

## 7 The Hybrid Nature of Autobiography: James Ellroy's *The Hilliker Curse* Rethought as a Deleuzian Rhizome

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*A book itself is a little machine; [...] But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.*

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 4)

### 7.1 What is Ellroy's Literary Machine Plugged Into?

James Ellroy's life and literary work are pervaded by a very special dynamism: a strong desire – an obsession – that can be traced back to an event in his early childhood: the unsolved murder of his mother Geneva Hilliker when he was 10 years old. This desire not only fuels many of his fictional works, but is also the main focus of his two autobiographies: *The Hilliker Curse* (2010) and *My Dark Places* (1996). The murder of Ellroy's mother can also be seen as a “rupture” in terms of Deleuzian rhizomatics, a philosophy Deleuze developed together with his writing partner Félix Guattari in their seminal (“anticultural”) book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1993). This is also the theory on which I will base my analysis of Ellroy's autobiography *The Hilliker Curse*, that is, schizoanalysis, the method Deleuze and Guattari apply in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Arguing that theirs is an “analysis of desire,” they note that it is both practical and political in nature (1993, 203).

In order to understand why I chose this particular method and why I find it especially suited for approaching autobiographical writing, we need to take a closer look at some of the main concepts from the theory of rhizomatics. Let us first address the term “desire” in connection with Ellroy's writing, since I consider it to be a crucial element in understanding the intricate connection between his life and his work. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the best way to approach a book that is mapping (a) desire is by means of schizoanalysis. In the context of *A Thousand Plateaus* “desire moves and produces” by way of or in the form of a rhizome: “Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs” (1993, 14).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We will return to this quotation in the final section, as this statement has particular significance in regard to the rhizomatic nature of Ellroy's two autobiographies: does his desire still stir, move, produce (at the end of his second autobiography) or does it become stagnant?

Because the concept is so crucial for this volume, we can ask again, *What is a rhizome?* A rhizome is an acentric, non-hierarchical system<sup>2</sup> that “connects any point to any other point” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 21) and has “neither beginning nor end, but is always in the middle, between things, from where it grows; it is an interbeing, intermezzo” (1993, 263). The rhizome morphs, changing in “dimension” and “necessarily [...] in nature as well” (1993, 8). It is made of three types of lines or “lineaments” (1993, 21): lines of segmentarity and stratification (territorialization and reterritorialization lines, also molar lines) which chart its dimensions, and lines of flight or deterritorialization (here Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between molecular lines and lines of flight).<sup>3</sup> These lines can alternatively be called break line, crack line and rupture line.<sup>4</sup> The function of deterritorializations<sup>5</sup> is defined as “the movement by which one leaves a territory”, although it still also constitutes and extends the territory itself. Deterritorialization lines are the most important lines in a rhizome: they make (or better, keep) the rhizome an open system.<sup>6</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari also liken the rhizome to a “map”, which is “not a tracing”; the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” and “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (1993, 12). To this they connect perhaps the most important characteristic of the rhizome, which is that it has multiple entry points.

They contrast the rhizome with the arborescent, hierarchical, centred system, in which “the channels of transmission are pre-established and they preexist the individual, who is integrated into it at an allotted place” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 16). This statement infers the existence (to a certain extent) of

- 2 It can be found in nature in the plant and animal world in the form of subterranean stems of potato, couchgrass or weed, and the burrows of rabbits, foxes and rats (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 21).
- 3 They define molecular lines as finer segmenting lines, which are “already ferrying their micro-black holes” (1993, 506) and the line of flight as “the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature” (1993, 21).
- 4 These are terms that Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 200) borrowed from Scott Fitzgerald. They connect them to their own classification of molar lines, molecular lines and lines of flight. The line of rigid segmentarity has molar breaks; the line of supple segmentation has molecular cracks; the line of flight or rupture is nonsegmentary. The molecular cracks are subtle and occur “when things are going well on the other side” (the molar line) and you do not notice it on the other line until after ‘it’ has already happened on this line (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 199).
- 5 Deterritorialization can also be described as any process that decontextualises a set of relations, rendering them virtual and preparing them for more distant actualizations. As an example of a line of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the “refrain” or rhythm as a means of escaping from and forming new territories, or even existing in a process of continual deterritorialization, what they call “consistency”: “Music is precisely the adventure of the refrain: the way the music lapses back into a refrain [...], the way it lays hold of the refrain, makes it more and more sober, reduced to a few notes, then takes it down a creative line that is so much richer, no origin or end of which is in sight” (1993, 302).
- 6 An open system is a system that has external interactions. Such interactions can take the form of information, energy, or material transfers into or out of the system boundary. An open system is contrasted with the concept of an isolated system, which exchanges neither energy, matter, nor information with its environment (cf. Luhmann, 1995, 6–7).

pre-established goals, and strategies for achieving them; the evolution is directed from the least to the most differentiated element, because arborescent systems are governed by the principle of imitation and the production of or through filiation.<sup>7</sup> An arborescent system most certainly gives the impression of a greater stability and – at least on the surface – seems to be more rewarding as a model of thought on which to base one’s life. Goals are relatively clear and recognizable in terms of points to be reached. And that inspires a kind of optimism as it seems to make life easier, but the fact that the goals are relatively clear and recognizable has a downside, too: when a desired point cannot be reached, frustration sets in and the clarity of direction and the goal become replaced by the oppressive feeling of stasis.

A rhizome, on the other hand, operates immediately in the heterogeneous, following the principle of alliance. It does not progress from the less to the more differentiated elements, but jumps from one already differentiated line to another. No goal is prefixed or even recognizable. The next move is not pre-existent, pre-thought, pre-written by the system. Such structuring grants great freedom; however, it is also scary and – in a different sense – frustrating, because it infers endlessness and lack of purpose, which are concepts quite foreign to Western thought.

Deleuze and Guattari use many synonyms (or near synonyms) for “rhizome” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, among others multiplicity (1993, 8) and becoming (1993, 237–239). They say becoming does not equal a progression (regression); it is neither a resemblance to nor an imitation of something,<sup>8</sup> nor is it an eventual identification with something; it is not a production of anything. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. Becoming is a rhizome.<sup>9</sup> They also argue that “[w]hen desire climbs a tree, internal repercussions trip it up and it falls to its death” (1993, 14). By “climb[ing] a tree” they mean succumbing to the logic of the arborescent system. The rhizome, on the other hand, “acts on desire by external, productive outgrowths” (ibid.) and allows it to keep moving and producing (more of itself).

7 The OED defines “filiation” as “the fact of being the child of a particular parent or parents: *relationships based on ties of filiation as opposed to marriage*” (*Oxford Dictionaries*, “filiation”).

8 A very famous and recurring example that Deleuze and Guattari give in explanation of the rhizome and the becoming is the one of the wasp and the orchid (1993, 10). They explain that the orchid deterritorializes by forming an image of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is also deterritorialized, in that it becomes a piece in the orchid’s reproductive system. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. “Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome” (ibid.). They further explain that this is not a case of the orchid imitating the wasp or vice versa, but that “something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp” (ibid.).

