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Memory, History, Cognition: Using Systems-Theoretical Social Theory to Illuminate Patrick Modiano's *enquêtes policières*

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Article abstract

Winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in literature, Patrick Modiano is perhaps the most widely known contemporary French author uniting individual memory and collective historical narrative. His novels, detective-like investigations, focus on the German Occupation of France during World War II. *This article argues that Modiano's detective investigations may best be read as a mise-en-scene of processes of cognition, using the work of social scientist Niklas Luhmann, whose theory of how individual and collective systems "make sense" using memory, perception, and other cognitive phenomena addresses certain particularities present in Modiano's work. The idea of witness plays a crucial role in both Modiano's oeuvre and Luhmann's model of cognition.*

Memory, History, Cognition: Using Systems-Theoretical Social Theory to Illuminate Patrick Modiano's *enquêtes policières*

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RÉSUMÉ *Lauréat du Prix Nobel en littérature (2014), Patrick Modiano est sans doute l'écrivain français contemporain le plus connu qui unit la mémoire individuelle et la narration historique collective. Ses enquêtes policières se focalisent sur la période de l'occupation pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Cet article propose une lecture de Modiano par le biais de la théorie du sociologue Niklas Luhmann, dans laquelle les enquêtes constitueraient une mise-en-scène des processus de cognition, effectués par des systèmes individuels et collectifs, au service d'une tentative de compréhension ("making sense"), et qui répond à certaines particularités dans l'œuvre de Modiano. La notion de témoin joue un rôle primordial à la fois dans l'œuvre de Modiano et dans le modèle de cognition de Luhmann.*

ABSTRACT *Winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in literature, Patrick Modiano is perhaps the most widely known contemporary French author uniting individual memory and collective historical narrative. His novels, detective-like investigations, focus on the German Occupation of France during World War II. This article argues that Modiano's detective investigations may best be read as a*

mise-en-scene *of processes of cognition, using the work of social scientist Niklas Luhmann, whose theory of how individual and collective systems "make sense" using memory, perception, and other cognitive phenomena addresses certain particularities present in Modiano's work. The idea of witness plays a crucial role in both Modiano's oeuvre and Luhmann's model of cognition.*

In 2018, the journal *Yale French Studies* published a special issue dedicated to French novelist Patrick Modiano, titled "Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives[1]." The impetus for this publication was Modiano's reception of the Nobel Prize for literature four years earlier, a development that took many critics by surprise. For, although Modiano has been active since the publication of his first novel, *La Place de L'Etoile*, in 1968, and by 2014 was relatively well-known in France, he had remained largely off the international radar for most of his career, with only a handful of his novels available in other languages. The move catapulted him into international fame seemingly overnight, although some critics at the time questioned the choice of the Nobel committee, citing the "frustrating" effect of some of his most common themes: inconclusiveness, repetitiveness, and a lack of universality[2].

However, if he was little known by the general reading public outside of France, he was already being extensively studied by academics. Leo Robson points out that, by the time of his reception of the Nobel Prize in 2014, more than twenty critical books devoted to Modiano's oeuvre had been published, with academics from Sweden to Australia choosing him as an object

1. Richard J. Golsan and Lynn A. Higgins, eds., "'Detecting' Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives," special issue, *Yale French Studies* 133 (2018).
2. Jean-Christophe Buisson and Grégoire Leménager, "Le Clash : Modiano merite-t-il son prix Nobel ?", L'Obs, October 23, 2014, video, 06:54, https://www.nouvelobs.com/culture/20141023.OBS3021/modiano-merite-t-il-son-prix-nobel.html (page consulted on April 25, 2021).

of study, even dedicating an international conference to him[3]. Why, then, the intense academic focus on Modiano, even as the international public was "stampeding as one to frantically Google 'Patrick Modiano novelist'[4]?" Clearly, Modiano has "something to say" that is of great value to literary intelligentsia as well as to French readership. The answer lies in his treatment of the relationship of memory to history, particularly that of the Nazi Occupation of France during World War II. Modiano's oeuvre is entirely and single-mindedly focused on this question, to the point that critics routinely call him "obsessed[5]." The Nobel Prize committee itself justified its choice of Modiano as recipient "for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the Occupation[6]." This "art of memory" through which Modiano engages with the Occupation goes beyond mere textual significance, for Modiano is credited with helping to bring about a very real reckoning with the French national narrative surrounding this period[7]. This engagement wrestles with both collective and

3. Robson is referring to the conference *Colloque: Patrick Modiano*, held at the University of Kent on March 12-13, 2004. Leo Robson, "Why nobody knows what to think about Patrick Modiano winning the Nobel Prize for literature," *New Statesman*, October 23, 2014, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/10/why-nobody-knows-what-think-about-patrick-modiano-winning-nobel-prize-literature (page consulted on April 25, 2021).
4. Philip Sidney, "Forget the Nobel—it's the Samuel Johnson prize that really excites," *The Spectator*, October 10, 2014, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/forget-the-nobel---it-s-the-samuel-johnson-prize-that-really-excites (page consulted on April 25, 2021).
5. See, for example: Dominique Viart, "Une reconnaissance qui va plus à l'oeuvre qu'à l'écrivain," *Le Temps*, October 9, 2014, https://www.letemps.ch/culture/une-reconnaissance-va-plus-loeuvre-qua-lecrivain; Xavier de la Porte, "Modiano a pensé Internet sans y mettre les pieds (ou presque)," *L'Obs*, November 21, 2016, https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-rue89-culture/20141009.RUE6130/modiano-a-pense-internet-sans-y-mettre-les-pieds-ou-presque.html; Le Point, "'Dans la peau de Patrick Modiano' : radiographie d'une oeuvre et d'une vie," January 3, 2011, https://www.lepoint.fr/culture/dans-la-peau-de-patrick-modiano-radiographie-d-une-oeuvre-et-d-une-vie-03-01-2011-126223_3.php (accessed August 25, 2021).
6. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2014," nobelprize.org, last modified May 3, 2021, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2014/summary/ (accessed on April 25, 2021).
7. Modiano scholar Colin Nettelbeck sums up his contribution thusly: "Nous savons la contribution capitale de Modiano à la révision de l'historiographie de la deuxième guerre mondiale : avant le tournant de l'histoire 'historienne'

individual memory, with Modiano using the Occupation as a backdrop from which to examine the construction of individual identity/ies, including his own.

