Elfriede Jelinek’s Theater Texts – A Case of Drifting and Rhizome Making

While documenting (the facts in aesthetic ways), crafting the language to point out at some particular consciousness (basing it on philosophical discourses), tailoring the theoretical works (as per the need of her work), incorporating (the reports, the poems etc.) inserting the images, (to enhance the message of the play), using montage technique (for arranging quotes from different sources), Elfriede Jelinek is ‘doing’ things with the materials in order to bring the people engaged with her theater texts, to the “materiality of thought”¹. There are materials in abundance available in different fields on different themes, Jelinek through her strategies, gives a perspective to them, and make them appear for the readers in the context of their reality.

The reality has several dimensions, an individual or a group reality, a local or a national reality, or even an international reality around the same theme. My opinion is, that a reader while engaging with her theater texts, is also bound to get into the multi-dimensional aspect of the reality. Jelinek’s role as a writer is to put the material in the state of the materiality so that the material is perceivable. Each text brings in with itself multitude of materials, and through Jelinek’s ways of working, they are open for the new multitude of more materials that will come up each time a reader brings his/her own material along. The multitude of the materials (consisting of varied ideas, associations) that Jelinek uses in goal oriented way to bring in visibility certain reality, requires to find the tubers and bulbs, from where the materials can connect to each other. The rhizome has the quality to grow laterally and endlessly. In my opinion, Jelinek works rhizomatically with existing materials for her theater texts, her theater texts are a work of rhizome and they have the quality to grow further in multi – dimensional ways, i.e. to grow further rhizomatically.

Deleuze and Guittari while engaging themselves with the concept of rhizome, say, “We will never ask what a book means... We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge.”²

It is the other with which a work transmits and with certain intensity it transmits, which connects to the functionality of a rhizomatic work. While I am reading Jelinek’s theater texts, I will let her work and the theory of rhizome intersect in one section and in another the theory of drift and her work intersect.
Part 1:

Theory of Rhizome and Jelinek’s Theater Texts: The first reference of ‘rhizome’ as a concept, we find in the field of science, which originates from the ancient Greek word, *rhizōma* "mass of roots". According to definition, a rhizome “is a modified subterranean stem of a plant that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes”. Rhizomes, also called creeping rootstalks and rootstocks, grow from auxiliary buds and grow horizontally and they allow the new shoots to grow upward. Even a single section of the rhizomes is enough for a new plant to grow. In a plant, a rhizome is a storing point for the protein, starch and other nutrients. These nutrients help the plan in surviving in the extreme weather situations (for example in winter) and it also helps normally in the growth of the new shoots. Rhizome also allows the lateral growth of the plants like bamboo, asparagus, ginger, turmeric, lotus, and many types of ferns etc; it does not grow vertical ever.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972–1980) conceive rhizome in the field of philosophy as an “image of thought”, basing it on the botanical rhizome, first in the project mentioned above and then in 1987 in their work, *A Thousand Plateau*. They basically analysed three different kinds of book: the classical form in book writing, which they call root book; second a book written under radical system, which has fascicular root, and third kind of book is the one written like rhizome and has a subterranean stem. To grow, and as it happens in the nature also, the rhizome like behavior is apt, because whereas the root based growth is predictable, but the rhizome like growth brings a new dimension. Deleuze and Guattari divide the books written in three styles, as I have mentioned above. They say, the root book has strong root, radicle system has fascicular root which takes the place of the primary root and in its place multiple new roots grow. A book with a strong root is like a tree, which is hierarchical in nature and the spiritual reality of a root book is binary logic. However, in their opinion the nature does not work in this way. They say, “in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one.” The rhizome can be characterized here as multiplicity, as a lateral and circular system of ramification, as a natural reality and they propose some principles of rhizome, if a book is written in the rhizomatic manner, then according to the two theoreticians, the book can be read in the light of the principles of rhizome.