9 They speak of different kinds of becoming and even establish a kind of hierarchy of becoming: becoming-child, becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, becoming-imperceptible/ clandestine, becoming everybody-everything, becoming-world (1993, 232–310).

Deleuze and Guattari ascribe a special position to American literature, which must include the author James Ellroy. In it they see manifested a greater rhizomatic direction than in European literature; the American authors “know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings” (1993, 25). This was an additional reason for me to apply the rhizomatic, schizanalytic perspective to James Ellroy’s autobiographies.

There are several important questions one should attempt to answer when using the method of schizanalysis (in our case on a book), such as: What lines are there (in the rhizome)? What map is the book making and/or rearranging? Is the author deterritorialising? What are his lines of flight? What is he becoming? These questions (and specifically the question of what Ellroy is becoming – through and via writing – in the wake of the tragedy that he experienced in his childhood) will be answered in the last section of this chapter.

The question regarding Ellroy’s literary machine in the title of this chapter, however, can preliminarily be answered as follows: his “literary machine” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 4) as well as his life, have been primarily plugged into the “crime machine” (1993, 242).<sup>10</sup> In addition to that we can also observe an assemblage<sup>11</sup> with the love machine. Ellroy’s desire is directed toward an empty space, the missing mother that he can never again reconnect with, and her death that triggered his “becoming” (1993, 9–10) – this is what drives his “love machine”.

## 7.2 Autobiography and its Contemporary Incarnations

Before I focus on the rhizomatic method and its connection to hybridity, a brief outline of the field of autobiography must be provided. It is a hard task to define the text type (or literary genre, as it is usually referred to in English terminology) of autobiography, in my opinion mainly because it is a hybrid genre. I will define the concept of hybridity in connection to literature, the way I understand it, in the following section. So for now, let us just say that the word “hybrid” has developed from biological and botanical origins and that its

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari never really define the term “machine”; they give many examples of many different machines, they write at great length about the “war-machine” (1993, 351–424), but they do not clearly define it. The closest they come to identifying it is likening it to a “multiplicity” (1993, 36–37).

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 36) define assemblage as follows: “For the moment, we will note that assemblages have elements (or multiplicities) of several kinds: human, social, and technical machines, organised molar machines; molecular machines with their particles of becoming-inhuman.” A literary machine creates the assemblage of literature.

modern use refers mainly to a juxtaposition (usually without transitions) of two or more unlike elements.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally, autobiography (in the broader sense of the word)<sup>13</sup> refers to life writing. More specifically (as a literary genre) it signifies a retrospective, autodiegetic narrative that undertakes to tell the author's own life, or a substantial part of it, based on memory. It aims to reconstruct a person's development within a given historical, social and cultural context. While autobiography on the one hand claims to be non-fictional (factual) "in that it proposes to tell the story of a 'real' person, it is inevitably constructive, or imaginative, in nature and a form of textual 'self-fashioning'" (Schwalm, 2014, 14).<sup>14</sup>

In accordance with Lejeune's theory of the autobiographical pact, autobiography is an institutionalised communicative act, in which author and reader enter into a particular contract – the "autobiographical pact": "Autobiography supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author, the narrator of the story and the character who is being talked about" (Lejeune, 1988, 12). The author's proper name refers to a singular autobiographical-identity, which identifies author, narrator and protagonist as one, and suggests a decoding of the text as autobiography. If the identity of names is missing or if the perspective is not autodiegetic, it suggests a different kind of decoding (in the sense of autofiction<sup>15</sup> or autobiographical novel).

An interesting question is also who the autobiography is written for, whom it addresses. Any act of autobiographical communication addresses another person, somebody else, by constructing a narratee, a "fictive addressee" (see Schmid, 2003, 79), "who may be part of the self, a 'Nobody', an individual person, the public, or God as supreme Judge" (Schwalm, 2014, 16). At the same time, autobiography stages the self in relation to others on the level of narrative. These others (personal models or important figures in one's life story) and the relationships the self has

12 The OED defines "hybrid" as follows: "1 *Biology* The offspring of two plants or animals of different species or varieties, such as a mule (a hybrid of a donkey and a horse): *the bird was a hybrid of a goose and a swan*; 2 A thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture: *the final text is a hybrid of the stage play and the film*" (*Oxford Dictionaries*, "hybrid"). Young (1995, 6) writes, that "a few examples of this word occur early in the seventeenth century; but it was scarcely in use until the nineteenth", 'hybrid' is the nineteenth century's word. But it has become our own again. In the nineteenth century, it was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one. [...] The word's first philological use, to denote 'a composite word formed of elements belonging to different languages', dates from 1862."

13 Autobiography in the broader sense of the word refers to one of the two main genres within the broader field of life writing, life narrative, which are biography and autobiography. In both genres we find texts that have either a more literary or a more sociological focus and can manifest themselves both as writing or as speech. In the narrow sense of the word autobiography means specifically the literary genre, in which life experience is aestheticised (to various extents) (cf. Jolly, 2001).

14 This constructive, imaginative aspect is directly linked to its poeticity, its literarization and aestheticization .

15 In autofiction an author may decide to recount his/her life in the third person, to modify significant details or 'characters', using storytelling techniques of fiction.

with them can be present in the narrative to a varying degree, up to the point where the boundaries between auto- and heterobiography are effectively erased. In a heterobiography a life narrative is not “the bounded story of the unique, individuated narrating subject”, but rather a “routing of a self known through its relational others” (cf. Smith and Watson, 2001, 67).

Dilthey (2002, 221–222) considers autobiography the supreme form of the “understanding of life”. Understanding, according to Dilthey, also involves fitting the individual parts into a coherent, meaningful whole, ascribing interconnection and causality, giving it sense (“Sinn”). This automatically suggests an underlying binary, hierarchical tree-structure and the presence of a strong molar line (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 512), which discerns between selected moments that are in retrospect awarded special significance and relevance for the entire life course; the author has the superior position of the interpreter. But that is the case only in the classic version of autobiography. The contemporary notion of autobiography has shifted from a literary genre to a broad range of cultural practices that draw on and incorporate a multitude of textual modes and genres.<sup>16</sup> Autobiography ultimately resists a clear distinction from its fictional relatives (autofiction), leaving the generic borderlines blurred.

Memory is the key element in autobiographical literature. Which type of memory is at work in it? At the core of the cognitive-based definition of autobiography (which is also the one I ground my approach on) is the concept of autobiographical memory. The development of autobiographical memory is directly linked to language, as language is the medium that enables the symbolic exchange and externalisation of experience, and thus creates the possibility of positioning oneself in relation to others (Markowitsch and Welzer, 2006, 28–34). It also allows us to imagine ourselves beyond the immediate present.<sup>17</sup> Autobiographical memory is social<sup>18</sup> because it is a fixed point in the fluctuation of roles and situations, which offers to oneself and others the assurance that one remains (and will remain) the same *self* throughout. This spatio-temporal sameness defines the so-called autobiographical position that reflects the dual

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16 By 2010, Smith and Watson distinguish between sixty “Genres of Life Narrative” (2015, 253–268), based on a combination of formal and semantic features (e.g. narratives of migration, immigration or exile, narratives engaging in ethnic identity and community, prison narratives, illness, trauma and coming-out narratives, as much as celebrity memoirs, graphic life writing and forms of internet self-presentation).

