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**Citation:** Susen, S. (2016). Further Reflections on the “Postmodern Turn” in the Social Sciences: A Reply to William Outhwaite. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 29(4), pp. 429-438. doi: 10.1007/s10767-016-9230-x

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## Further Reflections on the “Postmodern Turn” in the Social Sciences: A Reply to William Outhwaite

Simon Susen<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 28 July 2016  
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I am immensely grateful to William Outhwaite for commenting on my book *The ‘Postmodern Turn’ in the Social Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).<sup>1</sup> I should stress at the outset that I agree with most of the points he makes in his commentary, which I find very insightful, thought-provoking, and constructive. Hence, any reader expecting to be entertained by a cockfight between book author and book reviewer will be disappointed. Let me take this opportunity to reflect on some of the main issues raised in Outhwaite’s inspiring review.

### “Definitive”

I am not sure whether or not I have “produced what is surely the *definitive* account of postmodern social, political, and cultural theory”<sup>2</sup>, but it seems to me that Outhwaite is certainly right to point out that most contemporary social scientists would agree with the contention that the postmodern era—if there has ever been such a thing—is “well and truly over”<sup>3</sup>. One may, or may not, share the view that the sustained concern with, and the heated debates on, the concept of “the postmodern” peaked in the mid-1990s<sup>4</sup>, as I maintain in the book, and that “around 1997 or so the tide started to turn”<sup>5</sup>, as asserted by Keith Tester in an interview he conducted with Zygmunt Bauman.<sup>6</sup> Irrespective of the question of what one makes of this assessment, however, there is no point in denying that today, in the early twenty-first century, the concept of “the postmodern” is out of fashion, regarded by most social scientists as, at best, an outdated object of investigation belonging

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<sup>1</sup>Susen (2015).

<sup>2</sup>Outhwaite (2016/2017) (italics added).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>On this point, see Susen (2015), pp. 32 and 75.

<sup>5</sup>Bauman and Tester (2007), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>See *ibid.*

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✉ Simon Susen  
Simon.Susen@city.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> City University London, Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB, UK

to the history of intellectual thought or, at worst, an esoteric subject of inquiry that never deserved to be taken seriously in the first place. I hope to have demonstrated in my book that the various paradigmatic transitions that have arguably been taking place in the social sciences over the past few decades should be reason enough to grapple with the numerous theoretical and practical implications of the “postmodern turn”. If there is anything “definitive” about this study, it is the conclusion that the “postmodern spirit”, notably in terms of its subtle spheres of influence, will be around for some time to come, even if the historical episode associated with it may long be over.

## “Paradoxical”

In my view, Outhwaite is right to draw attention to the *paradoxical* nature of historical periodizations concerning the purported advent of “the postmodern”. More specifically, Lyotard’s claim<sup>7</sup>—to which Outhwaite refers in his commentary—that “the postmodern” can be interpreted not only as “the *successor* to the modern”<sup>8</sup> but also, in a more fundamental sense, as “a *precursor* to it”<sup>9</sup> is sociologically significant, implying that key features of the “postmodern condition” have *always already* been part of both modern and premodern life forms. In other words, even if post-traditional modes of existence associated with postmodernity are characterized by a *radicalization of indeterminacy* at unparalleled levels, this does not mean that indeterminacy cannot be regarded as a constitutive component of human modes of existence *preceding* those of the present.

As Outhwaite—citing Adorno—suggests, it may appear that the modern “lives on because the moment to realize it was missed”<sup>10</sup>—an insight that Adorno applied to the interpretation of the role of philosophy in the twentieth century. Yet, whereas sceptics may posit that, as Adorno notes, “philosophy [...] once seemed obsolete”<sup>11</sup>, even the most extreme advocates of postmodernity would find it difficult to provide conclusive evidence for the validity of the contention that modernity has completely disappeared from the historical stage. To the extent that modernity remains an “unfinished project”<sup>12</sup>, it continues to represent a societal condition of unfulfilled potential. This potential, however, constitutes a conglomerate of contradictory—that is, of both positive and negative, empowering and disempowering, emancipatory and repressive—forces. The paradox persists.

