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The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences

Simon Susen

"*The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences* presents an authoritative treatment of a significant phenomenon. Simon Susen's book is a real *tour de force*: it is remarkably comprehensive, analytically rigorous, and it develops a thorough critique of postmodern thought."

- Patrick Baert, University of Cambridge, UK

"Simon Susen has done a first-class job in bringing some order into postmodern thought, which is notorious for its programmatic disorderliness. He has succeeded in doing so on the basis of research that is of unprecedented width and depth. The resulting compendium of thoughts and thinkers may well serve as a crucial point of reference for people contributing to or affected by the 'postmodern turn' – that is, the rest of us."

- Zygmunt Bauman, University of Leeds, UK

"More commonly associated with the humanities, postmodernism has also had major impacts in the social sciences. Rather than choosing one narrow interpretation, Simon Susen takes a broad and inclusive look at a whole series of important debates and shifts of direction. The result is a timely account not just of past controversies but also of changing presuppositions shaping future scholarship."

- Craig Calhoun, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

"Simon Susen's magisterial critical organization of diverse insights, ambiguities, and problems in the fields of both modern and postmodern thought is a great gift. He provides a solid conceptual platform from which to launch tomorrow's progressive (yes!) social theories, policies, and practices."

- Sandra Harding, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

"Simon Susen has written an original and comprehensive review and critique of the 'postmodern turn' in the social sciences – an investigative project that is particularly important in relation to current intellectual developments in the United States. This work's depth and systematicity promise to play a major role in reversing the unfortunate decline in interest in, and attention to, postmodern thinking since the late 1990s. Early-21st-century social science, especially sociology, needs the insights and correctives of postmodern thinking more than ever. A careful reading of this book will make that clear and hopefully spawn a much-needed revival of interest in this important body of work."

- George Ritzer, University of Maryland, USA

"Postmodernism may no longer be the provocation it was two decades ago, but it remains a profound challenge to the enlightenment dreams of 'reason' and 'progress'. Simon Susen's *The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences* provides a smart and reader-friendly account of this transformational shift in contemporary critical thought."

- Steven Seidman, State University of New York, USA

"*The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences* offers a lucid account of relevant debates and developments in epistemology, social research methodology, sociology, historiography, and politics and provides an insightful discussion of the work of thinkers who have been closely associated with postmodernism."

- Barry Smart, University of Portsmouth, UK

"Simon Susen's detailed, systematic, and precise description of the 'postmodern turn' in all its dimensions – from identity politics to cultural studies – provides a diagnosis of where we stand today in the social sciences. We all need this book in order to engage in a serious assessment of our theoretical (and practical) predicament. There is no excuse – everyone has to read it!"

- Slavoj Žižek, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, UK; New York University, USA

About the book

The main purpose of this book is to examine the impact of the 'postmodern turn' on the contemporary social sciences. Here, the 'postmodern turn' is conceived of as a paradigmatic shift from the Enlightenment belief in the *relative determinacy* of both the natural world and the social world to the – increasingly widespread – post-Enlightenment belief in the *radical indeterminacy* of all material and symbolic forms of existence. As illustrated in this enquiry, the far-reaching importance of this paradigmatic transformation is reflected in five influential presuppositional 'turns', which have arguably been taking place in the social sciences over the past few decades and which are inextricably linked to the rise of postmodern thought: (I) the 'relativist turn' in epistemology; (II) the 'interpretive turn' in social research methodology; (III) the 'cultural turn' in sociology; (IV) the 'contingent turn' in historiography; and (V) the 'autonomous turn' in politics. On the basis of this five-dimensional approach, the study provides a systematic, comprehensive, and critical account of the legacy of the 'postmodern turn', notably in terms of its continuing relevance in the twenty-first century.

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