17 The child learns to discern between the past, present and future between the ages 3 to 5, a phase that – in Western culture – coincides with the so-called infantile amnesia; in other words it has to do with adults’ inability to retrieve episodic memories, i.e. memories of specific events (times, places, associated emotions, and other contextual who, what, when, and where) before the ages of 2 to 4 (cf. Robinson-Riegler, 2012, 272–276).

18 Furthermore, autobiographical memory is a social competence insofar as we develop it in communication with others by means of “memory talk” (Nelson, 2004) and “conversational remembering” (Middleton, 1997).

structural core of the autobiographical self and the first person pronoun that represents it (see also Ricœur, 1992).

Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 16) offer an interesting perspective in connection with the type of memory that is at work in (life) writing. They point out the difference between long-term and short-term memory, which is not simply quantitative because the two types of memories do not grasp the same thing in different ways. “Short-term memory is of the rhizome or diagram type, and long-term memory is arborescent and centralised (imprint, engram, tracing, or photograph)” (1993, 16). Deleuze and Guattari do not define short-term memory in terms of a “law of contiguity or immediacy to its object” as most do, but describe it as discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity, which can act at a distance or return a long time after the event. Short-term memory is the mode connected to writing, and long-term memory is at work during the process of reading. Short-term memory also includes forgetting as a process: “it merges not with the instant but instead with the nervous, temporal, and collective rhizome” (ibid.) So when writing and living coincide, either in the sense of true temporal parallelism (diaries) or subsequently

– when writing reconstructs living (as is the case in autobiography) – we have a very special situation in regard to the type of memory that is active in the process. Writing requires forgetting, which creates holes (ruptures) in the timeline and sabotages the intent of the long-term (also molar) memory to reterritorialize; molar memory (which is bound to molar entities of family, race, society, or civilization) is a punctual system.<sup>19</sup> The rhizome (to which short-term memory is connected) on the other hand, is a line-system, in which lines do not link or conjugate points – they pass between them.<sup>20</sup> This passing-between constitutes the opposite of arborescence. It is also the opposite of the point-system of (long-term) memory, and this is why such memory is “antimemory”. That would mean that the rhizome *is* antimemory. This is somewhat confusing as they link the rhizome to both the short-term memory and the antimemory, but there is a connection via forgetting, which is an integral part of short-term memory.<sup>21</sup>

19 Deleuze and Guattari explain the punctual system of long-term memory as follows: “Memory has a punctual organization because every present refers simultaneously to the horizontal line of the flow of time (kinematics), which goes from an old present to the actual present, and the vertical line of the order of time (stratigraphy), which goes from the present to the past, or to the representation of the old present” (1993, 295).

20 For instance, in the wasp and orchid example they write, “The line does not link the wasp to the orchid, anymore than it conjugates or mixes them: it passes between them, carrying them away in a shared proximity in which the discernibility of points disappears” (1993, 293).

21 This type of confusion is quite common in *A Thousand Plateaus* as Deleuze and Guattari do not provide stable definitions in it; by this I mean that the definitions change from chapter (plateau) to chapter (plateau), and some terms remain completely undefined. Instead, they offer a series of examples from which a definition is supposed to arise somehow. In addition to that they do not claim that their concepts are scientific (1993, 22). They go as far as to virtually deny a definition (1993, 294): “Wherever we used the word ‘memories’ in the preceding pages, we were wrong to do so; we meant to say ‘becoming’, we were saying ‘becoming’.”

Deleuze and Guattari consider rhizomatic writing to be connected to short-term memory and antimemory.<sup>22</sup> What about the autobiographical memory (and autobiography)? Is it connected more to short-term memory (antimemory) or does it also bear some characteristics of long-term memory? It is definitely more connected to short-term memory, as forgetting figures so prominently in it; one individual's memory has a more confined perspective and it is less verifiable and more connected to the process of writing/speaking (and not to reading/listening).

### 7.3 The Interspace: The Rhizome and Hybridity

Hybridity is in my opinion closely linked to the rhizome as understood and defined (in their very own, rhizomatic manner) by Deleuze and Guattari. The two terms are not (entirely) synonymous, but they are interrelated in a complex manner. The rhizome can be seen as that which produces the hybrid, but on the other hand the process of hybridization (as merging of heterogeneous elements) is the key aspect of rhizome-building.

Both words are borrowed from biology and both denote something anomalous, something that propels change and forms (or is part of) a system that is very different from the one that governs Western (and arguably worldwide) thought, namely, the arborescent (centralised, hierarchical, binary) one.

But let us first review how the term hybridity is understood and applied in the context of literary theory and writing in general, so we can better discern the connecting points that it has with the concept of the rhizome and lastly also with the text type of autobiography.

#### 7.3.1 What are Hybrid Text Types?

The term hybrid text is understood in many different ways in the context of various subdisciplines<sup>23</sup> of both linguistics and literary theory (and beyond)<sup>24</sup>. In literary

22 As an example of true rhizomatic writing they (among others) name Virginia Woolf and her novel *The Waves* (1993, 292), which is not an autobiography, but bears resemblance to autofiction. They claim that the memory, by and with which that book (that writing) operates, is "molecular memory" and it too is not completely independent from the molar memory. But because the molecular components are connected to it via deterritorialization, the molar memory is not really governing them. This level of becoming is rarely reached, but there are many stages in-between (the arborescent writing and rhizomatic writing), which are also noteworthy as they are signs of an (un/conscious) struggle against arborescence.

23 Interestingly, the term hybrid was first used to describe a linguistic phenomenon and was only later transferred to literary and cultural contexts, which indicates a close connection between linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies in regard to the phenomenon of hybridity.

24 In translation studies, for example, a hybrid text is defined as "a text that results from a translation process". A typically linguistic concept of hybridity sees hybrid texts as particular instances of bimodal (for instance, verbal and visual) materials (cf. Baptista et al., 2011).



theory, for example, there is talk of the so-called hybrid narrative<sup>25</sup> which refers to texts that are a mix, a blend of two or several literary genres and/or forms, and marked by characteristics like non-linearity, fragmentation, segmentation and a threaded, braided structure. Two aspects that have been most discussed in literary theory in regard to hybrid text types are the process of *writing as a way of living* (in connection with the fixation and production of memories) and the question of the *aestheticisation of existence* – both aspects can be surmised in the concept of text as an existential category (see Fabčić, 2003). Text types that are traditionally considered hybrid (especially the travel essay, the diary, the autobiography, etc.) are specifically suited to express the aestheticisation of existence, since they are on the one hand bound to the objective reality, and on the other hand they strive to heighten and augment it. This *copying* with life, with the objective reality, the jump from perception to understanding, can also take on the form of writing, of text production – this is the main subject and motif of all autobiographical literature. One copes with life by writing (it), and life and writing come the closest in the text type of the diary, which is fundamentally life being written parallel to living it (see Fabčić, 2003, 145–148).