## “Independent”/“Interdependent”

As Outhwaite rightly remarks, my book aims to examine the impact of the “postmodern turn” on the social sciences by disaggregating it into five paradigmatic transitions, which are characterized by the recognition of, and insistence upon, “the *radical indeterminacy* of all material and symbolic forms of existence”<sup>13</sup>: the “relativist turn” in epistemology, the “interpretive turn” in social

<sup>7</sup> On this point, see Lyotard (1986).

<sup>8</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (*italics added*).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* (*italics added*).

<sup>10</sup> Adorno (1973 [1966]), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Habermas (1996 [1981]) and Habermas (1989 [1985/1987]). On *modernity as an unfinished project*, see also, for example: Frank (1992); Honneth et al. (1992a); Honneth et al. (1992b); McLellan (1992); Outhwaite (2009 [1994]), pp. 118–133; Outhwaite (1996), esp. pp. 305–365; Passerin d’Entrèves and Benhabib (1996); Patton (2001), esp. p. 11875; Susen (2007), p. 72; and Susen (2015), pp. 233–235, 241, and 279.

<sup>13</sup> Susen (2015), p. 1 (*italics in original*); on this formulation, see also *ibid.*, pp. 39, 233, 258, and 278. In addition, see Outhwaite (2016/2017).

research methodology, the “cultural turn” in sociology, the “contingent turn” in historiography, and the “autonomous turn” in politics. These presuppositional shifts are, at the same time, relatively *independent* and relatively *interdependent*.

- They are relatively *independent*, insofar as each of them has its own rationale, expressed in idiosyncratic disciplinary implications and consequences.
- They are relatively *interdependent*, insofar as they draw upon, and are influenced by, one another, while sharing “what Wittgenstein would have called a family resemblance”<sup>14</sup>.

As argued in my book, one crucial trait that these paradigmatic turns have in common is their sustained concern with different degrees and forms of *indeterminacy*. One may have good reason to object to—or, instead, to sympathize with—(i) *relativist* conceptions of knowledge, (ii) *interpretivist* conceptions of social research, (iii) *culturalist* conceptions of society, (iv) *non-determinist* conceptions of history, and (v) *autonomist* conceptions of politics. Notwithstanding the respective merits and limitations of these paradigmatic positions, they have had, and continue to have, a major impact upon the normative parameters underlying large parts of both mainstream and alternative forms of investigation in the contemporary social sciences. As Outhwaite eloquently puts it, “the ‘postmodern turn’ has had the valuable consequence that it has *sharpened* our focus on a number of important features of the recent developments *shaping* modern societies”<sup>15</sup>, including the ways in which they are conceptualized by laypersons in their everyday lives as well as by social-scientific experts in their critical explorations.

## “Indeterminate”

One of the ironies of the term *indeterminacy* is that, as Outhwaite perceptively observes, its meaning is itself *indeterminate*, or at least ambiguous. Its denotative and connotative meanings range “from ‘vagueness’ or ‘imprecision’ to stronger and sometimes more formal notions of ‘undecidability’”<sup>16</sup>. In my opinion, Outhwaite’s (hitherto) preference for the term *fragmentation* as “a common denominator to these postmodern turns”<sup>17</sup> is entirely justified, not least because—along with “indeterminacy”—it represents one of the most striking characteristics of highly complex human life forms. Unsurprisingly, different commentators have different views about the usefulness of epochal labels—such as “modern”, “late modern”, or “postmodern”—aimed at capturing the historical specificity of the current era. Irrespective of one’s assessment of these descriptions, it is no accident that *fragmentation* constitutes one of the predominant tendencies examined, and frequently bemoaned, by contemporary critical sociologists. Indeed, the increasing *fragmentation* of key civilizational—notably social, cultural, political, economic, geographic, demographic, epistemic, and experiential—dimensions of human life forms appears to contribute to the gradual *disintegration* of elements that play a pivotal role in the flourishing of the human condition.<sup>18</sup>

Some readers will agree, and others will disagree, with Outhwaite’s verdict that the term *indeterminacy* is “probably the best way of representing a common denominator to these

<sup>14</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (italics removed from “family resemblance”).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (italics added).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. In this context, Outhwaite makes reference to Gödel (1931).

<sup>17</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017).