Principles of Rhizome and Jelinek’s Theatertexts: Deleuze and Guattari have proposed four principles of rhizome. In this section I discuss them and also make an effort to trace those principles in Jelinek’s theater texts on the basis of not very close personal reading but on the
basis of how the scholars engaged in reading her theater texts, while looking at different dimensions in her work, have come across the ideas and associations, which mark at Jelinek’s theater texts being like rhizome. Along with the principles of rhizome as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari I get the portions from various scholars, hereby, to strengthen the point that how does Jelinek write is rhizomatic, what does she write is rhizome and how can one go about with her text will make a rhizome.

1. Connection and Heterogeneity: According to Deleuze and Guattari whereas there is a plotted point and fixed order in the root or in the tree, any point can be, and must be, connected to any other in rhizome.

In Jelinek’s theater texts, the plot is decentralized. Maja Sibylle Pflüger says that Jelinek pushes drama to its boundaries, by that, she means to the boundaries of the presentation and the understandability by developing a decentering text structure. Pflüger argues that decentering concerns not only the formal aspects of the drama but also the structures of meaning, as there is no content key, no centre of textual event, and hence resists interpretation. Pflüger suggests one to approach Jelinek’s theater texts from the borders and one should try to reconstruct the text procedure from the margin through entering into the polyphony.

Deleuze and Guattari say,

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. 7

According to definition,

‘Semiotic chain’ refers to a process of sign-making in which the meaning is materialized in a range of different but linked texts. It is based on the assumption that meaning-making is ongoing and continuous rather than limited to one moment in time. It derives from Gunther Kress’s discussion of the way texts are ‘punctuations’ of semiosis, points of relative stasis and stability in ongoing processes of meaning-making (1997). 8

The semiotic chain is a process and as put in the definition of the concept above, it is an ongoing process of meaning making. It is a characteristic of a rhizome. Baerbel Luecke says,

Jelinek ‘erlöst’ so den Text von denGattungsregeln als Code, von dem einen Sinn als idealem Gehalt, von seiner überzeitlichen Wahrheit und Ewiggültigkeit. Im Spiel mit den aufgepfropften textuellen und kulturellen Zitaten (Pop etc.) werden sämtliche Texte plural, multifunktional, offenes Kunstwerk, Ereignis. Sie bedeuten anders (etwas anders), sie bedeuten neu. 9
Lücke reads Jelinek’s works as an event which is plural, multifunctional, open art work and they mean something else, something new with each reading. It is interesting that Lücke calls the process of taking the materials from different sources as grafting. By definition, “Grafting (and budding) are horticultural techniques used to join parts from two or more plants so that they appear to grow as a single plant. In grafting, the upper part (scion) of one plant grows on the root system (rootstock) of another plant. In the budding process, a bud is taken from one plant and grown on another.”

As grafting and budding is a technique to join two plants to make a third plant, so one part of a plant (could be already a hybrid also) is put on top of one part of another plant with a rootstock, hence the new plant that comes up is a third type of plant. However, while recognizing the aspects of the plurality, the multifunctionality, and openness that Luecke associates with Jelinek’s works, I would like to argue here that it is not the grafting but rhizome making that Jelinek undertakes here with ample of materials. In my opinion, Jelinek takes from the existing materials stems, and connect them to each other here all the existing materials do exist in connection to each other and make a bigger rhizome. “If a rhizome is separated each piece may be able to give rise to a new plant” however a rhizome of potato will grow further as potato; a ginger as ginger. For example, a text on fascism by Jelinek is there to attract all the ideas and associations emerging from different sources, and connect to each other in rhizomatic fashion.

2. Multiplicity: According to Deleuze and Guattari, “The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available—always n-1 (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at n - I dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome.”

Each time Jelinek writes a text, it is the multiplicity that she presents, multiplicity of ideas/associations/thoughts. She does it through the multiplicity in the sentence, in the figures, in the concepts, in the discourses, and when one engages with her text one does the same, one constitutes the multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that one must take away the uniqueness from the multiplicity to be constituted in order to make it rhizome. Being unique means being only one of its kinds, and then unique is something that does not allow any further connection, and hence stops further association, and the process of rhizome formation.