The key question in defining hybrid texts seems to be one of decoding: should they be decoded referentially (as factual texts) or as fictional texts? Factual texts, specifically factual narrations (like biographies, autobiographies or chronicles) describe a certain incident while raising a claim to reality and “referentiability”. They are to be understood as narrative models of reality. But even though factual narrations are not about fictitious figures, things and events, they can have their own poeticity.<sup>26</sup> Assmann (1980, 14) states that reality itself proves to be insufficient for literary processing and that with the help of “interpretive connections and the creation of correlations”, the “deficiency of the given” is being rounded up.<sup>27</sup> The *literarisation* of a factual narration often happens through staging (or better, re-staging), that is, re-organizing of elements that are in themselves factual; this leads to a reconstruction of the empirical world. Fictional texts, however, are “part of a real communication, in which a real author [...] produces sentences that are being read by a real reader” (Klein and Martínez 2009, 2), without (directly) referring to

25 The term is used mainly in connection with nonfiction writing, although the results of it are viewed as literary forms, as *literary hybrids*.

26 I understand poeticity in the sense of cognitive psychology and cognitive poetics as a quality of discourse, of language use, in general. “Verbal signs function poetically whenever verbal processes activate nonverbal (visual, acoustic) ones, so that a balance between the two or a predominance of the nonverbal over the verbal is achieved” (cf. Sándor, 1989, 299).

27 The other reason for the *literarization* of reality in factual narrations is the fact that it is impossible to portray the totality of just one single moment, thus creating the necessity to select (moments) in order to “transfer a confusing and insignificant entropy into a meaningful entity by the principle of selection” (Sándor, 1989, 299).

real people, places, events. The act of fictionalising is actually the as-if-movement of thought, an act of imagining, which results in a text world that is never a complete equivalent of the empirical world, regardless of whether we are observing and analysing literary, hybrid or factual texts (see Iser, 1991, 43). Both have or can have a (gradually expressed) literaricity. The factual and fictional do not represent a binary opposition, as the fictional is connected with the real via manifold interrelations. The fictional should rather be seen as another perspective of reality, which is, however, always based on this reality (cf. Iser 1991, 18–51). The distinction between factual and fictional texts is therefore inherently vague. Hybrid texts belong to the in-between space: they are a blend of factual and fictional elements in a way that enhances their complexity and demands a more active and creative decoding. The aforementioned factual narrations are in my opinion hybrid texts (in this case: neither factual, nor fictional). Some authors (especially narratologists)<sup>28</sup> consider them to be factual texts, but I believe they fit much better in the inter-space of hybrid texts.

From the perspective of radical constructivism it can be said that the aesthetic approach is part of every human conception of reality since the human perception system acts in a constructive, and not a reconstructive manner (cf. Dettmann 1999, 123). The aestheticisation<sup>29</sup> is not an attempt to embellish the reality but rather an epistemological instrument. This view can be traced back to Konrad Fiedler and his statement that art is a sphere of knowledge and that it is unjustly reduced to striving for beauty as the main goal. Art is not a representation but a production of reality; the cognition of reality can in a sense be equated to the production of reality. And if we take a closer look, the production, the constitution of reality, reveals itself to be an aesthetic process (cf. Fiedler 1996, 36–37). As stated, my approach to text types and specifically hybrid text types is cognitive-based. I see hybrid texts, as well as the categories below the text level, their building blocks (figures of thought and their realizations on the mezzo and micro levels of texts) as modalities of thinking, which more often than not coincide with the metaphorical modality (see Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, 12) or metonymical modality of thinking. My definition (Fabčič, 2016, 141) of hybrid texts or text types therefore distances itself from the traditional distinction made between literary and non-literary texts; it is not based solely on the criterion of a gradually emerging literariness and aestheticism (although both elements can be found in the rhizome of a hybrid text). It instead postulates an underlying rhizomatic structure<sup>30</sup> of said texts, an affinity

28 Cf. Schaeffer, 2013.

29 Which is in fact used synonymously with literarization and poeticity in this context.

30 Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new centre to the new periphery, falling back to the old centre and launching forth to the new (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 53).

toward a theming and imitating<sup>31</sup> of the perception process, in order to achieve a parallelism of perception and thinking. All of these elements are present in Ellroy's autobiographies.

### 7.3.2 Are "Rhizome" and "Hybrid" Synonyms?

The terms "rhizome" and "rhizomatic" are prominent in Deleuzian philosophy; they describe an open system that works with planar and trans-species connections and allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation, which is extraordinarily rich and complex (see Smith and Protevi, 2015). The planar, horizontal connections of the rhizome are what makes it similar to *hybrids* and hybridization, which is also known (in biology) as horizontal gene transfer. Hybridization is described as the transfer of genetic material from an organism to a being other than one of its own offspring (the opposite of filiation and hereditary reproduction, which are based on vertical gene transfer). As such, it is a source of new genes and functions to the recipient of the transferred genetic material. In this sense, hybridization is a mechanism that permits the acquisition of evolutionary novelties (see Boto, 2010, 819). Horizontal gene transfer therefore contradicts the neo-Darwinian conception of a gradualist process driving the appearance of novel traits and functions. Another concept that is connected to hybridity is mutualism, in which two different species interact together to form a multiplicity (i.e. a unity that is multiple in itself). And multiplicity is, of course, also a term that features prominently in Deleuzian philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 242) mention the hybrid in the context of discussing bands and packs: "Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. Like hybrids, which are in themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much more ground." Hybridization is not "filiative production or hereditary reproduction" and neither is the rhizome; they work by *alliance*. Instead of filiation there is infection, contagion, which involves entirely heterogeneous elements (for instance, human – bacteria, human – vampire, wasp – orchid) which result in

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze suggests a different term for imitating, namely, becoming (1993, 272).

<sup>32</sup> As already stated, "multiplicity" is a term that is sometimes used as synonymous with "rhizome," but more precisely: the rhizome is a type of multiplicity; there also exists an arborescent, molar one. The molar multiplicity is countable and is subordinated to the One; it consists of molar lines that are "subordinated to the point; the diagonal is subordinated to the horizontal and vertical; the line forms a contour, whether figurative or not; the space it constitutes is one of striation." Molar lines form a segmentary, circular, binary, arborescent system". The rhizomatic multiplicity is very different; Deleuze and Guattari also call it "molecular". In it "the diagonal frees itself, breaks or twists. The line no longer forms a contour, and instead passes between things, between points. It belongs to a smooth space." This multiplicity is "no longer subordinated to the One, but takes on a consistency of its own" (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 505).

combinations that are “neither genetic nor structural”, but “interkingdoms”. Rhizome is alliance, trees are filiations. “The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’, but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and’... This conjunction carries enough forces to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be’ [...]”. So alliance can be seen as a connection that is based on (additive) conjunction, which propels the horizontal spreading (of the rhizome) in space. This planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and the organisational structure of the arborescent system. It does not look for causality along chronological lines in search of the origin of things and neither is it focused on the pinnacle or conclusion. It is favouring a nomadic (hy-brid) system of growth and propagation.