So Modiano's engagement with memory and its relationship to the historical moment of the Occupation explains his Nobel selection and the reason for which scholars have long engaged so thoroughly with his work. However, that same scholarly engagement has often come up against difficulties of critical interpretation, specifically ones concerning notions of truth and its interplay with memory and history[8]. The editors of the Modiano-themed special edition of *Yale French Studies* acknowledge some of the critical roadblocks and ponder whether "New Perspectives" are possible and, if so, what the interest would be. They maintain that the answer is a "resounding yes" and that new perspectives are not only possible, but necessary for a more thorough understanding of Modiano. The current paper contributes to this objective.

MODIANO'S DETECTIVE FORMULA

Modiano's engagement with memory and history takes the form of an oeuvre in which each novel depicts a detective-style investigation. The narrator-detective carries out an inquiry into his own background and identity while simultaneously examining

marqué par *La France de Vichy* de Robert Paxton in 1974, le jeune Modiano avait déjà mis les années noires sous sa loupe, en faisant resurgir leurs douloureuses ambiguïtés et en faisant exploser les glorieux mythes de la France gaullienne." Colin Nettelbeck, "Jardinage dans les ruines: Modiano et l'espace littéraire français contemporain," in *Patrick Modiano*, John E. Flower, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 25-26.

8. See, for example: Gerald Prince, "Re-Membering Modiano, or Something Happened," *SubStance* 15, 1 (1986); Bruno Blanckeman and Ellen Collier, "Patrick Modiano or Writing as 'Nocturne,'" *Yale French Studies*, *Detecting Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives*, special issue, edited by Richard J. Golsan and Lynn A. Higgins, 133 (2018). See also: Annelies Schulte Nordholt, "Dora Bruder : Le Témoignage par le biais de fiction"; Christian Donadille, "Patrick Modiano et la littérature de l'enfance : de l'autre côté du miroir"; Simon Kemp, "Fade-Out: Patterns of Inconclusion in Modiano's Novels," in *Patrick Modiano*, John E. Flower, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

collective memory (or lack thereof) surrounding the Occupation. In most of his novels, the scrutiny of collective memory is implicit; for example, in *Rue des boutiques obscures*, one of his most widely read novels, the narrator is a professional detective whose final case is that of his own identity[9]. In trying to discover who he is, or was, he encounters various figures implicated in shadowy business of an indeterminate nature involving the Occupation. This scenario can be considered typical of his oeuvre, with the vast majority of his novels closely hewing to this pattern. However, with the publication of *Dora Bruder*, generally considered to be his most "historiographical" novel, Modiano changes course and addresses the Occupation head-on[10]. After coming across an old newspaper announcement for a missing young woman in 1941, the narrator is struck—not so much by the announcement itself as by dint of his own familiarity with the address listed as her domicile. He undertakes an investigation to find out what happened to Dora, and more specifically, what became of her during a particular period when she ran away from home. Dora Bruder was a real person and the documents cited by the narrator authentic, as are the autobiographical elements pertaining to Modiano's own life scattered throughout the text. Throughout his investigation, the narrator uses the "official" documents uncovered by his inquiry to situate Dora in the greater systemic context of the Occupation, while bringing forward the singular stories of individuals—including himself—that reveal themselves as

9. Patrick Modiano, *Rue des boutiques obscures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

10. This critical reception is due to the fact that, in contrast to Modiano's previous works, authentic documentation and verified facts are central elements: Dora Bruder was a real person who truly existed, the documents described are archived artifacts, and Modiano actually undertook the central investigation himself, over the course of many years. As Annelies Schulte Nordholt puts it, "Dora Bruder a paru en 1997 et dès sa parution, le texte posa un problème de genre aux journalistes et aux critiques. Après tant de romans, Patrick Modiano venait-il soudain de se convertir au témoignage historique?" Annelies Schulte Nordholdt, "Dora Bruder: Le Témoignag par le biais de la fiction," in *Patrick Modiano*, 75; Nathan Bracher cites Dora Bruder in his study of prominent French "historiographical" novels of the 21st century. Nathan Bracher, "Timely Representations: Writing the Past in the First-Person Present Imperfect," *History and Memory* 28, 1 (Spring/Summer 2016); Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

part of the investigative process. For instance, from a dossier and an official register, the narrator learns that Dora was taken to Tourelles by police. This causes him to recall a story told by his own father of a roundup in which he was driven in a black Mariah to police headquarters. During the ride, his father noticed one of the other passengers, a girl of about 18, and the narrator wonders if that girl could have been Dora, before concluding that even if it weren't Dora, it was perhaps one of two other girls listed in the register, or, really any number of figures like her[11]. The narrative interweaves Dora's story with Modiano-the-author's own personal history and with the story of the investigation itself. Its real-life events and authenticated facts and documents about Dora's own life are supplemented by musings and imagined happenings conferred by the narrator, which serve to fill the gaps left by narrative elements both unknown and unknowable: "C'était en février, pensais-je, qu' "ils" auraient dû la prendre dans leurs filets. "Ils": cela pouvait être aussi bien de simples gardiens de la paix que les inspecteurs de la Brigade des mineurs ou de la Police des questions juives faisant un contrôle d'identité dans un lieu public[12]." Ultimately, the narrator is able to verify that Dora was deported to Auschwitz, where she died, although the real focus of his investigation—what happened to Dora during the precise period of her escape—remains unsolved.

In each case, from his first novel to his less-typical *Dora Bruder*, the novels cleave to a particular Modianesque detective novel "formula," with only slight variations among texts. Indeed, due to the consistency and repetitiveness of this formula, many critics describe his oeuvre as a single continuously written novel[13].

