics? Is the sky the limit?” “What questions do they think are likely to emerge from the field but are dead-ends, uninteresting, or otherwise hazardous?”

4.) We need to consider international comparisons.
“What is the future of comparative cultural sociology, and how can we make the field more truly international?” “Is there a future for ‘culture’ in current approaches to globalization? Do we need a new paradigm of globalization to make room for culture?”

5.) Several writers asked about what might be called the utility of culture. Does the sociology of culture have policy relevance? What is it, and how? “What is the ‘demon of our time’ (Weber) and how should cultural sociologists be dealing with it?” “What is the relationship between very real and changing ecological conditions with ‘environmentalism’” (or “the environment”) as social/symbolic phenomena?

and of course a Southern slave-owner, but Obama chose to end his Inaugural Address by calling Washington “the father of our nation” and quoting his words at Valley Forge about “the survival of hope and virtue” in those grueling wintry months. With the same wish to go beyond honored battles from American history, Obama is careful to include among memorable military engagements not only Concord, Gettysburg, and Normandy, but also Khe Sahn from the Vietnam war. In much the same way, he merges the hopes of freed slaves with the hopes of immigrants crossing the ocean and pioneers crossing the continent. No part of America’s past is rejected other than “the original sin of slavery,” and that is seen as already doomed by the implications of words about equality in the Declaration of Independence, though knowledgeable commentators like Henry Louis Gates believe Jefferson did not include blacks when he wrote the word “men.” At a more personal level, Obama repeatedly cites the diversity of his own heritage as a reflection of America’s larger diversity.

There are many references in Obama’s speeches to the “American Dream” held by individuals, but always balanced by a focus on the nation as a whole. *E pluribus unum* is a frequently quoted phrase, along with familiar sounding Biblical references to “I am my brother’s keeper, I am my sister’s keeper.” He points to the importance of the government acting for the greater good and emphasizes that Lincoln managed during the Civil War crisis to pass a Homestead Act, develop a cross-continental railroad, set up land-grant colleges, and create a national academy of sciences. Going forward we can expect Obama to draw further on American collective memory as he attempts multiple policy initiatives in the midst of the current economic crisis.
interesting ways in which a number of individuals within the department form a loose affiliation. Through this particular medium diverse questions are explored. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on newspapers as a means to assess questions regarding how citizens engage in the public sphere. Andy Perrin’s ongoing study of letters-to-the-editor has focused on letters as a way citizens enact a public sphere and addresses questions such as the who and why of letter writing, the arguments writers seek to make in their letters, and what the particular features of the letter-to-the-editor form "do" to the deliberative sphere. Graduate student Katherine McFarland draws on this research in her study of the argument frames used to debate same-sex marriage amendments in newspapers.

On the other hand, newspapers are being used as a means to assess questions regarding social movement coverage. Neal Caren and Kenneth "Andy" Andrews have been at work on projects seeking to determine who/what, i.e., social movements and their organizations, receive media coverage and factors that shape this coverage.

Health

Perhaps best described as a locus-in-formation, a number of faculty members and advanced graduate students are beginning to explore the relationship between culture and health. Margarita Mooney is in the early stages of a project at the intersection of culture, health, aging, and Hispanic migration. Her project is designed to capture the dynamic interplay of the spatial process of population movement, the time-dependent process of aging, and the pervasive cultural influences on health which we would expect to be influenced by migration. Andy Perrin and Neal Caren, in collaboration with researchers at the Department of Health Policy and Management and Department of Pediatrics, as well as with the support of advanced graduate students Michele Easter, Sondra Smolek, and Andrew Payton, are in the early stages of a research project on culture and obesity. The purpose of this research is to develop a sociologically robust method for measuring place-based cultures and apply it to evaluating cultural effects on the health outcome of obesity. In addition to this research, advanced graduate students Michele Easter and Andrew Payton are engaged in dissertation research at the intersection of culture and health. Michele Easter’s work assesses the manner in which ideas about genetics as a causal factor for eating disorders may be seen as newly available "cultural tools" for individuals to use as they manage identities, organize action, and conceptualize their own behavior. Andrew Payton’s work utilizes Alcoholics Anonymous as a site to examine the ways in which new cultural meanings and strategies of action are created and maintained by members and the conditions under which these strategies are successful at creating new health behaviors that have a positive impact on health.

Social Movements

A collection of researchers, some more explicitly focused on culture than others, study the field of social movements. Neal Caren and Andy Andrews are both at work on a number of projects aimed at a broader effort to call attention to local-level factors in political participation. Andy Andrews is currently working on research examining the impact of local movements on desegregation during the 1960s, which is part of his larger project on local-level factors shaping the impact of the civil rights movement. Neal Caren has related projects on local culture and political participation. One project explores city-level variation in likelihood of participating in protest while another, larger project emanating from his dissertation research examines political participation more generally and focuses, in part, on the local racial and ethnic context. Neal is also at work on a project with advanced graduate students Raj Ghoshal and Vanesa Ribas that assesses continuity and change in the demographics of protest and addresses whether different generations have different "cultures" around protest and petition-signing. In a different vein, Charles "Charlie" Kurzman specializes in the study of Islamic movements and is currently working on a project that examines the culture clash between liberal and revolutionary Islamic currents. Drawing on diverse materials, he seeks to assess the challenges underlying revolutionary Islamic attempts to mobilize against western cultural imperialism. Advanced graduate student Raj Ghoshal has conducted research on narratives as a tool for political persuasion in the case of same-sex marriage and has an ongoing project on collective memory and racial violence. Part of this project is his dissertation research, which addresses the resurgence of previously-buried past racial violence in present-day collective memory. Graduate student Katherine McFarland explores the diffusion of Gay and Lesbian Pride Parades in the U.S. as a cultural form. Finally, graduate student Vanesa Ribas has conducted research on the relationship between an emergent community movement in Puerto Rico and a government social program that prioritized community organizing in poor neighborhoods, and argues that the government program fostered the initial mobilization of community leaders, but also shaped the shifting political orientations of movement leaders in complex ways.