A rhizome is made of plateaus. Gregory Bateson<sup>33</sup> uses the word “plateau” to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end. Rather, the plateau of intensity is a goal-in-itself, a situation of constant evolution and becoming. In rhizomes, conflict and pleasure are maintained together; conflict does not build, but is expressed and released.<sup>34</sup> Deleuze and Guattari ground their concepts (and theory) of rhizomes and plateaus in Bateson’s ruminations. They consider the rhizome to be suitable to serve not only as a model of the world, history, culture, knowledge, etc., but also as a model of the book, for a book.

*A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, is written in a non-linear fashion,<sup>35</sup> and the reader is invited to move among plateaus in any order. One can indeed read (and keep reading) the book in this exact manner, always taking a different path through it and always arriving at (at least slightly) different conclusions, but sometimes the book “forces” one into a corner, as it offers contradictory definitions and opinions. But that is, in fact, part of schizoanalysis.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the barrier between observer and observed is blurred: “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world)

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33 Bateson (1972, 113) cites Balinese culture as an example: mother-child sexual games, and even quarrels among men, undergo this bizarre intensive stabilization. “Some sort of continuing plateau of intensity is substituted for [sexual] climax,” war, or a culmination point.

34 Bateson (1972) sees the characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value, as something regrettable. He further claims that social conflicts (in the arborescent system of the Western culture) tend to build to a point of release, which he calls “schismogenesis”, that is, the creation and emergence of schisms between groups.

35 Even though they define the rhizome as a linear (more precisely: multilinear or superlinear) system in opposition to a punctual system (1993, 295), linearity is not understood as succession on a single line or a hierarchy of lines, but as an assemblage of lines.

36 Deleuze elaborates on the function of theory and concepts in a conversation with Michel Foucault in 1972 which was first published in 1980 in the book *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* by Michel Foucault. He says that the tracing of concepts (and the so-called long-term concepts) is something to be avoided at all cost; concepts must change (in true nomadic nature); they must not add up to a system of belief that you either enter and accept, or you do not, they are to be seen as a “toolbox”.

and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author).” Instead, “an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders” (1993, 23). A rhizome-book<sup>37</sup> is in an assemblage with the outside, as opposed to the book as image of the world. “The outside has no image, no signification, no subjectivity.” To come close to it means to understand the contemporary world as an assemblage of more and more de-regulated flows of energy, matter, ideas and actions (see Smith and Protevi, 2015).

All the aforementioned aspects of the rhizome (the blending of the observer and the observed, assemblage with the world, multiple entry points) can be observed in what literary theory calls hybrid texts.

In analogy to the question “Who does the earth think it is?” that Smith and Protevi (2015) offer as an illustration for the Deleuzian approach to re-thinking the system of knowledge in a rhizomatic manner, we ask the question: Who does this book (*The Hilliker Curse*) think it is? A rhizomatic autobiography has a fluid and even reversible chronology, which means we have leaps from a point (in time) to a point without there being a connecting line and without identifying the (real) point of origin. It does not attempt to retrace a life, but to draw a map of it, starting from whichever point in said life. As there are two autobiographies that I will analyse in broad strokes, we can in fact speak of two maps with different entry points, but covering (nearly) the same time span. I maintain that neither is really directed toward a conclusion, a goal, as it is very clear from the start that the (obvious) goal is unreachable by default. Like a true rhizome that is always in the middle, in-between dimensions of time and reality,<sup>38</sup> a rhizomatic autobiography will aim at reaching a plane of consistency, of immanence. It does not seek catharsis, but rather searches for another kind of *aliveness*, not one that is connected to a singular peak, a pinnacle, after which no becoming is possible, but one that maintains a (relatively) constant level of intensity.

#### 7.4 From *My Dark Places* to *The Hilliker Curse*: the Plateaus of Ellroy’s Autobiography

As already pointed out, Deleuze and Guattari consider American books and their conception to be different from European books (1993, 19). They link it to the

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37 Or, rather, should be, as there are very few texts that come close to a true rhizome-book; most have some rhizome-features and can therefore be called rhizomatic, but are still not a *bona fide* rhizome-book, including *A Thousand Plateaus*, for which the authors say that it did not completely succeed in becoming that (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 24).

38 Smith and Protevi (2015) speak of the rhizome in terms of a system that is a more or less stable set of processes moving in different directions toward actuality and toward virtuality, without ever reaching either one, as these two ontological registers do not exist, but they do “insist” (Deleuze, 1966, 22).

reversal of Occident (arborescent structure) and Orient (rhizomatic structure) that takes place in America and especially in American literature: their West is rhizo-

matic and their East is arborescent in nature. They claim that in America there is a reversal of directions: the search for arborescence occurs in the East, and the West is rhizomatic, “with its Indians without ancestry, its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers. There is a whole American ‘map’ in the West, where even the trees form rhizomes” (1993, 19).

Ellroy’s LA (which he depicts in 13 of his 16 books) is right there, inside or, better, within the American rhizome. Los Angeles was and remains his travelling ground in the sense of a “voyage in place,”<sup>39</sup> “nomadic transit in smooth space”<sup>40</sup> (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 483). The voyage in place or the smooth voyage is (in Ellroy’s case) one that happens by way of thinking, a spiritual voyage, if you will (effected without relative movement, but in intensity), and it is a difficult, uncertain becoming.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 203),<sup>41</sup> the highest level of rhizomatic writing implies that the writer opens “his lines of writing to life lines”<sup>42</sup>, which means that the “lines” of his life are constantly transforming themselves and cross-ing over into the “lines of writing.” The lines which constitute a becoming can be imposed on us from the outside or sprout up by chance, without a recognizable reason. And the third kind of lines must be invented, effectively drawn in our lives: these are the lines of flight. We may be more interested in a certain line than in others, and perhaps there is indeed one that is – not determining but – of greater importance. In Ellroy’s case that is the Geneva Hilliker line.

Let us touch upon some of the defining points of autobiography in connection to James Ellroy’s autobiographies. Who are the fictive addressees of *My Dark Places* and *The Hilliker Curse*? The first addressee is no doubt Ellroy himself, but the second one is someone who also constitutes a key figure in his life narratives and will never be able to read them: his mother, Geneva Hilliker. Are they autobiographies

39 Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 403) differentiate between movement, which is extensive, and speed, which is intensive. “Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as “one,” and which goes from point to point; speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex, with the possibility of springing up at any point.

40 Smooth space is heterogeneous, a field without conduits or channels, not observable from a point in space external to it (an example of this is the system of sounds, or even of colours, as opposed to Euclidean space). “[...] it is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without “counting” it and can “be explored only by legwork” (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 393).

41 Which I consider to be a very fitting definition of autobiographical writing, especially in reference to modern autobiography.