11. Modiano, *Dora Bruder*, 62-65.
12. *Ibid*., 62.
13. See, for example: Marja Warehime, "Originality and Narrative Nostalgia: Shadows in Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures*," *French Forum* 12, 3 (September 1987) (Warehime also cites Michel Tournier, "Autour des prix," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* 23, 30 (November 1978), 3; Bruno Blanckeman, "Lire Modiano," *La Compagnie des auteurs*, France Culture, September 11, 2018, https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-compagnie-des-auteurs/patrick-modiano-24-lire-modiano; and Virginie Jannière, "On a lu 'Encre Sympathique' le nouveau roman de Patrick Modiano," *CNews*, October 3, 2019, https://www.cnews.fr/

Even Modiano himself says he has the impression that he is writing the same story over and over again[14]. His recurring detective formula can be summarized thusly: A narrator goes on a detective-like quest to find answers; however, answers to what, exactly, is not usually revealed to the reader, and it is often implied that the narrator-detective does not actually know himself. These narrators, as well as other characters, are fleeing their past in some way, a flight that includes allusions to participation in some kind of illegal or clandestine activity, usually with vague references to the Occupation (although in his later works these references become more explicit). As such, these narrators, along with other characters, wield multiple names, nationalities, and identities (or names that evoke multiple nationalities): The character of Louki in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* is happy to use her nickname, which hides her actual identity; in *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, the Anglo-Hispanic sounding name of Jimmy Sarrano was invented by the narrator to hide his real identity; the narrator of *La Place de l'étoile* goes by the name Raphaël Schlemilovitch or Raphaël de Château-Chinon, depending on whether having a French or Jewish identity is more advantageous in the moment[15]. Then there is Guy Roland of *Rue des boutiques obscures*, who goes through a litany of identities, some invented, some attributed by others as authentic, some assumed: After passing through the identities of Guy Roland and Freddie Howard de Luz, he concludes "Et je ne me souviens plus si, ce soir-là, je m'appelais Jimmy ou Pedro, Stern ou McEvoy[16]." The narrator's investigation

culture/2019-10-03/lu-encre-sympathique-le-nouveau-roman-de-patrick-modiano-884576 (consulted August 25, 2021).

14. Modiano makes this remark in many instances; to cite one example: "Je croyais avoir écrit [mes romans] les uns après les autres de manière discontinue, à coups d'oublis successifs, mais souvent les mêmes visages, les mêmes noms, les mêmes lieux, les mêmes phrases reviennent de l'un à l'autre, comme les motifs d'une tapisserie que l'on aurait tissée dans un demi-sommeil." Patrick Modiano, "Conférence Nobel," Speech, Presentation of the Nobel Prize, The Nobel Foundation, Stockholm, December 7, 2014, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2014/modiano/25249-conference-nobel/ (consulted on April 25, 2021).
15. Patrick Modiano, *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (Paris, Gallimard: 2007); *Vestiaire de l'enfance* (Paris, Gallimard: 1989); *La Place de l'étoile* (Paris, Gallimard: 1975).
16. Modiano, *Rue des boutiques obscures*, 182.

guides him to many different places, takes him through interviews with many different people, and leads him to the collection of various pieces of "hard" evidence, such as photographs, official government registries, handwritten notes, phone book entries, and letters. Conversations concerning lived events and eyewitness accounts are generally cloaked in a reluctance to remember, evoke, or recount. Such accounts include testimony from witnesses as well as observations or remembrances of lived experiences voiced in the first person by the narrator-detective.

MODIANO'S SUBVERSION OF THE DETECTIVE TROPE: A FOREGROUNDING OF MENTAL PROCESSES

However, Modiano continually subverts the detective trope even as he employs it. The subjectivity of experience and memory routinely predominates over the objectivity of hard facts. The veracity and motivation of both witnesses and evidence are constantly put into question, sometimes quite literally, by the detective himself: "Une impression m'a traversé… A quelle époque cela remontait-il ? Du temps où je m'appelais Pedro McEvoy et où je rentrais ici chaque soir ? Est-ce que je reconnaissais l'entrée, le grand paillasson rectangulaire, les murs gris, le globe au plafond cerné d'un anneau de cuivre[17]?" Some critics interpret Modiano's emphasis on subjectivity as an attempt to humanize victims of the Occupation: Whereas hard evidence is associated with the collective "official line," individual stories convey the multidimensionality of human experience[18]. But while this may be so, even "hard" evidence leads only to an increasing number of questions: "Le Trianon de Freinville occupait le 24. Un café? Un cinema[19]?" The further the detective-narrator takes his investigation, the more muddied the waters become.

17. Modiano, *Rue des boutiques obscures*, 124.
18. See, for example, Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert, "Au-delà de l'autofiction : Écriture et lecture de Dora Bruder, de Patrick Modiano," *French Forum* 29, 1 (Winter 2004), and Nordholdt, "Par le biais de la fiction."
19. Modiano, *Dora Bruder*, 20.

Witnesses are particularly problematic: They obfuscate rather than clarify. Rather than contributing to a singular storyline leading to a unique truth, witness statements proliferate (often contradictory) narratives, none of which lead to the truth or much of anything else concrete. Witnesses remember events differently; they recall or forget specific details, whose importance to the investigation is either essential or dubious; they deny even being present at all. Even direct observations made by the narrator are couched in an aura of subjectivity and doubt. Moreover, these observations are not related as a straightforward account of the events being observed; instead, their narration is intertwined with memories and reveries that the narrator evokes even at the moment of witness. In *Dora Bruder*, for example, the narrator punctuates the firsthand account of the discovery of an official school record with speculation: "Le registre de l'internat porte les mentions suivantes… Pour quelles raisons ses parents l'ont-ils inscrite dans cet internat ? Sans doute parce qu'il était difficile de continuer d'habiter à trois dans la chambre d'hôtel du boulevard Orano[20]." He follows with a description of a map of the school's location, which quickly transforms into an evocation of his personal memories: "Sur le plan, en face du pensionnat, de l'autre côté de la rue Pipcus, se succèdent la congrégation de la Mère de Dieu, puis les Dames de l'Adoration, et l'Oratoire de Pipcus… puis les Dames Diaconesses où je me suis fait soigner, un jour à dix-huit ans. Je me souviens du jardin des Diaconesses[21]." In nearly every instance, subjectivity takes precedence over objectivity, a-temporality subsumes linearity and chronology, and "real" lived events become mixed with dreams, memories, and imagination. The complexity seems to build rather than diminish; the unknowable nature of the quest seems increasingly pronounced, and in the end, the narrator never arrives at a definitive conclusion to his quest. This inconclusiveness is often read as failure or a statement about the futility of such undertakings[22].

