



Excerpt: Alexander & Smith: The Strong Program in Cultural Theory. Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics

The authors distinguish between 'sociology of culture' and 'cultural sociology' by describing the first as the 'weak program' of cultural theories and thus to get to the need of developing a 'strong program' of cultural sociology which has three basic characteristics: a) cultural autonomy: the analytical uncoupling of culture from social structure b) explication of meaning: the hermeneutical reconstruction of social texts and symbolic significances, like in the 'thick description' by Geertz, and c) causal specificity: »to anchor causality in actors and agencies and specifying in detail how culture interferes with and directs what really happens«. Culture should be analyzed as independent, not dependent variable.

They point out the weaknesses in the four contemporary cultural theories:

1. Birmingham School: they've melted cultural texts unto neo-marxist understanding and saw cultural forms tied to social structure as either manifestation of 'hegemony' or 'resistance' - but cultural autonomy is reduced to instrumental reason.
2. French School
 - a) Bourdieu saw culture as ensuring the reproduction of inequality and links culture to power. Stratification is defined by class which is important for the dominant group to have their cultural codes embraced as legitimate - but he saw culture as a strategic resource but not a text that shapes the world.
 - b) for Foucault discourses classify the world / shape knowledge formations and are homologous with institutions, flows of power and technologies - but he binds discourse to social structure and contingency is at the level of history not at the level of dispositif.
3. Governmentality is an anticultural mode of theory where language and discourse are just modes of technical communications.
4. Middle Range Empirical Studies researches on production and reception of culture with explicit causal links between culture and social structure - analytical attention

is centered on the circumstances of production and reception but it is a reductionist view on culture as a product and meaning as a black box.