Introduction

"Theoretical Futures"

The Creation of a Concept

Grant Farred

According to the Nietzschean verdict, you will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them—that is, constructed them in an intuition specific to them: a field, a plane, and a ground that must not be confused with them but that shelters their seeds and the personae who cultivate them.
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What Is Philosophy?

Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures is, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s sense, a creation. It is the creation of a concept, a concept signed “theoretical futures of Africana studies.” “Theoretical” is understood here as the production of a framework within which thinking for the becoming of Africana studies could be accommodated. That is, a thinking for that which Africana studies must become, must become as it assembles a series of components. We might name these components conjectures, ideas, imaginings. Regardless, in every instance this theorizing (for) Africana studies turns, relentlessly, on the creation of components. It is through the creation of components that thinking for the theoretical futures of Africana is undertaken. Theorizing Africana studies so as to make it—in the course of its becoming—a creative mode for engaging those questions, difficulties, modes of being that mark, with more or less intensity, black and diasporic life, in its broadest instantiation. (Theorizing through this “assemblage,” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms; an “assemblage,” the theoretical futures of Africana studies that is not—yet?—a body without organs, that most tantalizing, elusive, and provocative of their concepts.)

Furthermore, as the plural indicates, theoretical futures is a concept that undertakes to create a plane of immanence that can sustain—support, provoke, cultivate—Africana studies as a singular yet polyvalent mode of thinking. Thinking what it means to be black, African diasporic (as the principal but by no means only conditions implicitly under consideration
in this volume) in our world. Thinking what it means to be immersed, fully embedded in our world, in the life of our world. To exist and remain within the (in)finite field, in the possibilities, difficulties, cruelties, intensities, desires of our world and, in so doing, to stringently oppose any inclining toward transcendence. This is how, broadly speaking, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the plane of immanence. A conceiving that, as they recognize in *What Is Philosophy?*, must always allow for the reemergence, no matter how fleeting, of transcendence.² We are seemingly never done with guarding against its reemergence, thinking always in expectation of its return, a return Deleuze and Guattari seek to restrict to a temporal and conceptual minimum.

*Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures* marks, as such, not only the construction of a plane. It also takes as its project the posing of problems that will in any way forestall, interrupt, or delay the becoming of Africana studies’ theoretical futures. However, the chapters gathered here address those problems, for the most part, implicitly rather than naming them explicitly. (And in taking up these problems—among which we might include the closed archive, certain entrenched modes of essentialism, intradiasporic tensions, and so on—we suggest that in conceiving through implication rather than direct naming a tendency toward transcendence might be discerned. Such a line of argument would, for all its sturm and drang, be well wide of the mark. The work of the plane of immanence, or the plateau, is to forge a series of new connections outside existing lines of flight and, in so doing, to think the problems through a different concept and through a new and different series of connections. In this way, the concept theoretical futures will be able to entangle extant problems in a set of connections that will bring different potentialities into being.) The volume is, then, in the sense offered by Deleuze and Guattari, creative rather than negative. A concept, they argue, is “never valued by reference to what it prevents: it is valued for its incomparable position and its own creation.”³ At stake in this collection is the work of “creation,” of providing a terrain on which theories of Africana studies—how to think it, how to delineate the terms of its becoming, what set of problems to pose, what lines of inquiry to pursue—might be struggled over. The project is, for this reason, not in the least about preventing this or that idea from coming into being (from becoming, as it were); the project is decidedly not to predominate the discourse or to preclude the invention of new components. Au contraire. Within every concept, indeed, a priori the creation of every concept, is the necessary recognition that the concept is itself nothing other than a struggle against limit. A struggle against the limit it perceives in extant concepts and the anticipation of the struggle among the components out of which the concept is constructed. Deleuze and Guattari, as we know from their oeuvre more broadly, are fully
aware of this. Hence their notions of territorialization, reterritorialization, and deterritorialization—a trio of terms for which this Introduction will shortly offer its own working definition.