20. *Ibid.*, 36.
21. *Ibid.*, 40-41.
22. See for example, Ora Avni, "Patrick Modiano: A French Jew?," *Yale French*

Notably, much of Modiano's detective formula involves a portrayal of mental processes: There are constant allusions to memories both known and suppressed, imagined events, dreams, and daydreams, not to mention the (mental) inventiveness of fictions, lies, and falsified information. In this way also, Modiano's formula departs from the classic detective trope, wherein a third person omniscient narrator recounts the "facts" of the matter in question and the actions of the detective[23]. In this trope, the cogitations of the detective remain generally un-communicated to the reader, and the actual process of deduction undertaken by the detective is usually revealed by the narrator or the detective *post factum* at the end of the story: One may think for example, of the narrator Watson recounting the odd behavior of Sherlock Holmes as he conducts his investigation: Watson is an outsider with no privileged access to his mental process; only when Sherlock engages him in conversation after solving a case is his process of deduction revealed to Watson and to the reader, as a *fait accompli*[24]. For example, in the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, the first in the Sherlock Holmes series, Watson's account of Holmes's examination of the crime scene is that of an external observer: "As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon[25]." He recounts the rest of the case

Studies, *Discourses of Jewish Identity in Twentieth-Century France*, special issue, edited by Alan Astro, 85 (1994); Jens Brockmeier, "On Failed Understanding," in *Narrative Hermeneutics*, Jens Brockmeier, ed., special issue, *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 8, 1 (Summer 2016); and Simon Kemp, "Fade-Out."

23. See, for example, Peter Hühn's thorough description, drawing on Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, of the "classical [detective] formula" in "The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, 3 (Autumn 1987).

24. "So 'what happens,' Tzvetan Todorov asks, in the narrative of detection? 'Not much.'… The characters of this second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them.' At the very last moment, the detective deciphers, narrates, names names. Before that, there is nothing to do but wait." Theodore Martin, "The Long Wait: Timely Secrets of the Contemporary Detective Novel," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 45, 2 (Summer 2012) : 166.

25. Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet," *Sherlock Holmes Collection: 4 Novels and 44 Short Stories by Arthur Conan Doyle* (Colorado Springs, CO, Ignacio Hills Press: 2011), 34.

in the same manner, and in the end, the case is solved, the criminal apprehended, and the confession made before Watson (and thus the reader) receives a full explanation from Holmes of his reasoning process: "This was a case in which you were given the result and had to find everything else for yourself. Now let me endeavour [*sic*] to show you the different steps in my reasoning[26]." Or one may consider Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, who goes into a trance while "thinking" before unveiling his deduction, thus hiding his mental processing from the narrator and therefore the reader[27]. Modiano's detective investigation, by contrast, affords the reader an intimate position to the internal rumination of the detective narrator as it occurs; here, the reader becomes a witness to processes of cognition undertaken by the detective-narrator, including but not limited to, deduction and reasoning.

That the major site of the Modianesque investigation process and its narrative is precisely *the mind* is evidenced by the regularity with which the body of critical vocabulary dedicated to Modiano evokes this concept. For instance, Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert evokes the Modiano narrator's "lacunes cognitives," "univers cognitif," "univers mental," and "quête mentale", and cites Peter Fröhlicher's reference to the Modiano investigation as a "programme cognitif[28]." For his part, Flower opens his book with a warning to readers of Modiano that they must willingly accept being "entangled in a mental web" that serves to remind

26. *Ibid.*, 110.

27. In the classic detective novel *Murder on the Orient Express*, the section in which Poirot carries out the process of deduction is titled "Poirot sits back and thinks." The process is described thusly: "Hercule Poirot sat very still. One might have thought he was asleep. And then, suddenly, after a quarter of an hour's complete immobility, his eyebrows began to move slowly up his forehead. A little sigh escaped him…His eyes opened. They were green like a cat's. He said softly, "*Eh bien,* I have thought. And you?" Once he is ready to reveal the answer, he calls the involved parties into the train car, where the reader, along with the characters, discovers his conclusion and reasoning process, by way of an *ex-post-facto* explanation. Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express: A Hercule Poirot Mystery* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 218.

28. Dammame-Gilbert, "Au-delà de l'autofiction," 85-86; 92; 94.

them of the limits of what they (can) know[29]. Elsewhere critics refer to the "pensée" or "réflexion" unique to Modiano, and of course memory and imagination, two of the principal focuses of Modiano criticism, are fundamentally cognitive activities[30].

Such mental operations have largely been interpreted as the portrayal of "making sense" from the past, on individual and collective levels. The autobiographical elements of Modiano's narration can be attributed at least in part to the author's own personal identity crisis, as a child born to a single mother at the end of the Occupation and whose largely absent father was rumored to have participated in seedy wartime dealings[31]. This preoccupation is confirmed by Modiano himself, who states, "Voilà pourquoi le Paris de l'Occupation a toujours été pour moi comme une nuit originelle. Sans lui je ne serais jamais né. Ce Paris-là n'a cessé de me hanter et sa lumière voilée baigne parfois mes livres[32]." However, Modiano emphasizes that his work goes beyond the question of his individual identity. On the collective level this activity can be read as a metaphor for the desire for and/or attempted construction of a collective narrative that would "make sense" of past events, specifically the various roles—saviors, collaborators, indifferent observers—the French played during the Occupation. Many critics see in this collective aspect a portrayal of guilt and ambivalence about lived events in the Occupation and attribute the lack of dénouement in each novel to a collective paradoxical urge to know and to repress. Some even attribute to Modiano a heroic effort to make sure the events

29. Flower, "Introduction," *Patrick Modiano*, 10.
30. See for example, Julia Holter, *Le clair-obscur 'extrême contemporain': Pierre Bergounioux, Pierre Michon, Patrick Modiano, et Pascal Quignard* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2017); and Maxime Decout, "Modiano : La voix palimpseste sur la place de l'étoile," *Littérature* 162 (June 2011) : 48.
31. "Il est obsédé par le destin de son père juif venu en France avant la guerre et condamné à une vie de marginal et d'apatride, et dès l'occupation condamné à une vie clandestine, et ne devant sa survie qu'à des trafics louches." Joseph Jurt, "La mémoire de la Shoah : *Dora Bruder*" in *Patrick Modiano*, 93.
32. Modiano, "Conférence Nobel."

of the Occupation are not forgotten, erased, or swept under the rug by "official" or nationalistic historical accounts[33].