Migration

Lastly, several faculty members and advanced graduate students are conducting research at the intersection of culture and migration. Margarita Mooney’s work has explored the factors that contribute to the successful assimilation of Haitian immigrants in different destination cities with a specific emphasis on religious narratives and cooperation between religious and government leaders. Jacqueline "Jackie" Hagan recently completed a book examining the role of religion in the migration journey. In particular, the book highlights Mexican and Central American migrants’ reliance on everyday
become deadly, and the metaphorical uses of that term have assumed apocalyptic connotations. The most frequent use of “virus” in the pages of the New York Times occurred in connection with AIDS. There were also frequent uses connected to SARS and the avian flu. Articles warned not only of the global spread of these viruses themselves, but also of their economic impacts. The late 80s saw the emergence of the “computer virus”; by the late 90s the information technology departments of large corporations around the globe were working in full crisis mode to mitigate the catastrophe anticipated from the “millennium virus.” After 9/11, there were widespread fears of cyberattacks in the form of computer viruses. By 2008, the metaphorical “virus” said to be affecting the economy had been transmuted from something routine, contained, and passing into a lethal contagion. And the word “virus” had developed a new association with the instability of computer systems.

This new figuration is evident in the heart of a summative analysis by Gretchen Morgenson, the New York Times’s chief investigative financial reporter, on September 28, 2008:

Although America’s housing collapse is often cited as having caused the crisis, the system was vulnerable because of intricate financial contracts known as credit derivatives, which insure debt holders against default. They are fashioned privately and beyond the ken of regulators—sometimes even beyond the understanding of executives peddling them.

Originally intended to diminish risk and spread prosperity, these inventions instead magnified the impact of bad mortgages like the ones that felled Bear Stearns and Lehman and now threaten the entire economy.

In the case of A.I.G., the virus exploded from a freewheeling little 377-person unit in London, and flourished in a climate of opulent pay, lax oversight, and blind faith in financial risk models. It nearly decimated one of the world’s most admired companies, a seemingly sturdy insurer with a trillion-dollar balance sheet, 116,000 employees and operations in 130 countries (Italics added).

The title of this article captures Morgenson’s image of the economy: “a web of risk.”

The Economy as Information System

The set of metaphors that newspapers are starting to use in describing the present crisis indicate the most recent shift in the figurative ground of conceiving the economy. The economy is something that crashes when credit freezes, as the virtual or shadow banking system is disabled by a virus spreading in real-time along the pathways of global networks. The economy is metaphorically becoming an information system. Its core is being transformed into the vulnerable, digital infrastructure of the global trading network. Of course the economy remains a compound metaphor, retaining vestiges of previous usages. When we speak of the “business cycle,” we are alluding to its grounding in the figuration of nature; when we speak of “jump-starting” the economy, we are alluding to the figuration of the machine. It was not until the present crisis that we started thinking of the economy primarily as a computer network. (Starting in November 2008, for example, General Electric’s Jeff Immelt repeatedly declared, “If you think this is only a cycle you’re just wrong. This is a permanent reset.”) Although the press covered the contrarian warnings of Buffett, Volcker, and Soros, among others, the warnings could not gain public traction because not just their substance but their mnemonic frames were too dissonant from the emergent practice. We could not see the impending malfunctions in part because we were looking for problems of a natural or mechanical sort. We feel as helpless in the face of this economic crisis as when our computer starts emitting inscrutable error messages, or when we lose internet access, or when we can’t get the system to reboot. In this case as in so many others, the “metaphors we live by” distort the substance of the real challenges we face. While the apocalyptic connotations of “terrorism” raise our defenses against cyberattacks or fatal system errors, the far more serious source of danger is more mundane: the continuing spread of online gambling by speculators posing as institutional investors, playing by their own house rules with other people’s money.

Works cited and further readings are available at http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter.
religious practices in order to endure – and even to sanction – the dangerous and illicit journey across the border. Advanced graduate student Alexis Silver is engaged in dissertation research that examines how adolescent immigrants negotiate their cultural identities as they leave high school and transition into adulthood in small, rural settings. As part of her dissertation research, Vanessa Ribas is conducting a multi-sited ethnography of meatpacking and food service jobs in Eastern North Carolina, focusing on how workplace intergroup relations shape Latino/a migrants’ social and economic incorporation, and on the boundary processes that are reconfiguring race relations in the South.

In conclusion, we believe cultural sociology at Carolina is an emerging field. In recent years the department has made significant advances. Between a number of new faculty and a growing body of graduate students interested in culture, the founding of the Culture and Politics workshop, and a number of promising projects in their early stages, we believe there is much to look forward to with regards to culture at Carolina.