The creation of a concept is a matter of no small import because, institutionally, Africana studies is a discipline of very recent standing, at most five decades old, a discipline birthed out of the intense cultural and political struggles that marked the United States in the 1960s. In most institutions, even in the United States where it first found articulation, Africana studies is of a much more recent vintage. In some sites it is more or less embattled than others, a discipline whose right to institutional existence remains contested; it is subject to scrutiny, skepticism, and critique from a different array of forces, forces that have always been at work and, indeed, have emerged with fresh vigor to launch a renewed assault on black life in post-2016 America. In some institutions, however, the discipline has imbricated itself into the fabric of the university’s life, and in still others (although these are too few in number), Africana studies has, for now at least, secured its place. It still awaits that moment when it can be a thriving intellectual enterprise. (Given the strange conjuncture that is our moment—the coinciding of racism, police brutality, xenophobia, the pandemic with its disproportionate effect on not only minorities but women more broadly, economic uncertainty, food insecurity, and so on—the question might be posed, if not now, when? If not now, then when will a discipline such as Africana studies or Asian American studies or gender and sexuality studies locate itself at the very core of institutional life? Now, at a conjuncture when planetary life appears to, for all political intents and purposes, have reached an unprecedented crisis? Is not now the moment for the thinking of these disciplines to constitute the first lines of flight for all institutional thinking?)

Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures is aware of this institutional history, and indeed, all the chapters (in one way or another)—although Chapters 1–4 and the sublime Afterword come readily to mind—acknowledge the import of this history and address and take up its difficulties. The concept, then, is a response to—a critique of—that mode of thinking (institutional and extrainstitutional, political, cultural, sociopolitical, as you wish) to which it is heir. And, because of what the concept has inherited, let us abbreviate it. Appending a name to it, “theoretical futures,” we must decide on how it stands in relation to what it has been bequeathed.

Because of this, Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures is guided by a specific intuition. It takes as its project the construction of a concept in response to what it understands as the problem facing black life. (“All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning,” Deleuze and Guattari remind us.) That is, how it might help black life survive, what conditions must be secured for black life to thrive,
and so on. Black thinking, in its many registers: philosophically, nonphilosophically, in institutions of higher learning, in the sphere of popular culture, within the arena of representational politics, and so forth; in a word, thinking for the dangers that threaten, daily, black life, as well as the potentialities immanent—in place, always already existing—to the plane of immanence. As Deleuze and Guattari caution, while remaining hopeful of what it is the concept might yield, “a possible world, the possibility of a frightening world.”

The problem, we can say, demands a concept, the creation of a concept whose immanence is such that it not only accounts for a “possible world” that might very well be “frightening” (already the condition of black life, we would be well justified to rejoin) but, in seeking to eradicate those components responsible for producing the fear, might extend itself into a series of successive tomorrows that accentuate possibility, pure and simple. Possibility, that is, as that affirmation of life fully cognizant of the fear it must eradicate—or if not eradicate, then keep in check at the very least. The chapters that constitute Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures represent, each in its own distinct way, components of a concept that can accommodate theoretical futures. Components that connect with each other to form a singular line of flight, components that approach each other and then, in quick succession, take their leave of each other. Components that, by turns, form entanglements and disentanglements. Components linked, as close as neighbors, distant as cousins. In Nietzsche’s poetic phrasing, these components are constructed out of the language of “high winds, unrest, contradiction.”

That is, this volume has territorialized the concept that is theoretical futures so that one component of the concept may or may not extend seamlessly into another—one mutating with little or no apparent transition into the other or one jaggedly abutting its successor, cutting across, violently, another component. In other words, the concept that is theoretical futures, a plane of immanence that, in our thinking, extends far beyond the limits of this volume, recognizes that the various components that lay claim to the theoretical futures of Africana studies are in constant struggle with not only each other but also with what, and how, the concept is becoming.

On the plane of immanence, one component can easily find itself in conflict with another because, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, “there is no concept with only one component.” Because of this, it is explicable that one component will not wish to give way, does not want to cede conceptual territory. In relation to which it does not, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, want to be de- or reterritorialized. “The concept,” then, must be apprehended as a “whole because it totalizes its components, but it is a fragmentary whole.” With this dialectical phrasing (much as Deleuze and Guattari
strongly favor multiplicity over the dialectic), containing within it the propensity for totalizing while acknowledging (if not quite celebrating) the fragmentariness of the whole, Deleuze and Guattari provide an apt and incisive description of the construction of the plane of immanence that is *Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures*. Each chapter in the collection operates in a distinct register—in disciplinary terms, race and diasporic studies (John E. Drabinski, Chapter 1; Sarah Then Bergh, Chapter 6); politics and political science, the study of the state in Africa, specifically (Radwa Saad, Chapter 3; Kasereka Kavwahirehi, Chapter 4); philosophy, or philosophical Marxism (Zeyad el Nabolsy, Chapter 2); literary theory, of the singularly poetic variety (Gregory Pardlo, Chapter 5; Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, Chapter 8); and creative nonfiction (Akin Adešọkan, Chapter 7).