While the notion of "making sense" is certainly key to understanding Modiano's project, in most critical interpretations, the notion of "making sense" is conflated with the idea of finding "the truth[34]." But such an interpretation relies on the presumption of a singular, objective truth[35]. This is obviated by Modiano's manipulation of the detective genre, which puts the very notion of "truth" into question. It is therefore difficult to affirm that Modiano's characters are looking for "the truth," in a preexisting and unitary sense, what Jens Brockmeier calls "traditional truth[36]." Some critics have circumvented this impasse by couching the notion of truth in more subjective or vague terms, such as "coming to terms" with the past; however if "coming to terms" dodges a commitment to absolute truth, it implies a conclusiveness that Modiano also denies his readers. Furthermore, the question of truth poses a problem for critical interpretations focusing on the divide between literary creation and historical account. Examining Modiano from this angle has led less to a unifying understanding of his work than to a conflict where one must choose a camp. Tellingly, the Nobel secretary who announced Modiano's win takes care, as a historian, to distance himself from Modiano the novelist, in the post-speech interview immediately following his announcement[37]. In the case of the composition of Dora Bruder this division led to a real-life falling

33. Jean Charbonneau, for example, attributes to Modiano the "role of guardian of memory" and the desire "to wage war against oblivion." "Patrick Modiano: Rememberance of Shadowy Things Past," Review of *Dora Bruder*, by Patrick Modiano, *Agni*, 50 (1999) : 227.
34. For example: "The truth is what he now strives for." *Ibid*., 226.
35. Whereas the classic detective trope leads up to "a well-nigh Utopian moment of absolute knowledge." Martin, "The Long Wait," 166.
36. Brockmeier, "On Failed Understanding," 88.
37. When asked by the interviewer, "Do you feel an affinity for Modiano, as a historian yourself?" Peter Englund responds with: "Not as a historian, but as a person concerned with memory, which I think we all are." "Interview," Interview by Sven Hugo Persson, Announcement of the 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature to Patrick Modiano, nobelprize.org, October 9, 2014, video, 04:50, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2014/prize-announcement/ (page consulted on April 25, 2021).

out between Modiano and his one-time collaborator, Serge Klarsfeld, who accused him of turning a historical project into a literary one (as well as of not giving Klarsfeld credit for his own research on the project)[38]. Studies approaching Modiano from this angle do not situate him definitively on one side or the other and tend to conclude by evoking the notion of "paradox."

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TRUTH TO MAKING SENSE

Today, a growing body of criticism on Modiano addresses questions of truth and genre while explicitly engaging with the cognitive aspect of his detective investigations; for example, by examining them from an epistemological standpoint. For instance, in his article "Un Sentiment de vacances et d'éternité : « Dora Bruder » contra l'histoire," (2018), Nicholas Xanthos revisits the "literature versus history" debate, placing Modiano in the "anti" historical camp[39]. However, he justifies this choice by citing the particularities of mental processes of "knowing" depicted in his works that render a traditionally historical approach impossible. In particular, Xanthos critiques the limitations of traditional conceptions of the human subject. He evokes the notion of *conaissance* while insisting on the Modiano narrative as *mise-en-scène* of this *mode de connaissance*, thus highlighting the narrative of the investigation as a *depiction of ways of knowing*. Interestingly, he envisions the text as a discursive space for the invention of new ways to conceptualize the human. But perhaps one of the most interesting Modiano critiques involving notions of cognition comes from Jens Brockmeier, whose essay "On Failed Understanding" (2016) uses Modiano as a springboard for discussion of the current limitations of contemporary narrative hermeneutics[40]. His central claim is that these frameworks fail to account

38. Excerpted letter from Klarsfeld to Modiano, dated April 3, 1997, republished by Maryline Heck and Christina Lord, "Modiano, Klarsfeld, and Dora: Revisiting a Misunderstanding," in "'Detecting' Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives,", 16.
39. Nicolas Xanthos, "Un sentiment de vacance et d'éternité : "Dora Bruder" contre l'histoire," *MLN* 127, 4 (September 2012).
40. Brockmeier, "On Failed Understanding."

for conceptions of understanding other than that of "one, ideal type: that of successful understanding[41]." Brockmeier alludes to developments in cognitive science that render obsolete previous notions of understanding, by reframing memory as a plastic and emergent medium that operates by incorporating functions such as imagination and interpretation, rather than serving as an encoding device that faithfully transcribes and stores information for future retrieval. He recontextualizes the "failure" of Modiano's detective as an instance of "non-understanding" and argues that to engage with this as a legitimate concept, criticism must overcome the generally accepted reduction of "understanding" as the discovery of truth, positing that a better approach may be one that engages with *processes* of understanding, rather than its outcome. He also frames understanding as "meaning-making," and points to alternative perspectives that are "more sensitive to the narrative dynamic of meaning formation[42]." He wonders, "Where would be the theoretical place, the appropriate hermeneutical anchorage ground, for an exploration of this existential experience[43]?"

NIKLAS LUHMANN'S SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that Niklas Luhmann's theory of society and communication has the potential to constitute such a space. And when examined through the lens of Luhmann's theory, a literary text becomes the site of development of new ways of thinking about the human referenced by Xanthos. Luhmann was a German sociologist who developed a theory of society and communication over the course of several decades, most recently in the 1980s. Although he is relatively well-established throughout the European social sciences, he remains almost unknown

41. Jens Brockmeier, "Guest Editor's Column,", *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies, Narrative Hermeneutics*, special issue, edited by Jens Brockmeier 8, 1 (Summer 2016), xii.
42. Brockmeier, "On Failed Understanding," 91.
43. *Ibid.*, 85.

to American academic circles. While ostensibly situated within the realm of sociology, Luhmann's project was incredibly ambitious and drew on theories from many different disciplines across the sciences and the humanities. It includes the developments in cognitive science referenced by Brockmeier: cognitive theory, systems theory, cybernetic theory, biology, deconstruction, and phenomenology, among others. In fact, his own stated personal ambition was to create a "holistic super-theory" to "deal with every social and societal phenomenon[44]." Originally conceived as a way of understanding the concept of society and its processes of communication, the theory also explains processes of cognition, including perception and sense-making. The theory's wide-ranging scope makes it extremely versatile and applicable, and it has therefore been adapted and adopted by fields ranging from organization and management to family studies to law. It continues to make inroads into various disciplines and is just beginning to make its way into literary studies, though literary scholars have made it clear that his theory has much potential for literary criticism. Bruce Clarke, for example, signals the utility of this theory for narrative studies in his book *Neocybernetics and Narrative, stating*:

> This... line of systems discourse has borne the widest and most promising dissemination beyond the home disciplines of cybernetics, and the most searching theoretical development beyond science proper and into the discursive disciplines. For the kind of work done in the posthumanities, Luhmann's social systems theory in particular represents the second-order line's most thorough unfolding to date[45].