3. Asignifying rupture: Deleuze and Guattari say that a rhizome has a line of segmentarity, from where it can “stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc.”, and then there are lines of deterritorialization to flee. They say, the rupture happens when the segmentary
lines explode into a line of flight. However, the line of flight is part of the rhizome. The lines are tied to each other and hence there is no dichotomy here, still a rupture may lead into recountering organizations that restartify everything, which can develop into the formations that „restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject”\textsuperscript{14}. In other words, the asignifying rupture can give life to a signifier, which gives birth to a subject.

The segmentation seems to be a key concept for me here. In their work, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus} itself in the chapter “Micropolitics and Segmatarity” Deleuze and Guattari explain that the notion of segmentarity was „constructed by ethnologists to account for so – called primitive societies, which have no fixed, central State apparatus and no global power mechanisms or specialized political institutions”\textsuperscript{15}. They argue that in these societies there is certain freedom between these segments in the moment of fusion and division; depending on the undertaken work and the situation. Segmentations also do not mean that the segments do not communicate with each other, Deleuze and Guattari say that there is considerable communication between the segments, which consist of heterogeneous elements. The communication between heterogeneous elements may result in one segment fitting into the other one in many ways. Moreover, a segment is a local construction, which excludes „the prior determination of a base domain”. They say that the social segments in the primitive societies have extrinsic and situational properties, i.e. they can’t be reduced to the intrinsic properties of a structure. The activity is spontaneous, so there is no separation between the segmentarity and the segmentation - in - progress.

So, there is the line of segmentation in the principle of rhizome, which relates to organizing, territorialization, giving significance to the text; then there is flight from the line, which is linked to deterritorialisation by Deleuze and Guattari, which they term as „asignifying rupture” after that again there is activity of reteritorialization. In my opinion, in a text or a book, the aspect of deterritorialization, the asignifying rupture is an intentional undertaking by the author to stop the process of teritorialization, which if it continues as it does, can turn into a domain, with a capacity of prior determination. There is the moment of ‘asignifying rupture’ in Jelinek’s usage of materials ranging from philosophy to a shopping bill, from a literary text to a pop song, from the reference of a iconic figure in history to a figure from everyday life.

4. \textbf{Cartography and Decalcomania:} According to definition, cartography is the study and practice of making maps through combining science, aesthetics and technique. Decalcomania is a “decorative technique by which engravings and prints may be transferred to pottery or other materials”\textsuperscript{16}. Whereas cartography relates to the field of geography; decalcomania connects to the technique of art, a kind of art which can be transferred on the pottery. Deleuze and Guattari, while elaborating on their fourth principle say that a rhizome keeps itself away from the genetic
axis or deep structure. Deleuze and Guattari define genetic axis as objective pivotal unity and all the successive stages are organized upon it. Deep structure is like base structure which can be broken down and the unity of the product passes into another transformational, subjective dimension. On the basis of this argumentation, a work with a genetic axis or deep structure is representational in character and such a work is based on the principles of tracing. On the basis of the tracing principle, a work just explores unconscious that is already there from the start, just hidden in the darkness (of memory and language). Deleuze and Guattari say, a rhizome is a map, and not a tracing and whereas tracing reproduces unconscious, mapping constructs the unconscious. Moreover, tracing always comes back to the same; a map has multiple entryways. They also add, that map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing has to do with competence.

Jelinek’s works are not representational in character. The characters are not psychologically created. Her theater texts are on the intersection of discourses, and they remain on the threshold of concepts. According to Bärbel Lücke, “Sie (Jelinek) literarisiert eine Theorie des Schwellen – Denkens, die gar keine Theorie im strengen Sinne ist und die es auch erklärtermaßen nicht sein will.” Lücke says, she is literarizing a theory of threshold concept, which is also not a theory, rather her work blurs the boundary between literature and philosophy.