42 They have nothing to do with language; they mean nothing – they are an element of cartography. It is language (the literary machine, the writing) that must follow them and feed off them (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 202–203).

or memoirs? The difference (according to Neumann, 1970, 25) is that between the external orientation of memoirs, representing the individual as a social type, while the autobiography focuses on memory and identity. Ellroy calls *My Dark Places* a

“crime memoir”, but it is much more an autobiography as it deals with reconstructing memories and trying to establish personal identity via another person, his mother – which makes the book a heterobiography, to be exact. *The Hilliker Curse* is not identified as a memoir or autobiography by the author, but it is also an autobiography. The clues for the autobiographical position (and a corresponding interpretation, decoding of the book) are the family name “Hilliker” and the possessive pronoun “my” in the subtitle *My Pursuit of Women*. Are the two books examples of (true) rhizomatic writing? The preliminary answer would be: *The Hilliker Curse* might very well be considered as such, while *My Dark Places* still bears many traits of arborescence.

In *The Hilliker Curse* there are two lives that are being written: the author’s and his mother’s (i.e. the life of Geneva “Jean” Hilliker Ellroy). There are also other lives, stories of real women, whom Ellroy had long(er) lasting relationships with: his first wife Helen, his lovers Joan and Karen, and his current partner Erika; they play a more significant role, form stronger deterritorialization lines. But there are numerous other women, some named, some unnamed, some re-named by Ellroy in what can be considered an assemblage of his mother Geneva and an imagined woman, who is basically an empty slot, ready for reterritorialization whenever a new object of observation that seems to fit the slot (even though it is characterised by very few specific features) appears.

In *My Dark Places* we find the same two lives that together form the subject of the autobiography, which, as mentioned, must therefore be called a heterobiography: Ellroy cannot write his own life without writing his mother’s life as they both form a rhizome. In addition to Ellroy’s and his mother’s life story, there is also the life of homicide detective Bill Stoner (who is the only male linked to Ellroy via a deterritorialization line in his autobiographies).<sup>43</sup> Via Bill Stoner’s life we get an insight into the lives of the victims of the murders he investigated, which again serve as lines of deterritorialization, of flight. These lines are less connected to Ellroy’s life, as they are present only through narration of others (the most significant being the story of the Black Dahlia aka Elisabeth Short)<sup>44</sup>.

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43 In his fictional works there are many male characters into which Ellroy deterritorializes himself, but in his autobiographies women dominate and therefore we can truly see them as documents of his becoming-woman.

44 Elisabeth Short ( July 29, 1924 – January 15, 1947), nicknamed “The Black Dahlia”, was the victim of a much-publicised and particularly gruesome murder that happened in Los Angeles in 1947 and that to this day remains unsolved.

We can see both autobiographies as interconnected to the point where we can draw a comparison to the three versions of Wordsworth’s verse autobiography *The Prelude*,<sup>45</sup> in which he writes about the same time span of his life again and again.<sup>46</sup> This has been seen by many as an impossibility of autobiographical closure

(Schwalm, 2014, 15). The continual revision of the same time-span reflects the author's state of mind at different stages of writing as well as a certain instability of the autobiographical subject as a narrator – he is not one, he is many. The various narrative presents are only ever temporary points of view, and there is no one or final vantage point – this, too, can be considered a characteristic of a rhizomatic (hybrid) autobiography.

In chapter 14 of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of *My Dark Places* (titled “Geneva Hilliker”), Ellroy reviews his past attempts to write about his mother's life, stating that the female protagonist of his 1982 novel *Clandestine* was loosely based on his mother, and her son on Ellroy. But they were “surrogate fictions”, as Ellroy calls them. *Clandestine* is (not only by name) connected to the Deleuzian becoming-clandestine (1993, 188), which further connects to becoming imperceptible;<sup>47</sup> it is one of the plateaus of Ellroy's becoming. His becoming-clandestine is manifested early in his life: he describes himself as a seasoned “brooder and watcher” (Ellroy, 2010, 18) at the age of 10, and being invisible, imperceptible, is one of the prerequisites of a watcher (which is a precursor to the full-blown stalker that Ellroy later became).<sup>48</sup> In one of his signature climaxes, “Voyeur. Pious Protestant boy. Fatuous seeker” (2010, 19), he points out a line of deterritorialization that moves from molar elements (voyeur, protestant boy) to molecular segments (unquantifiable, undeterminable)

– that is, elements which the “seeker” is vaguely discerning. He calls his specific type of watching “voyeur-perving” (2010, 119). His fixation on watching, on visual access (which – to him – was superior to physical contact) resulted in a multitude of deterritorialization lines along which his becoming unfolded: “My girls were

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45 There are three versions of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem: the 1799 *Prelude*, called the *Two-Part Prelude*, the 1805 *Prelude*, which was found and printed by Ernest de Sélincourt in 1926, in 13 books, and the 1850 *Prelude*, published shortly after Wordsworth's death, in 14 books.

46 He does that in order to chronicle the “growth of a poet's mind” (this is the subtitle of the 1850 version of his autobiography *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*).

47 Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 279) explain becoming-imperceptible (or clandestine or molecularized) in their own, rhizomatic fashion as “the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula”, toward which all other becomings strive. They also connect the imperceptible with the plane of consistency or immanence (ibid, 252): “Everything becomes imperceptible, everything is becoming-imperceptible on the plane of consistency, which is nevertheless precisely where the imperceptible is seen and heard [...], where desire directly invests the field of perception, where the imperceptible appears as the perceived object of desire itself, ‘the nonfigurative of desire’” (ibid, 284).

48 He claims to have been peeping and stalking girls since the age of 10 (but also admits to showing an affinity toward it even sooner (2010, 1)), and later “graduated” to minor crimes (especially shoplifting, breaking into houses, and burglary).

never standard pretty or comely in prescribed ways. I was always looking for the physical flaw or distinction that marked gravity. I looked in window after window at face after face. I was looking for one face. There can only be one and she will be THE OTHER. ‘The Other’: My real self made whole by an image” (2010, 19). This is already another type of becoming: namely, becoming-woman (see Deleuze and



Guattari, 1993, 270), which Ellroy pursues (as the subtitle of his second auto-biography reveals) throughout his life, starting with the death of his mother (or – probably – even before). This is also what makes both autobiographies rhizomatic to a high degree: although Ellroy time and again claims that it was his mother’s death that triggered his becoming (“You made me. You formed me.” (2010, 188)), he also repeatedly admits that he cannot say for certain that was the real starting point as there is no starting point; there is just a preferred entry point (the murder of his mother). However, the map he draws while searching for his mother (and himself ) is different every time.<sup>49</sup> He produces and constructs the map each time using the same material, but modifies it, detaches elements, connects them in a different order, even reverses them, which is very similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the production of a rhizome (1993, 21).