Indeed, its situation at the nexus of communication and sense-making, makes it a promising theory for the study of narrative, especially that involving cognitive processes, such as perception and memory. Luhmann was a notoriously prolific and obtuse

44. Alexander Görke and Armin Scholl, "Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems and journalism research," *Journalism Studies* 7, 4 (2006) : 645.

45. Bruce Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 52-65.

writer; the following is a brief list of the aspects of his theory that are most relevant to reading Modiano.

Luhmann's theory grew out of his frustration, as a social scientist, that no "universal sociological theory" existed and that conducting empirical sociological study required "resignation" to an in-cohesive collection of disparate theories[46]. He rejected what he saw as the dominant notion in the Western sociological tradition that the basic elements of the social system should be "persons or actions" on the grounds that this perspective, rooted in "the humanist tradition" is too reductive and does not account for the actual complexity of society and communications[47]. The breadth of theories that Luhmann draws from, and to which he responds, in the service of creating his own, reflects this high level of complexity. Luhmann scholar Christian Borch notes:

> In Luhmann's case, the complexity is not only a reflection of the variety of social phenomena he analysed (law, politics, science, art, love, economy, etc.). It is just as much a consequence of his specific approach. Thus, rather than merely reinterpreting classical sociological theories such as those put forward by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, Luhmann developed his theoretical framework on a multiplicity of resources from biology, philosophy, mathematics, cybernetics and so-called general systems theory. The interdisciplinary inclusion of this variety of inspirational sources, with which only few social scientists are familiar, has contributed to the highly difficult, if not outright inaccessible, character that many sociologists (rightly) think that Luhmann's work has. However, it was also on the basis of this interdisciplinary approach that Luhmann arrived at some of his most thought-provoking

46. Christian Borch, *Niklas Luhmann* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2; Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. with Dirk Baeker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), xlv.
47. David Seidl and Kai Helge Becker, *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies* (Denmark: CBS Press, 2013), 28; Borch, *Niklas Luhmann*, 137.

> ideas which sought to radically reformulate the foundation of modern sociology[48].

Drawing on theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, with their theoretical criticisms of the humanistic epistemological tradition, and on scientific concepts such as autopoesis, Luhmann begins by removing the human being as the most fundamental and indivisible element of society and replacing it with the systems-theoretical distinction of system-environment. In fact, for Luhmann, the human subject viewed as a unitary, standalone, bounded, integral entity doesn't exist at all. Rather, the most reductive element of his social model is that of *events*, or moments of exchange between systems. A system constitutes any particular entity whose internal operations ensure its continued existence, and anything located outside of that entity constitutes its environment. Both of these elements can be continually re-bounded and redefined. What this means for the human subject is that it is rethought as a plural entity, simultaneously located in multiple systems, and partaking in multiple events. It is also fragmentary: The human subject is not "technically whole, but more or less integrated parts that Luhmann has parcelled [*sic*] out carefully and with precision[49]." A given individual may be understood as constituting a system in and of itself or as participating in the constitution of a larger system or multiple concurrent systems. In this paradigm, a "human subject" becomes a decentralized, plurally located agent, or system, acting in multiple other systems at once, whose operations are its most fundamental and reductive element. Luhmann scholars point out that in his paradigm, the "human" is broadly used as a kind of shorthand for the operations carried out by these systems and the environment in which they function: "Common sense continues to use "person" as a sense-making device to get various kinds

48. Borch, *Niklas Luhmann*, 3.
49. Todd Cesaratto, "Luhmann, All Too Luhmann: Nietzsche, Luhmann and the Human," in *Luhmann Observed: Radical Theoretical Encounters*, Anders La Cour and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 108.

of work done[50]." These operations are largely (but not exclusively) cognitive: To borrow Luhmann's term, the human subject constitutes an *individual psychic system*. Modiano's characters can thus be conceived as Luhmannian psychic systems whose multiple identities and fragmented presentation correspond to their pluralistic nature. Their different identities are contingent on the context in which they find themselves (such as the character Schlemilovitch from Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures*, who, as noted earlier, oscillates between French versus Jewish identities as it suits his needs), much as the pluralistic Luhmannian subject operates concurrently within different larger systems. Furthermore, their status as individuals always "on the move" is indicative of the imminence of Luhmannian systems, which are inherently dynamic[51]. That this multiplicity and fragmentation extends beyond narrative depiction to a way of thinking is supported by Julia Holter in her study on the particularities of the *pensée* of Modiano, who counts "multiplicité fragmentaire" among its essential characteristics[52].

From this starting point of the pluralistic subject/system, Luhmann's theory goes on to develop a notion of cognition. Essentially, a given system is prompted by external stimuli to undergo internal operations as a reaction to that stimulus. In the case of a *cognizing* system, or Luhmann's *individual psychic system*, it is prompted by elements in the material world to undertake internal operations designed to "make sense" of those external elements; the first interaction with these elements can be understood to constitute perception. The process of "making sense" can be broadly defined in the following ways: (1) the environment of any system (e.g. the material world) is one characterized by irreducible complexity. The processes of cognition are designed to make sense by internally reducing or attempting to

50. Stephan Fuchs, "Niklas Luhmann," *Sociological Theory* 17, 1 (March 1999), 117.
51. "His protagonists are (potential) writers, especially if one considers that the role is easy to assume for marginalized people on the move," Prince, "Re-Membering Modiano," 42.
52. Julia Holter, *Le clair-obscur*, 96.

reduce that complexity; in a sense, to create order from disorder. (2) There is no external, objective, "out there" reality; all reality is an individual, internal, subjective construction that is the result of the system's cognitive attempt at reducing complexity. As Luhmann scholar Hans Moeller states, "Reality is not an all-embracing whole of many parts, it is rather a variety of self-producing systemic realities, each of which forms the environment of all the others. There is no common "world" in reality, because reality is in each instance an effect of "individual" systemic autopoeisis[53]." He gives the example of a brain perceiving colors, in which a brain "selects" colors "as information" and from the basis of that information, constructs a "color-world"—no system perceives or constructs in exactly the same way; scientists know for example, that a horse and a fly do not possess the same color senses[54]. (3) Cognition involves the selection of one from among many possibilities, as exemplified by the term "select" in the preceding quote. External to the subject is any number of potentially meaningful items of information; it is up to the cognizing subject to select particular items of information, perceive them, and make sense of them. (4) In this model questions of temporality become moot; while the process of cognition itself may be chronological (perception leads to sense-making), the cognizing system may draw on functions such as memory and imagination as part of its operations. These processes of interaction and cognition repeat themselves endlessly in feedback loops, and thus the system is always imminent, always coming into being, in transition, never fixed, static, preexistent, or predefined[55].