<sup>18</sup> Outhwaite mentions *the fragmentation of work and of family relations* as two examples. See *ibid.*

postmodern turns—better, perhaps, than the notion of ‘fragmentation’, which [he has tended] to use to explain them”<sup>19</sup>. One may add to this judgement that, paradoxically, fragmentation processes are as much about *determinacy* as they are about *indeterminacy*. In terms of *determinacy*, fragmentation processes may follow causally defined and relatively predictable patterns of development, in accordance with context-specific logics of social functioning. In terms of *indeterminacy*, fragmentation processes may constitute fairly open and rather unpredictable dynamics, emerging from—while also triggering—unintended consequences. The challenge of living with different degrees and forms of determinacy and indeterminacy lies at the core of our everyday lives.

## “Ambivalent”

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to make sense of modernity without accounting for the extent to which it is marked by different levels of *ambivalence*.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, there is a *dark* modernity, whose *repressive* facets cannot be dissociated from the socio-historical preponderance of *instrumental* reason. On the other hand, there is a *bright* modernity, whose *emancipatory* aspects have been brought about, as well as grasped, by the discursive force of *critical* reason. The former “are intimately associated with variations of control—such as power, authority, order, discipline, obedience, enclosure, and heteronomy—and materialize themselves in social processes of domination, regulation, exploitation, alienation, fragmentation, exclusion, and discrimination”<sup>21</sup>. The latter “are expressed in Enlightenment ideals—such as progress, tolerance, liberty, equality, solidarity, dignity, sovereignty, and autonomy—and manifest themselves in social processes of liberation, self-determination, and unification”<sup>22</sup>.

Outhwaite and I seem to agree on the sociological centrality of this ambivalence. As noted by Outhwaite, the *conceptual antithesis of “liberty” and “discipline”*<sup>23</sup> captures this duality in an analytically powerful manner, obliging us to resist any temptation to reduce modernity *either* to its empowering *or* to its disempowering dimensions.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the overly *pessimistic* narrative that converts the whole of modernity into “a caricature of totalizing reason”<sup>25</sup>, portraying it as a completely or at least “tendentially totalitarian”<sup>26</sup> era, is as problematic as the excessively *optimistic* narrative that presents the whole of modernity as an emancipatory expression of the Kantian trinity of *Verstand*, *Vernunft*, and *Urteilkraft*, giving the misleading impression that it is tantamount to a pristine condition of universal enlightenment. Both the spirit and the reality of modernity have illustrated, time and again, that it is by recognizing the tension-laden confluence, rather than the artificial separation, of the bright and the dark sides of contemporary history that

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> On this point, see Susen (2015), pp. 16–18. See also *ibid.*, pp. 1, 16–22, 44, 75, 113, 119, 143, 174, 178, 179, 180, 190, 191, 204, 205, 219, 223, 235, 236, 269, 273, 276, 279, and 285n86. On *the social and political challenges arising from the experience of ambivalence under modern and/or postmodern conditions*, see, for instance: Bauman (1991); Bauman and Tester (2007), esp. pp. 23–25 and 29; Hammond (2011), pp. 305, 310, 312, and 315; Iggers (2005 [1997]), pp. 146–147; Jacobsen and Marshman (2008), pp. 804–807; Kellner (2007), p. 117; Mulinari and Sandell (2009), p. 495; Quicke (1999), p. 281; Susen (2010), esp. pp. 62–78; and van Raaij (1993), esp. pp. 543–546, 551–555, and 559–561.

<sup>21</sup> Susen (2015), p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> See Wagner (1994).

<sup>24</sup> On this point, see Adorno and Horkheimer (1997 [1944/1969]).

<sup>25</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

critical theory can contribute to a balanced—and, hence, plausible—understanding of the contradictory forces that have shaped, and continue to shape, human lifeworlds in communicatively sustained, yet systemically colonized, interactional formations.

### “Transcendental”/“Open-Ended”

Making reference to Jack Nusan Porter’s attempt to respond to the question of whether or not sociology is “dead”<sup>27</sup>, Outhwaite examines the cogency of the following twofold answer to this interrogation:

- If understood as a grand theory, or a set of catch-all explanatory frameworks with ambitious macro-conceptual pretensions, the answer is *yes*.
- If understood as an open-ended impulse to develop a critical understanding of different aspects of human society, comprising the ways in which our understanding of it is constantly being redefined, the answer is *no*.