Part 2:

Theory of Drift and Jelinek’s Theater Texts: As I have written in the beginning of this chapter, Jelinek, through her work would like to take the reader in the materiality of the thoughts. To go into the materiality of the thought, the conscious thought must connect to the unconscious thought. It is the unconscious movement that takes one to the materiality of thought. In her work, Die Ästhetik des Performativen Erika Fischer – Lichte while exploring the aesthetics of the performative says that it is the materiality of the actor’s body, and the materiality of the space, the time, the sound etc, which gives performance a transformative quality. So, the materiality of thought through unconscious movement can lead to something unexpected, may be to a new dimension of the thought. The unconscious movement (mental or physical) is termed as drift. Jelinek’s works are like rhizome, i.e. they have endless possibilities to grow in different dimensions. The basic premise in this section is that Jelinek drifts while she is working with different materials, and that creates a kind of work, which allows the reader to drift as well and thereby the new rhizomes get made.
As per the definition, drift is ‘chance’, to drift is ‘to take chance’ and the movement of drifting is “a transitioning that is responsive to chance and to circumstance, one which allows the various cross-pressures of the tide to carry a human subject, bobbing and vulnerable, to somewhere wholly unexpected, perhaps to somewhere that never could be arrived at via the pathways of rational intention”\textsuperscript{18}. As per my basic premise, the movement of drifting is important in responding to the chance and circumstance which the existing materials in the hidden corners in their existence, contain, and Jelinek’s movement of drifting has been responsive to those chances and circumstances. In my assumption, it is the movement of drifting that allows a particular thought process the complexities of the material. Interestingly, whereas the literature and art field asks for relearning to drift, the science, where the concept got theoretized first, looks at the concept drift, as problem, and explores the ways to handle it.

Here in this section, first I engage with various theories emerging in different fields to understand the concept of drift. Second I look at the Concept Drift, which has got recognized and has been worked upon in the field of Computer science. Jelinek’s theater texts work as pretext in both the parts.

**The Concept of Drift in various fields:** Drift, random drift, genetic drift, concept drift, the concept of drift emerge in various fields, and at this stage, it is still in the phase of formulation and organization. Still there is a debate going on, whether the drift should be seen as an opposite concept to the natural selection, and still the various components (like, process, cause, outcome, effect), or the terms like physical fitness, sampling etc, are argued; but there is a wider recognition for the concept and it is seen as something that brings a new unexpected variation in the evolutionary process. It is associated with something new that is seen as a ‘chance’.

In 1929, a founder of population genetics, Sewall Wright, introduced the concept of genetic drift. Wright referred to all changes in allele frequency\textsuperscript{19} as either "steady drift" (e.g., selection) or "random drift" (e.g., sampling error). He was using it in the sense of a directed process of change, or natural selection. So, he was not distinguishing drift from natural selection. His successors found the role of drift to be insignificant in the evolutionary scheme. In 1968, with Motoo Kimura’s “The neutral theory of molecular evolution” the interest in the concept of drift rose again. Kimura claimed in his theory that most of the genetic changes are caused by genetic drift acting on neutral mutations. The genetic science says that the genetic drift is the change in genetic diversity. Specifically, it relates to the change in frequencies of different alleles, over generations because of chance.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome work keeps itself away from the genetic axis or deep structure. In my opinion, Jelinek is against the canonical ideas, thoughts, views, identities,
which works as deep structure in the society and she works on its genetic axis and thereby the 
genetic drift plays an important role. Here I give an instance of her first theater text, Was 
geschah nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte oder Stützen der Gesellschaften which 
comes 100 years after Ibsen’s play A Doll’s House and in which Jelinek makes Ibsen’s plays 
the materials for her text to think about the women’s role in the patriarchal society, which dom-
inates not only the house environment, but also the other spaces, like work place, which is a 
combination of patriarchy and capitalism. Whereas Ibsen’s play is a canon and hence like a 
root book, has a direction; Jelinek’s Nora play talks about dimensions that could connect patri-
archy to capitalist structure, feminist movement to its evolution and its heterogeneous growth. 
As Christine Kiebuzinska says in her work\textsuperscript{20}, certain clichés continue to surround the reception 
of Ibsen’s play even today, and in that sense, it seems to have acquired an authoritative position 
in the society across the cultures and boundaries\textsuperscript{21}. Jelinek in her play, by using heterogeneous 
material, exposes the dream of gender equality that seemed to get materialized with Ibsen’s 
Nora walking out of her house. By using Ibsen’s plays as pretext, robbing the characters in her 
play of any psychological depth, using the capitalist jargons, by throwing in the discourse of 
materialist feminism, as Christine Kiebuzinska comments, Jelinek, is unmasking “the illusion 
perpetuated by misreadings of canonical texts”\textsuperscript{22}. By bringing Ibsen’s plays in the connection 
with other materials that makes the larger context to talk about gender identity, Jelinek is chang-
ing the gene frequency of the existing genetic diversity that is in place so far. Talking about the 
random genetic drift, the genetic science gives an example of pollen grains.