53. Hans-Georg Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 13.
54. *Ibid.*, 69.
55. This summary of these Luhmannian concepts is my own, based on English translations of Luhmann's texts, as well as volumes dedicated to analysis and explanation of Luhmann's work, including Hans-Georg Moeller's *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006); Christian Borch's *Niklas Luhmann* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Claudio Baraldi's, Giancarlo Corsi's, and Elena Esposito's *Unlocking Luhmann: A Keyword Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Katherine Walker (Germany: Bielefeld University Press, 2021); and David Seidl's and Kai Helge Becker's *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Theory* (Denmark: CBS Press, 2013). For explanations of how various threads

So, rather than starting from the presumption that Modiano is depicting a detective who is "seeking the truth," one can begin from the premise that Modiano is portraying processes of cognition enacted by a Luhmannian pluralistic psychic system, in a material world potentially lacking an external, objective, knowable reality. These cognitive processes draw on operations including imagination, memory, and ratiocination, among others, with the objective of making sense of the past, specifically of the historical moment of the Occupation. And then, perhaps, what is really being portrayed in Modiano's detective investigation is not so much a linear quest for truth as the imminent and ongoing *process* of making sense.

In the traditional paradigm, the act of the detective is to produce order from chaos; by finding signs in the material world, he can simplify the occurrences within it to a relatively simple storyline. The detective seeks out these signs, through his interactions within the material world—by collecting "evidence" and interviewing witnesses. The detective must select which of these elements he will use in the service of this simplification, as well as how to interpret them. These undertakings can be understood as the interactions with stimuli in the material world that serve as the catalysts for Luhmannian cognition, as well as the selection of informational possibilities in the service of "making sense." Modiano's detectives carry out the same operations, but notably, Luhmann's model conceptualizes an *attempt* at reducing the complexity, not its realization. Modiano's trademark "frustrating" inconclusiveness resulting from his detective's incapacity to execute this simplification reads as a failure when examined from the perspective of a linear narrative designed to bring the reader to a conclusion. However, the notion of failure is

of humanist criticism within the liberal arts relate to Luhmann's theory, see the works of Cary Wolfe, especially *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) and *Observing Complexity* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

superfluous if one regards the text as a *mise-en-scene* of cognitive processes implicated in the service of making sense, which were never designed to "succeed" at all. Likewise, Luhmann's model of subjective and individual realities negates the existence of an absolute truth, in the service of which the detective investigation cannot therefore be pressed. And in this constructivist pluralistic subjectivity, one can observe the "lack of universality" in Modiano lamented by his Nobel naysayers.

Additionally, conceptualizing the detective investigation as an *ongoing mental process* helps to reconcile issues of temporality in Modiano. "Linear" is often associated with "chronological," as are concepts of historical narrative, and indeed, one of the main objects of inquiry in academic criticism of Modiano is the notion of temporality. Rather than relating the tale of the investigation or its object in the order in which it unfolded, from beginning to end, Modiano's narrators tend to relate events as they consider them or learn about them. Although he evokes precise dates and times with regularity, he presents them to the reader in a manner that renders the task of constructing a coherent timeline difficult, if not impossible. Because his narration often is related in this way, scholars often characterize it as being "in the present[56]." If one considers that what is being related is a continual, ongoing, and emerging process, as opposed to a linear narrative, then such *presentness* of narration is warranted. Furthermore, a mixed narrative temporality may in fact be necessary for an "accurate" depiction of the process of cognition, for these processes are at once a-temporal and chronological: A person can recall an event while simultaneously hypothesizing or embellishing the details. Or a person may first evoke a memory, and subsequently, turn their attention to an observation they are making in the moment. A person may switch between all three—memory, imagination, and observation—concurrently or sequentially. From this perspective, the

56. See, for example, Lynn A Higgins, "Modiano at the Movies." In "'Detecting' Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives,"; and Nordholt, "Par le biais de la fiction."

storyline's fidelity to the exact order of events taking place in the material world in the name of historical accuracy becomes irrelevant, as it is not the events that are being related, but rather the mental process of making sense of them.

Finally, a key operation of cognizing systems in Luhmann's interpretation is that of *observation*[57]. Observation in Luhmann's sense essentially amounts to making a distinction. To observe its environment, a system must make the distinction between itself and its environment. This other-reference is referred to as *first-order observation*. To take it a step further, the system can recognize that it is the entity that makes the distinction, moving from other-reference to self-reference. This is called the "observation of observation" and is known as *second-order observation*. Each level of observation brings a new level of complexity, but does not bring a cognizing system any closer to the "truth" or objective reality, which does not exist. It simply constitutes a further step in the complexity of a cognizing system's processes. Moreover, there is no outside or "third-person" perspective from which an observer can observe. The observer is continually implicated in the process of observing, making distinctions, and, in the case of cognitive operations, making sense; in other words, the observer is necessarily a participant. Furthermore, these operations constitute an individual, constructed reality generated by an individual system. In this model a description of an observation cannot be "innocent;" it is implicated in the construction of a reality, and a second-order observer realizes this. "Observation loses its simplicity—an observer can no longer observe reality without taking into account its very observation as

57. Some of Luhmann's texts dealing explicitly with observation include "Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing," *New Literary History* 24, 4 (Autumn, 1993); "Observing Re-entries," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 16, 2 (1993); and "The Paradoxy of Observing Systems," *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn 1995). He also addresses observation extensively in larger works such as *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), Art as a Social System (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), and in the collection of his translated works edited by William Rasch, *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

a generating element of reality[58]." In this way, observation ensures total subjectivity, since the observer can only conclude what he observes, and only it/he/she can make this conclusion. As no two systems can know or experience that which is contained within another system, the only way to approach something resembling a shared experience is by a relationship of communication, whereby one system approximates its experience to another. Interestingly, as Stephen Fuchs points out, Luhmann cites music and art as one of the few vehicles that allow for the impression of shared experience[59]. All of the aforementioned processes occur in systems not only at the individual level, but also on overlapping or collective levels, the "social" aspect of Luhmann's vision.