Several of the chapters, however, do not operate in only one register. As much as anything, what the chapters share is their immanence. In their territorialization of the plane of immanence, in constructing the concept that is theoretical futures, there is, both implicitly and explicitly, a refusal of the metaphysical, even as the metaphysical lurks with the intent of manifesting itself. These chapters address what exists as the problem for, metonymically phrased, black life, the problem in its many iterations; a series of problems it would be fair to say that seem to be constantly growing. It is on this plane that these thinkings immerse themselves to address the problems that must be confronted, problems that have persisted, and thus have existed within a number (an infinite number?) of previous planes of immanence. For this reason this series of difficulties, we should insist, must be faced rather than transcended. (That which is immanent to the plane is that which is of imminent concern.) These chapters not only operate in more than one register; they also construct a plane of immanence that functions on more than one stratum; and what is more, they do so with a certain fluidity. (These strata are part of what, in Deleuze and Guattari’s oeuvre, constitutes the rhizome. In their work, the rhizome can, in a necessarily insufficient word, be taken as a series of tubular rather than rooted connections. That is, a series of smooth, not striated; antiarborescent; rootless; horizontal, not vertical, connections that allows the flourishing of multiplicity. “A rhizome,” they write, “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” The rhizome is always connected to the outside, thereby multiplying itself infinitely and establishing “lines of flight” that remain distinct, despite being entangled with other lines of flight.10)

In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari argue,
conceptual point constantly traverses its components, rising and falling within them. In this sense, each component is an intensive feature, an intensive ordinate [ordonnée intensive], which must be understood not as general or particular but as a pure and simple singularity—"a" possible world, "a" face, "some" words—that is particularized or generalized depending on whether it is given variable values or a constant function.11

That is, the chapters have multiple nodes of connection, "point[s] of coincidence, condensation, or accumulation of [their] own components," so that they, on this fluid plane of immanence, "move about" ("move up or down," "up and down"; "left and right, right and left," as it were, sometimes simultaneously operating on more than one level) between this level and that—what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "rising and falling." In so doing, the various "components," some of which have been assigned "variable values" while others perform a "constant function," create and re-create a web of connections that, in its multiplicity, opens new theoretical possibilities.12 The web, of course, intensifies and multiplies the number of possible theoretical futures, always bespeaking not only a multiple but an infinitely mobile future or futures.

Thus, each of the chapters, individually and in their connective multiplicity, creates (enhances) the possibility that it will, at some possible future intensity, exceed (transgress) the concept that is theoretical futures as it creates or finds itself instrumental in the founding of a new plane of immanence because the problems that it takes up in theoretical futures have now spilled over into, been conscripted by, a different plane of immanence (and the difference may be one of degree or of extremity) but one that has some connection to theoretical futures. The problem raised by, say, African Marxism (Marxism in Africa; Marxist theories as they apply to Africa, and so on) or the state in Africa (again, the African state; the conflict, ever ongoing, or so it would seem, between the military and civil society; democracy in Africa) in theoretical futures will, one can with great certainty, not be resolved by theoretical futures.

However, the concept, the conceptual personae (of which the state and Marx, or cultural politics, might present the most obvious examples; not quite Nietzsche’s Zarathustra or Plato’s Socrates but familiar and, in all probability, recognizable) created by the concept, could be appropriated in the creation of a new concept to address a series of problems that are familiar but by no means an exact replica of what exists on the plane of immanence that is theoretical futures. If the concept does its work, it will show its creativity to be not so much sovereign—that is, faithful to theoretical futures—but generative. It will show itself as that iteration of theoretical
futures that belongs, infelicitously, as it were, to futures immanent not only to this particular set of theoretical problems.

The Intensive Feature

The concept speaks the event, not the essence or the thing.
—Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy?