Apart from the two autobiographies and the aforementioned second novel *Clandestine*, Ellroy took another “confrontational swipe” (1996, 249) at Jean Hilliker in his (probably) most famed book to date, *The Black Dahlia* (1996, 250): “I was burning a lifelong torch with three flames. My mother, the Dahlia, the woman I knew God would give me.” *The Black Dahlia* is a “symbiotic stand-in” (Ellroy, 1996,

24) for Jean Hilliker.<sup>50</sup> The use of the adjective “symbiotic” points to the assem- blage aspect, to the rhizomatic nature of Ellroy’s approach. The truth is that Ellroy knows (or at that time knew) more about the death of Elisabeth Short than he did about the death of his own mother. Although their lives never touched, he was at-tempting to approach the secret of his own mother’s life and death via solving the unsolved murder of Elisabeth Short (offering in the end just a possible scenario, the same as he did later in *My Dark Places* for his mother’s murder).

49 In *My Dark Places* (which was the first direct approach to the subject of his mother) Ellroy admits that he has avoided writing about his mother for a long time: “Jean Ellroy was 35 years and 9 months dead” (1996, 247). He further writes: “I was afraid to stalk the redhead and give her secrets up” (ibid., 186). In 1996 he finally crosses that line and “stalks” his mother throughout a whole book. All the other stalkings were a prelude to the (retro-) stalking of his mother. And he revisits these other stalkings once again in *The Hilliker Curse*, in which his mother (through all the other women in his life) again becomes an indirect subject (as he only writes about her directly in the first chapter of sorts): “Jean Hilliker loomed as a fictive deity” (178).

50 Geneva Hilliker and Elisabeth (Betty) Short are connected in many aspects: “Betty was running and hiding. My mother ran to El Monte and forged a secret weekend life there. Betty and my mother were body-dump victims. Jack Webb said Betty was a loose girl. My father said my mother was a drunk and a whore” (Ellroy, 1996, 125). This reads – on the surface – as an analogy, but it goes beyond that. Ellroy has not “chosen” Betty Short as a “stand-in” for his mother. Her line of death crossed his line of longing and he deterritorialized his mother (and himself ) into the Black Dahlia-case.

One can observe a symbiosis of three heterogeneous points or “stand-ins”: the three points (women) are not contiguous – they are far apart in space and/or time; not connected by a line of territorialization, but rather by a line of flight, along which Ellroy deterritorializes himself. His deterritorialization line never actually touches “his mother” (he cannot – she is dead) or “the Dahlia” (he cannot – she is dead), nor is it really touching the “woman, he knows God would give him” as she is (at that time)

unknown. Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 293) speak also of a “line of becoming,”<sup>51</sup> which “has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination”, but only “a middle”, which is “the absolute speed of movement”. Although Ellroy tentatively identifies the origin (the point) of his becoming as the death of his mother, we must not see this as an instance of real causality, but rather as “the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible” (which is another definition Deleuze and Guattari offer for “becom-ing” (1993, 294)). Ellroy identifies this becoming as becoming-Hilliker: “I knew it was true – then. I sided with him – then. I hated her then. I was an Ellroy then. I’m a Hilliker now. Our pride, my bifurcated identity” (Ellroy, 2010, 13).

While *My Dark Places* was still describing a process of detection (of external facts that would help him understand what happened to his mother) bound to lines of territorialization that would discern his mother as a molar entity (separating her from him, his father etc.), *The Hilliker Curse* is all about molecular lines and lines of flight, about explaining himself (to himself ) via becoming his mother, via becoming-woman.

What could be considered a break line, a molar line in Ellroy’s life? Segmenting it in a clear, cutting manner? “She gave me the time and death of her place to extrapolate off ” (1997, 249), he says. His mother’s death could be considered a significant molar line, having rendering him motherless, an orphan, assigning him a position in his father’s “segment”. On a molecular line many small cracks appeared, simultaneously, but also previously to the great break on the molar line. He calls Jean Hilliker the “hushed center” (1997, 249) of his fictional world, but in truth it is not the centre or even *a* centre; she is simply the entry point of a rhizome that includes his fictional world (the world of his fictional works), his own life, his reflection of and about his life in the context of his autobiographical works. He started thinking about revisiting his mother’s life when he married his second wife, Helen Knode. She encouraged him, played the conjuring game with him (eliminating the brooding aspect of it, breaking him – at least temporarily

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51 The definition of this line is very similar to both the line of deterritorialization and the rhizome (such interchangeability is characteristic of their definitions in *A Thousand Plateaus*).

– out of his solitude), imagining Jean Hilliker in various scenarios with real life historical figures of her times. Jean Hilliker was partly deterritorialized in Helen Knode – who was her “advocate and agent provocateur” (Ellroy, 1997, 252). But that is also the role that Jean Hilliker has always played for Ellroy: triggering the mapping of his life. She did that by leaving a hole on at least two planes: as a lack of information about her (life before Ellroy’s birth and) death, and consequently as a lack of material (factual and emotional) to draw upon in building his own

personality and positioning himself in the world.<sup>52</sup> These holes triggered the deterritorialization lines that would first lead Ellroy away from Jean Hilliker and toward many surrogates (fictional and real) in order to finally reterritorialize her in a book not only dedicated to her (or based on her thematically), but a book that recognises her rhizome-building power and eventually ends with the acknowledgment that she is not to be found, that she is the search itself and (in true rhizomatic nature) a search that has no end.<sup>53</sup>

Let us take a look at the stages of Ellroy's becoming, specifically at his exceptional observational skill that helped develop his "superbly honed memory", as he calls it on page 11 in *The Hilliker Curse*. His process of memory training consisted of a specific conjuring, envisioning, which he calls "my time, my spells in the dark, my alone-in-the-dark perceptions, my time alone-in-the-dark" (Ellroy, 2010) that was preceded by minute observations during his stalking episodes. This conjuring (which he often refers to as "brooding") entailed and mixed two processes: the recollection of facts, gathered during observation (which was centred, from the early age of 7, on girls and women), the merging of these with other types of information not gained directly (but through secondary sources), and the combination of these into a narrative which included Ellroy himself as a protagonist. This transposed the recollection into the realm of imagination, which is specific to his "voyage in place". He describes his extraordinary observation skill as becoming the "Man Camera". This is a term Ellroy coined for a special detection technique, where the mind (through the eye) becomes a camera, roving over and recording a (crime) scene, to be replayed over and over again. The first mention of the technique itself (which is also very descriptive of Ellroy's own approach to writing) appears in *Silent Terror* (1990) that was written as a fictional memoir of

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52 In fact she "helped" him to *not* position himself in the world; she helped him become rhizomatic. We could say that she sent him on the voyage of his becoming.

53 "There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots [...] the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 41). Both models are at work in Ellroy's autobiographies, but more so in *My Dark Places*. Writing a rhizome can be exhausting, the need to revert to the arborescent model is therefore ever present.

a serial killer, who bears several traits of Ellroy as a teenager and young adult;<sup>54</sup> here it is called "(screening) brain movies" (Ellroy, 1986, 20). However, the first mention of the term "Man-Camera" appears in *The Big Nowhere*. The invention of "Man-Camera" is attributed to Hans Maslick, a fictional character from *The Big Nowhere*, supposedly a famous German criminologist, and it is described as an investigative technique that "involved screening details from the perpetrator's point of view" (Ellroy, 1988, 81). The brain (or better, the eye) operates like a

camera lens: it has the ability to zoom in and out, “freezing close-ups, selecting background motifs” (ibid).