Modiano's "eyewitness" accounts serve a much different purpose when considered from this angle. As previously noted, Modiano's witness accounts render the investigation more complex and uncertain, rather than clarifying the situation, precisely as in Luhmann's notion of first and second-order observation and the resultant increase in complexity of operations. The "witness" as "observer" thus becomes implicated in a sense-making, reality-creating narrative that moves progressively further away from reductive conclusiveness. As Fuchs notes, "an observer is anything and anyone that uses distinctions to generate information," not to clarify or simplify[60]. By considering the witness as Luhmannian observer, then, the role of the witness changes from someone whose role is to illuminate the linear path to a preexisting truth to an entity who is implicated in the ongoing creation of (a) subjective reality/ies situated in overlapping orders of complexity. Each witness may be considered as a psychic system participating in the collective process of making sense across larger systems while creating its own reality in turn.

Just as in Luhmann's paradigm of increasing orders of observation (the observation of observation), so too do Modiano's

58. Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, 71.
59. Fuchs, "Niklas Luhmann," 117.
60. *Ibid*.

observers operate in layers of observation. For example, in a passage from *Rue des boutiques obscures*, the protagonist, Guy Roland, has hired a taxi driver to take him to a Russian church, where he hopes to find a certain Styoppa de Dzagorev, who may be able to give him information about his past. Once he arrives at the church, he positions himself across the street, from which vantage point he observes a group of people chatting outside after a funeral. He recounts this observation to the reader, noting that this is an event "que je ne cessais de surveiller[61]." The taxi driver, waiting in his car, also observes the narrator (although he is at least partially distracted by a newspaper), whom he regularly reminds that the taxi is still running. After a (very slow) car chase scene, the narrator finally leaves the taxi driver, who continues to observe the narrator as he departs: "Il m'accompagnait du regard quand je m'engageai à mon tour dans le boulevard Julien-Potin[62]." In this scene, there are also instances of the group observing Guy ("Il me semble que l'homme de haute taille me dévisage avant de s'engager dans l'allée avec les autres"), as well as observations between members of the group ("Stioppa se détachait du groupe, faisait quelques pas et, sans se retourner, agitait le bras. Les autres, figés, le regardaient s'éloigner)[63]." If it is permissible to add an extratextual element to this, it is also possible to consider the reader as an additional level of witness/observer.

Considering a witness as a Luhmannian observer also helps reconcile the question of the Modiano narrator as a historian versus a literary figure. In the Luhmannian framework, the narrator is *expected* to be an active participant in the sense-making process. With its extreme constructivist subjectivity, there is no "outside" perspective from which Modiano's narrator could forge an extradiegetic account, even if he so desired, and thus there can be no expectation of third-person "historical accuracy." The insertion of the narrator's personal experiences, musings, and imaginings into an otherwise "historical" account becomes a natural

61. Modiano, *Rue des boutiques obscures*, 34.
62. *Ibid.*, 38
63. *Ibid.*, 31; 37.

and inevitable part of these processes. That a witness should be implicated as an active participant in processes of sense-making is reinforced by the work of Steffi de Jong in his essay on the link between witness, time, and (Holocaust) history in the book *The Witness as Object: Video Testimonies in Holocaust Museums*. De Jong points out that the Latin and Germanic roots of the word for "witness" and its evolution in both English and German are all related in some way to cognition; denoting (variously) "knowledge," "conscience," "cognizance," and "inner consciousness;" even the Oxford English Dictionary, he notes, gives the (now obsolete) primary definition of the word as "knowledge, understanding, wisdom[64]."

Thus, by reframing the various mental processes evoked in Modiano's texts—making sense, observing, remembering, imagining, and so on—as cognition, this framework allows for a reading of Modiano's detective formula that corresponds to the calls for new perspectives outlined by Xanthos, Brockmeier, Holter, and the Modiano-themed special issue of *Yale French Studies*[65]. It engages with the concepts of history, and memory, and "making sense," while avoiding the binary of literature versus history or the reliance on an essentialist notion of truth. Reading Modiano in this way is further justified by Nettelbeck, who states that ultimately, what counts in Modiano's novels is the quest itself, and not the resolution, and in particular the fact that the quest allows for a personal, internal "reorientation" of external reality that results in a "constructed" reality that is more accessible and reliable[66]. Here once more we can see the idea of "reduction of complexity" that constitutes sense-making as understood by Luhmann. Furthermore, the notion of imminence is reinforced by Modiano himself, who states that his book is constantly emerging, for "chaque nouveau livre, au moment de l'écrire, efface le précédent au point que j'ai l'impression de

64. Steffi de Jong, *The Witness as Object: Video Testimonies in Holocaust Museums* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 34.
65. Golsan and Higgins, "'Detecting' Patrick Modiano: New Perspectives".
66. Nettelbeck, "Jardinage dans les ruines," 29.

l'avoir oublié," and he seems to support the notion of text as a site of cognitive processing as reality creation when he says, "L'imagination [du romancier], loin de déformer la réalité, doit la pénétrer en profondeur et révéler cette réalité à elle-même:" the "à elle-même" or "to itself" at the end invoking the self-distinction of second-order observation[67].

Conceived thusly, Modiano's detective investigations serve precisely as the sort of textual discursive spaces for new conceptualizations of understanding referenced by Brockmeier and Xanthos. And that Modiano directs his sense-making processes at the Occupation is no mistake. His texts are at once the space where processes of cognition are enacted and the written record of its operations: It is making sense through narrative, as well as the narrative of making sense. The need for precisely just a space to generate new understandings of the Holocaust is voiced by Marianne Hirsch in the introduction to her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, for "the bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which trauma can recall, or reactivate, the effects of another, exceed the bounds of traditional methodologies and historical archives[68]." As Hirsch points out, the current generation, which includes Modiano, is situated in a liminal state between those who have lived through the events firsthand and those who must become the gatekeepers and transmitters of these events: they straddle the threshold between "guardianship" and "living connection[69]." It is therefore the responsibility of this generation to engage "urgently and passionately" with this subject[70]. And if engaging with this subject is a human and cultural imperative, then Modiano's detective investigations can be situated in the broader global and collective project of "making sense" of this particular historical event.

67. Modiano, Conférence Nobel.
68. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2.
69. *Ibid*., 1.
70. *Ibid*., 2.