While the volume bears the title Africana Studies (which we might, in this context, take as both the “thing” and the “essence”), the work of creating a plane of immanence is borne by the subtitular Theoretical Futures. Africana studies, as such, marks, again, both the thing and the essence (the second of which, in a related form, “essentialism,” is at the core of the problematic that is Africana studies), but the concept claims for its territorialization theoretical futures. In doing so, the creation of the concept acknowledges that the discipline, Africana studies, has a history. That is, it has in the course of its becoming—coming into being, sustaining that being, institutionally—accumulated, inter alia, a set of tools, methodologies, professional practices and modes of inquiry that mark its institutional life. These accumulations have, needless to say, been subject to change over the course of the disciplinary evolution of Africana studies. All of this is to say that the discipline, thus, is recognized as the thing. (And decidedly not, as in Kant’s transcendental sense, as the thing-in-itself—the proposition of which Nietzsche could not bear, in no small measure, of course, because for Nietzsche, exiled to Basel, Switzerland, to teach, Kant represented the institutional animal par excellence.)

The work of creating the concept theoretical futures thus falls to the subtitular. Or perhaps I should say, it is the work the subtitular assigns itself. The concept, then, as distinct from the discipline, or at best auxiliary or adjacent to it, not simply for its own sake; that is, not only because the concept wants to distinguish itself from the concept but because the concept responds directly to—is connected to—the set of problems it, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense, intuits.14 Creating the plane of immanence that is theoretical futures begins with the work of ensuring multiplicity. There can, on this plane of immanence, be no one future for Africana studies. There can be only futures: multiple futures, operating on several stratifications, sometimes forming a complementary connection; at others, points of friction and dissonance predominate. All the while, these futures are created, unimpeded by disciplinary demands and institutional strictures, unburdened by but not impervious to disciplinary history. The lines of becoming that are these futures are free to interact with as many other concepts and conceptual personae as is necessary. The concept, then, always has to revivify its reason...
for becoming. It is necessary, that is, to follow the line of thinking (or “lines of flight,” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms) that a particular problem presents while remaining cognizant of the connections (several or only a few, maybe even only one) that may emanate from following this line of flight.

Thus, *Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures* offers, in its chapters’ various articulations, specific conjunctures, signal points of intersection, conflict and difference, creating a resonance among them that is by no means removed (that is, it is not far removed) from dissonance. If, that is, we attribute to dissonance the potentiality for making different—intensely different—claims on the plane of immanence, for staking out different parts of the territorialization that is the theoretical futures of Africana studies. One of the salient features of a “fragmentary whole” is precisely that it is so constituted that the whole seems, at crucial or apparently insignificant intensities, capable of dispersing into fragments. That is, the whole is at once tenaciously singular and so tenuously constructed as to risk infinite dispersion, thereby opening up into—opening itself up to—theoretical futures that, in all likelihood, will also be marked by the fragmentariness that is particular to the whole’s tenuous resilience.

Despite the possibility for fragmentariness, this potentiality for resonance among chapters makes it possible that, for example, the two chapters on politics and political science not only amplify each other but also draw into their orbit, connect on their strata with, chapters that take up the difficulty that is the diasporic experience. In so doing, the ways in which the chapters contribute to the plane of immanence mean that the project as a whole not only ensures that the concept theoretical futures is brought into being but achieves, critical to Deleuze and Guattari, “consistency” and “intensity.” (Furthermore, in the spirit of their attention to “sensation” in *What Is Philosophy?*, the volume concludes with Fraiture’s delineation and exact naming of the senses that is, literally, organized according to the senses, as, one might say, befits the creation of a concept.) In the “Translator’s Foreword” to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi suggests that Deleuze and Guattari’s plane of consistency is best understood as a style: “The way the combination is made is an example of what Deleuze and Guattari call consistency—not in the sense of a homogeneity, but as a holding together of disparate elements (also known as a ‘style’).”

The chapters, in their occupation of the plane of immanence, apply torque (philosophical pressure, or intensity of thought) on each other. These are, as Massumi would have it, “disparate”—but not disconnected or disso-ciable—“elements” that “hold[] together” on the plateau that is theoretical futures. The various critiques of the state (Kavwahirehi, Saad), say, encounter an entirely new and different set of intensities when read alongside the poetics of loss or remembrance (Adęọkan and Pardlo, respectively) or cul-
tural possibility (Then Bergh; which might even be rendered as optimism), to say nothing of the philosophical contemplation of diaspora (Drabinski). In this construction of the plane of immanence, the creation of intensities thus emerges, as it should, not only from the individual chapters in themselves (obvious enough in Drabinski and El Nabolsy’s contributions) but out of the “points of coincidence, condensation, or accumulation” that mark the relations among the chapters. The plane of immanence that is theoretical futures thus simultaneously or according to different intensities, randomly or in sequence, territorializes, deterritorializes, and reterritorializes the components. Consequently, every chapter is subject to these forces because they operate on the plane of immanence.