Every pollen grain contains a different combination of alleles. Which pollen grains — 
whether carried by wind, insects, or some other medium — actually succeed in arriving 
at a compatible flower and producing a seed — are largely determined by chance events.
Thus, some genetic diversity is usually lost at every generation through these chance 
events.\textsuperscript{23}

Or, we can also say that a new genetic diversity comes up in this process, and contributes to the 
stepping in of the species into something new. So, Jelinek’s work asks the reader to drift through 
various materials related to gender identity and flow.

In the field of computer science, the concept drift relates to the learning in the context of non– 
stationary distributions. Most of the machine learning models are static. The scientists argue, 
“…increasing online deployment of learned models gives increasing urgency to the develop-
ment of efficient and effective mechanisms to address learning in the context of non-stationary
This is commonly termed as concept drift. The computer science gives suggestion to deal with robust outcome that the medium provides through its model and below we talk about it.

**A Glance at the Model, proposed in Computer Science to handle the Concept Drift:** In the language of the computer science, “During classification a change in the concept or distribution of dataset over the time is termed as concept drift.” It is about change, which could relate to the concept or to the distribution. According to Yamini Kadve and Vaishali Suryawanshi, “Concept drift occurs when the concept about which data is being collected shifts from time to time after a minimum stability period.” It is called ‘streaming data’, which is different from the stationary data, which could be mined through the conventional data mining algorithms. Sikha Mehta Janardan finds that the classical classification algorithms are not compatible with streaming data, because of the „resource constraints” and “single scan of the data”. She relates the resource constraints to processing time and memory, and single scan of data to one look and to no random access. The data streaming is a dynamic process, and Yamini Kadve and Vaishali Suryawanshi argue that one needs to consider the problem of the concept drift to be able to mine streaming data with „acceptable accuracy”. Janardan suggests that the concept drift can be handled through the use of „adaptive learning“, which can be implemented through using incremental and ensemble learning. The adaptive learning comes in the place of tailored learning, which is suitable for the stationary data. The adaptive learning “is an educational method which uses computer algorithm to orchestrate the interaction with the learner and deliver customized resources and learning activities to address the unique needs of each learner”.

Ensemble learning is the process by which multiple models, such as classifiers or experts, are strategically generated and combined to solve a particular computational intelligence problem. In incremental learning, which follows a machine learning paradigm, a learning process takes place whenever a new example emerges and then the learning paradigm gets adjusted with the new learning from the new example. The ensemble learning is about multiple base learners and it combines the predictions made by them. Ensemble learning is primarily used to improve the (classification, prediction, function approximation, etc.) performance of a model, or reduce the likelihood of an unfortunate selection of a poor one.
So, adaptive learning, which uses both incremental and ensemble learning, makes customized material by using the existing model of knowledge and constantly increasing it by bringing in new input data, and also through creating ensemble of various models of knowledge.