Outhwaite has argued elsewhere<sup>28</sup>, and reiterated in his review of my book<sup>29</sup>, that most of social theory is closer to the latter position than to the former. He makes it clear that, as a result, he has serious doubts about the validity of my claim that, in recent decades, we have been witnessing a “crisis of the universalist ambitions of modern social theory”<sup>30</sup>, which “is inextricably linked to the advent of the ‘postmodern turn’ in the contemporary social sciences”<sup>31</sup>. In other words, if it is true that most—including most prominent—social theorists have always conceived of their project as a critical endeavour, irreducible to the attempt to provide simplistic big-picture accounts of highly complex realities, then it is misleading to make provocative announcements about the alleged crisis of the ostensibly universalist spirit running through the construction of sociological toolkits. Outhwaite, in support of this assertion, draws attention to founding figures of sociology (that is, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel), all of whom—in his view—succeeded in “offering the social-scientific equivalent of transcendental arguments in philosophy: open-ended attempts to explain how some manifest phenomenon [...] is *possible*”<sup>32</sup>.

The question that poses itself in this context, however, is to what extent it is possible to reconcile “the *transcendental*” and “the *open-ended*” without falling into the trap of a merely rhetorical commitment to recognizing two key aspects of social life:

- on the one hand, the species-constitutive presence, and socio-ontological significance, of *foundational*—and, hence, *cross-culturally valid*—elements of human existence, whose anthropological centrality *transcends* the spatiotemporal boundaries of civilizational specificity;
- on the other hand, the species-constitutive presence, and socio-ontological significance, of *contextual*—and, thus, *culturally contingent*—elements of human existence, whose anthropological centrality *depends on* the spatiotemporal boundaries of civilizational specificity.

<sup>27</sup> See Porter (2008), p. viii. On this issue, see also Susen (2015), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> See Outhwaite (1999).

<sup>29</sup> See Outhwaite (2016/2017).

<sup>30</sup> Susen (2015), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (*italics in original*) (spelling modified).

Social theorists—and, in a broader sense, social philosophers—have grappled with this tension for a long time; it is far from obvious, however, to what degree this tension can, or even should, be resolved. It seems to me that the paradigmatic transition from the (arguably modern) preoccupation with *relative determinacy*<sup>33</sup> to the (arguably postmodern) concern with *radical indeterminacy*<sup>34</sup> has shifted the investigative parameters from the search for *foundational* and *cross-culturally valid* to the exposure of *contextual* and *culturally contingent* elements of human existence.

Surely, most—if not, all—constitutive social phenomena are characterized by both the former and the latter. As I have sought to demonstrate in another book<sup>35</sup>, *all* human life forms are crucially shaped by at least five socio-ontological foundations: *labour*, *language*, *culture*, *desire*, and *experience*.<sup>36</sup> In terms of their role and constitution, however, these socio-ontological foundations vary substantially across time and space, acquiring different functions, and reaching different levels of development, in different modes of existence. In brief, both “the *foundational*” and “the *contingent*” are built into the human condition. Social life is marked, and shaped, by both the contingency of foundations and the foundations of contingency. It is the task of sociological research to explore the relationship between the foundational and the contextual elements of human existence. Given that this relationship is shot through with—to use Outhwaite’s terminology—both *transcendental* and *open-ended* processes and structures, this task cannot be dissociated from the challenge of shedding light on the relationship between *determinacy* and *indeterminacy*.<sup>37</sup>

## “Critical Realist”

The thematic overlap between postmodern thought and other perspectives may not always be immediately obvious. One central area of investigation in which the intersection between postmodern and alternative variants of social analysis is evident, however, is *epistemology*. In line with this insight, Outhwaite makes reference to Roy Bhaskar’s *critical realism*<sup>38</sup>, which urges us to concede that “*reality*, even to a considerable extent social reality, *is as it is*, independent of our descriptions”<sup>39</sup>, while insisting that “we can know it only under *particular* descriptions and that these are inevitably *changing*, *open-ended*, and *contentious*”<sup>40</sup>. If we accept this twofold presuppositional framework by subscribing to both *realism* (“reality does exist”) and *criticism* (“we need to be critical of our material and symbolic constructions of reality”), then—as Outhwaite reminds us—“we have gone a long way to meeting the claims of postmodernism”<sup>41</sup>, notably its advocacy of epistemological scepticism, which, in this case, is conceptually embedded in a radicalized version of social constructivism. Rather than

<sup>33</sup> On this point, see Susen (2015), pp. 1, 39, 48, 65, 72, 74, 92, 233, 258, 265, and 278.