Concept/Concepts

It is not, however, only in relation to each other that the chapters exert their force and intensity. Saliently, as with all other concepts, the theoretical futures concept also has a becoming that involves its relationship with concepts situated on the same plane. Here concepts link up with each other, support one another, coordinate their contours, articulate their respective problems, and belong to the same philosophy, even if they have different histories. In fact, having a finite number of components, every concept will branch off toward other concepts that are differently composed but that constitute other regions of the same plane, answer to problems that can be connected to each other, and participate in a co-creation. A concept requires not only a problem through which it recasts or replaces earlier concepts but a junction of problems where it combines with other coexisting concepts.16

Every concept, then, is (potentially, at the very least) saturated with other concepts and, almost without question or exception, the components of other concepts. Every becoming is, in this way, a thinking-with—or against and with, and sometimes a thinking-for that which is not-yet—other concepts. Thus, every thinking contains within itself something other than itself, so that every thinking is already on the way to becoming something else. Because of this, every concept not only belongs to its own set of intensities but is open to being territorialized, reterritorialized, or deterritorialized by the past, present, and future. Theoretical futures thus is as much its own becoming—a coming into theoretical being, a becoming that belongs, indefatigably, to its own particular set of intensities—as it is coming out of, as acknowledged earlier, the tradition that is Africana studies. And, as it
should be, theoretical futures—in which we take futures to mean the territ-
orialization in its three manifestations—is that concept out of which other
concepts will emerge. Will, not to put too fine a point on it, be able to come.
(Let us, for the purposes of this Introduction, take the meaning of “territo-
rialization” as the making of the plane of immanence; “reterritorialization”
as the cutting across, remaking, through the creation of new or mutant
components; and “detrimentalization” as the taking apart or uncreating of
the concept.)

A territorialization, reterritorialization, and detrimentalization in
which other, new, planes of immanence will emerge, in which compo-
nents (that is, both the ideas that govern the individual chapters and the
elements—microcomponents, shall we say) of theoretical futures will make
themselves immanent, either through resonance or dissonance. Or we
might say, the concept that is theoretical futures ushers in a regime of
resonant-dissolution, dissonant-resonance, or both. What we think we
hear—discern—in the concept is susceptible to distortion, out of which a
new, dissonant-resonant unfamiliarity might emerge.

A dissonant-resonance or resonant-dissolution on the order of, say, An-
gelique Kidjo singing Celia Cruz. Celia, Kidjo’s 2019 tribute to Cruz, the
queen of Cuban salsa, voices two diasporic songbirds calling to each other,
across an ocean filled with traumatic memory, across musical genres—the
African woman from Benin, a virtuoso in lustrous soul-pop, punctuated with
joy and pain, enunciates the intensity of connection wrought of detriment-
alization and reterritorialization. Celia is the reterritorialization of a black
Cuban woman’s cry. What beauty, what wrenching, unforgettable beauty.
How it haunts the black diaspora, how it turns the black diaspora back onto—
into—itself; mangled, remade, unutterably unrecognizable. Yeatsian, with a
detrimentalized twist: “A terrible beauty has been [re]born.” Salsa detriment-
alized. Celia Cruz, we might go so far as to suggest, territorialized in Porto-
Novo (or in Quidah, Kidjo’s hometown), Benin. Quidah, Porto-Novor, and
Havana, Cuba, are points on a line of flight. Points that meet in the middle,
if we take the middle to be that particular note on which Cruz and Kidjo
conjoin, with a singular intensity, before taking their partial leave, each on
her own line of flight, each line of flight “growing [multiple] offshoots.” In
their notes, the reorganization of an entire plane of immanence.