In *The Hilliker Curse* he uses other terms to describe the technique (which is here, of course, attributed to him), like “brain-screening” (Ellroy, 2010, 8). This skill is linked directly to the experiential aspect of autobiography: the re-living and reconstructing of experience. His “brain-screenings” attempt just that. One could liken Ellroy to a “far-seer”, a term that Deleuze and Guattari (1993, 202) use for rare individuals who have long-distance vision and have “telescopes” that “are complex and refined”. What they see is entirely different from what the others see. They see “a whole microsegmentarity, details of details, ‘a roller coaster of possibilities’, a whole rhizome” and are very susceptible to cracks and uniquely equipped to detect ruptures; and after “real ruptures” (1993, 279) one becomes clandestine, imperceptible; they trigger the becoming-imperceptible.

If becoming-imperceptible comes at the end of all the molecular becomings that begin with becoming-woman, what does it actually mean? Becoming-imperceptible means many things. It is connected to the (asignifying) indiscernible and the (asubjective) impersonal (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 279). The development of Ellroy’s superb observational skills as well as his method of brain-screening leads in his final stage not to greater discernibility or ultimate clarity, but to indiscernibility, to asubjectiveness.

This is also reflected in the title of the first and the last part of *The Hilliker Curse*, which is “Her”; the word also appears in capitalised form throughout the book whenever Ellroy refers to his mother in the very specific way of revealing her as the line of becoming, leading to indiscernibility. In the preface to the book he says: “My obsessive will is too stretched. Their story must eclipse Hers in volume and content. I must honor Them and distinguish each one from Her. [...] They are all gone now. I am unbodied without them” (Ellroy, 2010, 114). This is a direct ex-pression of his need to change his rhizome, to make it change shape and quality,

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54 Such as being a Peeping Tom and breaking into women’s homes to steal undergarments.

because it has reached the point of being “stretched (too) thin.”<sup>55</sup> And the way to change it is via his main line of flight.

## 7.5 Becoming Everybody/Everything

The main line of flight of *The Hilliker Curse* (and the rhizome it builds with Ellroy’s life and his other works) is Geneva Hilliker, “Her”. By following it, he could actually transform his rhizome into another (rhizome), basically by means of reterritorialization of “Her”. But who is the final “Her” in the title of the last part of

*The Hilliker Curse*? Is it Erika Schickel (his current partner) or (the now finally found) Geneva Hilliker, or is it Ellroy himself? The pessimistic view would be: none of them, because his deterritorialization is forever ongoing.

If we take a more optimistic view, we can interpret the changing of Ellroy's rhizome<sup>56</sup> in the sense of "becoming everybody/everything", which is to "make a world (*faire monde*), become-world" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 281). This is – according to Deleuze and Guattari – the final stage of becoming in a rhizomatic book. Be-coming-world means that "one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things. One has combined 'everything' (*le 'tout'*): the indefinite article, the infinitive-becoming, and the proper name to which one is reduced" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 280). It also means to have "dismantled love in order to become capable of loving, to have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 218). The proper name to which Ellroy has been reduced is in fact the one used in the title of his second autobiography: Hilliker. This is the name that connects and combines him with infinitive becoming. And who is his double? Is it Erika? In the final paragraph of *The Hilliker Curse* he suggests that through Erika he is now experiencing glimpses of his becoming everybody/everything, as there is nothing that would separate Erika from "Her" and subsequently from him; he claims to have found the woman God had sent him, but it seems to be a premature assessment as his life is still ongoing and there is no way to tell if this is really the ultimate (re)territorialization. So is it just a case of him wanting her to be his "double"?

The question whether or not he found his "double", equals the question whether or not *The Hilliker Curse* is a modern, rhizomatic, hybrid autobiography (and

55 Ellroy repeatedly references the state of being "stretched too thin", specifically in connection with his obsession, his desire, his *becoming* (2010, 101, 111, 141).

56 The shape and the quality of Ellroy's rhizome are tentatively changing in the last chapter of *The Hilliker Curse* as he makes an attempt to end his "pursuit of women" by declaring Erika Schickel his real "Her".

the question that we asked in the first subsection regarding Ellroy's desire). But no matter what answer we give or which view we take, Ellroy made a world by conjugating with and continuing the lines of both Erika and Geneva, and all the other "stand-ins" of "Her" that came before (the imagined ones as well as the real ones).<sup>57</sup> And "it is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, 279–280). And that is what a rhizome, a hybrid text (including the modern autobiography), aims at: at making a world in a Deleuzian sense. In my opinion, he succeeded: his desire still stirs, his rhizome is still active, he is still becoming.

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- 57 Even though the imagined ones are in fact constructed from factual material, gathered in observation of real women, so the term “imagined” must in this case be understood in the sense of re-living, re-experiencing reality in a creative and constructive manner, which is what Ellroy’s “brain-screening” is all about.
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## Summary

Autobiography is a text type that defies classification in the sense of being literary or non-literary, especially in its contemporary incarnations; it is positioned in the interspace between the two. This position suggests a hybrid nature of autobio-graphical texts that – according to most theoreticians – manifests itself in a blend-ing of



heterogeneous (factual and fictional) elements. The chapter argues that the hybridity of autobiographical texts can also be understood in the sense of Deleuz-ian rhizomatics: as a multiplicity, a rhizome. To prove this point I chose to analyse the autobiography of the American author James Ellroy, entitled *The Hilliker Curse* (2010), by using the method of schizoanalysis. I contend that this autobiography (together with the previous one, *My Dark Places* (1996), as well as his other literary works), builds a rhizome with Ellroy's life and that *The Hilliker Curse* represents one of the plateaus of this rhizome.

## Povzetek

Avtobiografija je besedilna vrsta, ki je ni moč enoumno opredeliti kot literarno ali neliterarno, še posebej, če govorimo o moderni avtobiografiji z vsemi njenimi različicami. Umeščena je v medprostor med leposlovjem in neleposlovjem. Ta pozicija sugerira hibridno naravo avtobiografskih besedil, ki jo večina teoretikov razlaga v smislu mešanja in spajanja heterogenih (realnih in fiktivnih) elementov. V poglavju trdim, da je hibridnost avtobiografskih besedil moč razumeti tudi v smislu Deleuzove rizomatike: kot mnogoterost, kot rizom. Namen poglavja je potrditi to hipotezo z analizo avtobiografije ameriškega pisatelja Jamesa Ellroya, z naslovom *The Hilliker Curse* (2010), in sicer z uporabo metode shizoanalize. Moja hipoteza je ta, da omenjena avtobiografija (skupaj z avtorjevo prejšnjo avtobiografijo, *My Dark Places* (1996), kakor tudi z njegovimi literarnimi deli) tvori rizom z avtorjevim življenjem in da je *The Hilliker Curse* eden od platojev tega rizoma.