<sup>34</sup> On this point, see *ibid.*, pp. 1, 9, 19, 39, 48, 59, 65, 66, 69, 72, 74, 82, 90, 92, 93, 104, 137, 138, 139, 166, 180, 233, 258, 264, 265, 268, and 278.

<sup>35</sup> Susen (2007).

<sup>36</sup> On this point, see *ibid.*, Chapter 10.

<sup>37</sup> On this point, see Susen (2015), pp. 1, 9, 19, 39, 48, 59, 65, 66, 69, 72, 74, 82, 90, 92, 93, 104, 137, 138, 139, 166, 180, 233, 258, 264, 265, 268, and 278.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance: Archer et al. (1998); Bhaskar (2011a [1989]); Bhaskar (2011b [2002]); and Bhaskar (2012 [2002]).

<sup>39</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (*italics* in original).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* (*italics* added).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

stubbornly demonizing or naïvely embracing postmodern thought, we need to acknowledge that it may be both theoretically and practically fruitful to identify its main intellectual contributions to the contemporary social sciences, including areas of inquiry that have been sources of intense dispute for centuries.

### “Narrative”

According to Outhwaite, the principal achievement of my book is “to document, with meticulous accuracy and precision, the vast variety of ways in which social theory has responded to these changes”<sup>42</sup>—that is, to profound transformations associated with unprecedented degrees of *indeterminacy* and *fragmentation*—“in the course of the to-and-fro over ‘the postmodern’”<sup>43</sup>. In such a climate, “political ideologies are boiled down into sound-bites and flavours”<sup>44</sup>, dispersed within a rainbow-like assemblage of competing narratives, none of which can claim to possess a discursive monopoly on the interpretation of reality. In the contemporary era, highly differentiated societies lack a processual, let alone a structural, epicentre. Outhwaite posits, with a healthy dose of irony, that “[w]e are, in a sense, all populists now”<sup>45</sup>. In the jungle world of commodified eclecticism, we are able to choose from a large variety of lifestyle-related options and diffusely organized worldviews. In such a polycentric—or, if one prefers, centreless—environment of ubiquitous plurality, all narratives—regardless of whether they may be classified as “micro” or “macro”, “minor” or “major”, “mini” or “maxi”, “contingent” or “foundational”—compete in an open market of the “anything-goes-world”<sup>46</sup>.

### “Fishy”

Outhwaite’s most significant—and, in my view, at least partly justified—criticism “is that in casting [my] trawling net so broadly (including—rather problematically—Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein), [I tend] to *occlude the role of some of the bigger explicitly postmodernist and/or poststructuralist fish* (including, perhaps, Stanley Fish)”<sup>47</sup>. Although, in Outhwaite’s eyes, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard receive the attention they deserve, other “high flyers” whose names are rightly or wrongly associated with *la vague postmoderne*—such as Bruno Latour, Michel Maffesoli, Gianni Vattimo, Judith Butler, and Fredric Jameson—do *not* figure as “first-league game changers” and are largely relegated to footnotes. Let me, in response to this observation, make two straightforward points.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (spelling modified).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Susen (2015), p. 32. On this point, see also *ibid.*, pp. 117, 193, 194, 211, 252, 280, and 286n134. On the slogan “anything goes”, see, for instance: Beck and Lau (2005), pp. 540–554; Boghossian (2006), p. 23; Butler (2002), pp. 35; Clicqué (2005), esp. p. 29; Cole (2003), p. 493; Eickelpasch (1997), pp. 18–19; Elliott (2007 [2001]), p. 141; Gane and Gane (2007), p. 131; Matthewman and Hoey (2006), p. 536; Mcevoy (2007), p. 399; Nola and Irzik (2003), p. 395; Rose (1991), pp. 3 and 60; Sokal and Bricmont (1998), pp. 78–85; Torfing (1999), pp. 275–276; and van Raaij (1993), p. 560.

<sup>47</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (italics added).