Or we could consider the ways in which the Afrobeat vibes of a Fẹlá Kuti
track seem to turn the world upside down. Or downside up. Or in taking
down the head of state in “Coffin for Head of State,” Kuti offers a creative
promise: rhizomatize the state, make new points of connection, create new
lines of flight. Refuse the arborescent top-down model. That model runs
from the head to the soles, constituted as it always is of the poor, the disen-
franchised, those who can never quite get themselves off the ground; they
can now forge horizontal connections with all those around them, those who are outside them. The work is to make a new plane of immanence, with neither head nor toe. Bring new “aggregates of intensities” into being. How else are we to establish our relation to Kuti’s music, especially—at least in this moment—as it pertains to his creation of a Coffin for Head of State? (Is Kuti’s album, with its—eighteenth-century French class war, twentieth-century anti-colonial African struggles—revolutionary overtones and its ominous undertones for the polis, for the state, for those who stand at the head of the state that musical conception that allows us to conceive of Deleuze and Guattari’s “body without organs”?) Or we could posit the following: on Coffin for Head of State Kuti aligns himself explicitly with the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari. Through his album title, Kuti provides an intense, reverberating soundtrack to Down with State Philosophy, the French thinkers’ anthemic cry. A cry that punctuates their work, a cry especially resonant in A Thousand Plateaus, where they present the importance of “nomad philosophy.” Fela Kuti’s discography, in its openness to the world (the same can be said of Kidjo and Cruz) and in its relentless demand for creativity, is what happens when you follow—musically, creatively, poetically—Deleuze and Guattari’s injunction, “Don’t sow, grow offshoots!” Kuti’s Afrobeat is how you put philosophy to music. Kuti’s music is Deleuze and Guattari’s “middle, . . . where things speed up.” Speed up in the cause of doing away entirely with the aridity that is “State philosophy.” Speeding up the construction of the coffin in which the State, its rotting head (devoid of creativity, no longer able to think for the concept), and the entire carcass of State philosophy, is laid to rest. Unceremoniously. With all due haste. “Obasanjo is a liar,” scream the liner notes on Fela’s album. In the middle, sound and fury rise to a crescendo. In the middle there is always the possibility that the crescendo can sustain itself, indefinitely. “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains . . . and social struggles.” The nomad is the enduring offshoot of the rhizome.

In this poetic way, the components out of which theoretical futures is constructed never belong, as is true of all other components that make up a plane of immanence, only to themselves—to their component self or to their plane of immanence, always capable of establishing new lines of flight, of generating (further) multiplicities, always raising the possibilities of destratification.

New Thinkings

Every plane of immanence, therefore, every construction of a theoretical future, is already the becoming of something else. Already, itself, marks the becoming of something other than itself. The concept is marked, in all probability indelibly, as much by the determination to create a new concept—
which is why it must be named “event”—as it marks the turning away from and against, as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it (and we should not be deceived by their parenthesis), “‘a’ possible world, ‘a’ face, ‘some’ words.” To create, obviously, a new and different possible world, to mold a new face, and to conjure up a set of words that are better suited to the intensities of the concept than those, seemingly amorphous (some), but of course, this is by no means so because every one of those some words (every one of that sum of words), carries import, has impacts and effects in the world.

In this way the concept is always a straining against what it takes to be (as it must; otherwise, there would be no reason to create the concept) the insufficiencies, failures, oversights, and omissions of extant concepts. “These are,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “the intensive ordinates of the Idea: a claim will be justified only through a neighborhood, a greater or lesser proximity it ‘has had’ in relation to the Idea, in the survey of an always necessarily anterior time.” Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures, however, much as it recognizes the particular intensities of its relationship to concepts that are au courant, those concepts that have lost their relevance (if not always their institutional standing; a resilience and continued existence, one might argue, that owes everything to their shortcomings as a concept—that is, the stubborn inability to do the work of the concept and those that belong to a “necessarily anterior time”) and those concepts that retain a resonance that is more, and sometimes less, useful, is only incidentally concerned with that which it, in truth, seeks to displace. Those concepts it intends to deterritorialize, determinedly, while setting out a—and on a—a new path, a distinct line of flight, for Africana studies. Having taken up occupation in the neighborhood of the Idea that is Africana studies, the work of theoretical futures is to establish its relation to said neighborhood and to, as it were, justify the claim that it is making. That is, theoretical futures has to, at once, break off relations with the neighborhood (after all, were the neighborhood sufficient in itself, there would be no need for theoretical futures; theoretical futures must, in this way, always err on the side of greater rather than lesser proximity to its neighbors) after having surveyed it, while explicating—through force, metaphorically phrased—the primacy (originality, creativity) of its particular intensive ordinates.