**Concept Drift and Jelinek:** As Yamini Kadve and Vaishali Suryawanshi explain that concept drift happens when the concept about which the data is being collected changes after a minimum period of stability and that shift in the concept occurs time to time. In my opinion, Jelinek’s theater texts also entail the material which has data stream like quality. Right from the title, to the content in a play, the figures, the non–figures, the words spoken, the myth unfolded, the history revisited, the believes questioned, the purity doubted, everything is there in her plays as concept. Her texts are loaded with the concepts and they have the potential to proliferate with any interaction. In my opinion, like in concept drift, where while data is being collected, the concept can shift, the particular concept around which one may work in Jelinek’s text, can also shift, while one is working around that concept. So, what I am suggesting is, that the multiplicity, decentered content, plurality all that is created by Jelinek in her theater texts by use of montage, collage, intertextuality, and all is done by her, to create the threshold concept, i.e. the concept, which has the quality to change, to transcend, can be handled, if one tries to interact with her text, using the method of adaptive learning.

**Notes**

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome
4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome
5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome_(philosophy)
6 Ibid. p. 5.
7 Ibid. p. 7.
8 https://multimodalitglossarial.wordpress.com/chain-of-semosis/
10 https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/grafting-and-budding-nursery-crop-plants
12 Ibid. P. 6.
13 Ibid. p. 9.
14 Ibid. p. 9.
Allele frequency, or gene frequency, is the relative frequency of an allele (variant of a gene) at a particular locus in a population, expressed as a fraction or percentage. Specifically, it is the fraction of all chromosomes in the population that carry that allele. Microevolution is the change in allele frequencies that occurs over time within a population.


http://studylib.net/doc/10501873/genetic-diversity-is-always-changing---both-across-migration

https://arxiv.org/abs/1511.03816

Ibid. p. 804.


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allele_frequency

https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/chain-of-semiosis/

Bibliography:


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allele_frequency

https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/chain-of-semiosis/
Elfriede Jelinek has packed anger at a Europe that rejects refugees and despair at their hopeless situation into a text that links motifs from an ancient tragedy with images of asylum seekers today. The drowned of Lampedusa, the occupation of a church in Vienna, the eurocratic regulatory jungle and hypocritical rules for togetherness from a brochure entitled Living Together in Austria provide the text with plenty of realism. This is good. But at the same it is an artificial and imagined text. It continually talks of ‘gangs’. What is hurled at someone who is not desired in Europe by those who t...Â Die Schutzbefohlenen, the most recent theatre text of Elfriede Jelinek, the Austrian Nobel Prize laureate in literature, is a response to these events. Jelinek, a former communist, has developed the reputation of a radical feminist and provocateur, whose work is well regarded, but, as "Der Spiegel" points out, difficult for many to appreciate. She has been decried as a "desecrator of art and culture," denigrated as a "red pornographer."Â She makes use of a sarcastic, provocative and - for that reason - disturbing style. Many of her works revolve around the suppression of Austria's Nazi past, increasing xenophobia and the rise of right-wing populists. Jelinek's 2004 Nobel Prize for literature was a surprise to many, including the author.Â The Nobel Prize was awarded to Elfriede Jelinek "for her musical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels" and for her plays that reveal society's clichés. A central theme in Jelinek's work is female sexuality. Elfriede Jelinek is one of the most important contemporary writers in German. Her first play, "Was geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte oder Stützen der Gesellschaften" ("What Happened after Nora left Her Husband or Pillars of Societies") was premiered in 1979 and has been followed by other texts for the theatre. In 2004 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. She has also received numerous other awards and honours, including the Georg Bähr Prize, the Mülheim Dramatist Award (2002, 2004, 2009, 2011) and the Else Lasker-Schüler Prize for her dramatic Á