First, as spelled out in the section entitled “A Methodological Problem”<sup>48</sup>, “[t]he theoretical exploration of the ‘postmodern turn’ undertaken in this book is based on a *thematic*, rather than an author-focused, examination”<sup>49</sup>. To be exact, my study has sought to offer an “*aspect-oriented* account of postmodern thought”<sup>50</sup> by focusing on five areas of concern: epistemology, methodology, sociology, historiography, and politics. Drawing attention to both the advantages and the disadvantages of such a—thematically guided—form of inquiry, the book contains a somewhat self-critical section, which comprises the following explanation:

Paradoxically, the main strength of an aspect-oriented analysis is, at the same time, its major weakness. Its *strength* lies in its capacity to illustrate the thematic complexity of the “postmodern turn”. Its *weakness*, however, consists in its tendency to over-generalize. It is human beings—that is, individual thinkers, authors, and researchers—who stand behind the issues discussed in a thematically organized volume. Hence, to structure the argument in accordance with the five aforementioned areas of concern and, furthermore, take them to represent the most striking features of an overall paradigmatic shift means to impose a sense of consistency and homogeneity on a remarkably amorphous and heterogeneous landscape of paradigmatic transitions and contradictions. In other words, the risk of making overgeneralizations, resulting from the attempt to provide a thematically structured overview of an internally diversified and fragmented intellectual movement, constitutes a serious—albeit not untenable—methodological limitation of the foregoing enquiry.<sup>51</sup>

The paragraph cited above is not meant to serve as an excuse for what harsh critics may conceive of as an indefensible inadequacy. It makes clear, however, that the aspect-oriented, rather than author-focused, analytical undertaking of my book does *not* aim to offer a detailed discussion of original contributions made by individual scholars to postmodern thought. To put it bluntly, the study seeks to accomplish what it says on the tin: namely, to provide an in-depth *aspect-oriented*—and, thus, *thematically structured*—investigation into the impact of the “postmodern turn” on the contemporary social sciences.

Second, the section entitled “Who are These “Postmodernists?””<sup>52</sup> provides a detailed account of a “list of scholars whose works are—directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, rightly or wrongly—associated with the rise of postmodern thought”<sup>53</sup>. With the exception of Stanley E. Fish, all of the thinkers mentioned by Outhwaite in this context are not only included in this section but also examined and classified in terms of their importance for a comprehensive understanding of the “postmodern turn”. Of course, one may have good reason to disagree with the book’s assessment of their respective significance, especially in relation to point number 12, which categorizes these thinkers in terms of their intellectual influence (dividing them into three categories: “highly influential”, “very influential”, and “influential”).<sup>54</sup> With the exception of Vattimo, all of the intellectuals mentioned by Outhwaite are classified as “very influential” (and “very prominent contemporary scholars”), and their works are extensively referred to throughout the book. Hence, although it is true that, in this study, the

<sup>48</sup> See Susen (2015), p. 232.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 232 (italics in original).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 232 (italics added).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 232 (italics in original).

<sup>52</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 22–31.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 31.

Anglo-American literary theorist Stanley E. Fish is relegated to a footnote<sup>55</sup>, I am not sure to what extent it is accurate to affirm that I “occlude”<sup>56</sup> the vital role played by the other aforementioned thinkers in the postmodern endeavour.

More importantly, however, Outhwaite is, I believe, right to suggest that my book—while drawing attention to the fact that “most of the relevant thinkers are French or, secondarily, North American”<sup>57</sup>—“does not [...] say much about the underlying dynamics”<sup>58</sup> that may explain this ethnocentric constitution of postmodern scholarship. Indeed, similar to poststructuralism, postmodernism “was a largely French product but one which was more successful in its export version than at home”<sup>59</sup>—that is, one that was highly popular in Anglophone circles, but of marginal importance in the discursive domain of their Francophone counterparts, which had generated most of the “celebrity chefs”<sup>60</sup> responsible for the postmodern menu. Perhaps, then, another book needs to be written to shed light on the socio-historical conditions underpinning the production of postmodern thought in different parts of the world. Certainly, this would be an ambitious task, but one worth pursuing.

### *Une fin sans fin...*

William Outhwaite has done a brilliant job in providing a remarkably balanced and generous account of a book that, I am sure, suffers from various significant limitations and shortcomings, not least due to its ambitious nature. As, I hope, my study has demonstrated on several levels, the key facets of the “postmodern turn” are of paramount importance to the contemporary social sciences and will continue to shape their development in the future.

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<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 314n72.

<sup>56</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (italics added).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* On this point, see Susen (2015), pp. 23–24.

<sup>58</sup> Outhwaite (2016/2017) (italics added).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

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