High Spirits

In some it is their deprivations that philosophize; in others, their riches and strengths.
—Nietzsche, The Gay Science

The work of Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures is, as is surely obvious by now, to create a plane of immanence composed of a series of new thoughts.
A set of thinkings that will, at the very least, be constructed out of components that will require an assiduous and creative re- or deterritorialization. The concept that allows the proliferation of infinite lines of flight. Lines of flight that are “offshoots” of an “imperceptible rupture, not [a] signifying break.” The concept, thus, seeks no immunity from its components, is entirely open to its (potential) multiple movements, its rearrangement of the components, its continuing creation within—on the plane of immanence of—its own creation. Such generativity is the promise of all concepts.

It is because of the flash of intensities, the individual chapters, that shoot up from the plane of immanence that is Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures that this collection of chapters is able to capture what the different contributors do and do not do in their individual (and yet connected) chapters. These flashes of intensities are, then, resonant and yet dissonant. On the plateau of immanence they are neighbors and yet remote. It is the flash of connection (let us name it, provisionally, reattachment, which, of course, returns us to the conjugation of territorialization)—that is, connection and “imperceptible rupture”—for which this Introduction has sought to create a concept.

A concept “written in the language of the wind that thaws ice and snow,” a language that can sustain “high spirits”; indeed, a language that thrives on “unrest and contradiction,” but only “contradiction” of the multiple variety. More than anything, however, the plane of immanence that is theoretical futures is written in a language that is capable of, at any moment, taking off on its own, intensely singular, line of flight. That is the high-spirited language in, the restive and contradictory language out of, which each of these component chapters is written. High spirits, unrest, contradiction are the hallmarks of all the chapters in this collection because each of these components derive from a plenitude of possibility—such are their philosophical riches. These chapters all think from the position of strength. Following Deleuze and Guattari and Nietzsche, these chapters eschew the negative. They think only for creation, for the creation of the concept.

NOTES


3. Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy? 31. The term “assemblage” also belongs to that line of thinking that Deleuze and Guattari name a “collective assemblages of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 7).
4. Cornell University’s Africana Studies and Research Center, where four of this volume’s contributors are located, was founded in 1969. It was the first of its kind. Africana studies is, in this way, distinct but not entirely disconnected from the area studies programs birthed across the United States and the world during the Cold War, American studies being the most notable of these Cold War undertakings.

5. Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures undertakes the work of creating a concept—theoretical futures—because it understands itself as the necessary response to “problems which are thought to be badly understood or badly posed (pedagogy of the concept)” (Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy? 16). That is, the future/theoretical futures of Africana studies can be entrusted only to the concept of theoretical futures because, pedagogically speaking, only through creating its singular plane of immanence, by rejecting any inclination to transcendence (that is, through fidelity to the particular, to what is immanent), can the conditions for it to become the territory out of which futures can emerge be ensured. That is, “theoretical futures” is both a stay and a hedge. It is a stay against what we might name tradition, that which Africana studies understands itself to have been, its first articulation (that which sustained it, the ground in which it grew), that which inclined, decidedly, in the direction of transcendence (incorporating and making a claim on vast territories and many aspects of black and diasporic life; what in some quarters is named racial essentialism). It is a hedge against any such future transcendent inclinations. This collection also proffers the concept of theoretical futures as the creation of a plane of immanence where what exists, and because it exists, is thought in its multivalence and prized open to give full life to the various components that make up the concept. Out of one concept, many futures.


13. “Essentialism,” particularly when rendered as “racial essentialism,” has been a core term within the discipline. That is, the term intends to designate a certain, to coin a phrase, absolute knowledge, an epistemological certainty about what it means, especially, to be black (what set of apparatuses and functions attend to being black, as such; what modes of being in the world, what modes of representation—modes of address, aesthetic self-representation, and so on—are permissible or are deemed to be sufficiently transgressive). Racial essentialism, of course, is not what Deleuze and Guattari are invoking when they speak of essence. However, because of how I deploy What Is Philosophy? in this chapter, it would be remiss for me not to acknowledge the effects and resonances of their invocation.

14. “Intuition,” then, not in its mystical colloquial sense as something that comes to one, often out nowhere, without being able to account for its arrival, for why it produces or demands a response, but rather as an immediate or quick perception or cognition of truth (philos) or the direct perception of truth—or in this case, a difficulty for thinking—without its reason being immediately discernible. Or a knowledge that is inferred without prior training. All in all, a fine line, one acknowledges, but a difference critical for thinking as derived, in some instances, from intuition—both within this context and more broadly.


