To be named—even when the namer is godlike and blissful—perhaps always remains an intimation of mourning.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man”

CHANDLER GOES ON AT LENGTH about one word, the first word of Du Bois’s Souls: “Between.” Between is incommensurate with all that it is thought to name, so it may only be allusive of what exceeds naming and nameability. Chandler is reading Du Bois’s

1. I got into a bit of a debate, with beloved colleagues and with no hint of malice though, about naming. I was being pressed on my rejection of the possibility of salvation in naming, being told that finding new names might be a more ethical gesture because, indeed, how can one live without a name? How can we say no to naming when there are people who have insisted on inscribing their names into monuments as an ethical gesture not only to never forget but also to know, now, for the first time? It seems to me that, still, to desire one’s name on the historical ledger is to reinscribe the logic that one must be bestowed legibility and thus livability in a certain conception of life that is not the only conception of life by power. I am reminded of Lamonda Horton-Stallings who, in Mutha’ Is Half a Word, writes of the “(un)naming” Kimberly Benston asserts people like Malcolm X and Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man took up, a refusal of a name in order to name later or name, as it were, with black accoutrements, and what she understood as a more radical black feminist “unnaming”: a practice she thinks in the context of gender that might be generalized as “a process of unranking and challenging gender
“between” as a paleonymic term, a terminological rendering he gets from Derrida that means a new usage of an old word, a working and reworking with remnants that ultimately escape or destroy the word being used. Paleonomy, in other words, is a usage of “the Negro” where “emphasizing the predicative trait within the old name (i.e., ‘the Negro’) defines the ‘unthought structural possibility’ of that concept, designating it as the ‘X’ that remains to be theorized.”\(^2\) Du Bois’s opening sentence brings about the problem of presence and the assumption of selfsameness. Because the relationship between “me” and “the other” dislodges both from a stable and oppositional boundedness, mimicked by “between” and “and,” this throws the very question of selfsameness, of being, into question. This throwing into question between precipitates is the problem: the problem the root word of problematic, as the Negro is the general and generalized problematic for ontological grounds and pure being; and, too, the interrogative embedded in the titular problem of Chandler’s text, the introductory interrogative “Problem?” of the present meditation.

He finds in the moment of the LA riots, which is no singular and isolated moment but a moment begotten by a series of other moments, reason for pause. The riots, sparked by the brutaliz-

[and perhaps subjectivity as such] through a manipulation of language to elide the troubles and violations of language in the West,” an “interrupt[ion of] the subjective fictions of skin color, ovaries, uterus, and so on.” Devoid of the parenthetical coding, Stallings’s black feminist un-naming theorizes “a subject’s willful, infinite, multiple, and continuous process of defying classification/naming.” LaMonda Horton-Stallings, *Mutha’ Is Half a Word: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 34–35, 38.

ing of Rodney King in 1991, are the culmination of violence. A violence not confined to a singular moment but an inaugurate violence that has constituted the very conditioning ground that gave King over to the brutalization of police batons. The violence repeats and does not end, because King was violated before and after he was violated. And yet “we reach a limit,” Chandler notes. “We cannot know, we cannot (only) name, here, in this domain” (1). This domain is one that is uninhabitable to the radical alternative to which we owe our allegiance. To name only in this domain—which might be to say, simply, to name—limits our (para)ontological breadth. Epistemic curtailment is inevitable when this domain is the only one in which knowledge is deemed knowledge as such. Importantly, Chandler’s precision does not refuse this domain in its entirety, the domain with which we are accustomed, as if there have not always been clandestine and underground modes of living the desired radical alternative. We cannot “(only)” know and name here, so it is necessary that we continue to know and name here, but in a way that is perpetually moving toward, in the final instance, knowing and naming elsewhere. That elsewhere is in the between.

What does it mean to know and name in the between? Language and knowledge break down, and in the breaking down is where different kinds of names and knowledge arise, names and knowledge that might not be, indeed cannot be, properly called names and knowledge. The between cannot even be properly called a “place.” The preposition is one that does not denote a locatable space as prepositions should; it marks movement in the nonlocatable and indeterminate space between poles—between, if you will, a binary of two referents. *Between*, in other words, inflects a movement between poles, binaristically oppositional poles that ooze so much with a connotative sex/gender binary. *Between*, in one sense, marks trans movement. Residing in the interstices of the poles is, in a sense, a death sentence—a willing
obliteration of one's ontological foundation. A death sentence that permits the pursuit of another kind of life, life in the interregnum, those trans and transversal “moments . . . between the regime of what was and the promise of what might be.”

And here we begin to get at the figure of the X, as one of its definitions is in fact the figure’s use as a mark of obliteration. The crossed out and X’ed out is the erased, the expurgation from grammatical dictates of syntactical existence between nounal poles and the agency of verbs. Too, then, the figure of the X carries with it a kind of figurative somethingness not of the determinant poles. I would propose that in the between is where X lives, its problematizing Negroness and troubling of gender wrapped up in this betweenness. The troubling of gender and thought is garnered not from a direct challenge to the extant poles determining thought and (binary) gender but from opting out of the logic; residence in the between, that nonlocatable nonspace, is a more fundamental and radical refusal of the poles firmly entrenched. The X, like “between,” then figures as the authorization of “movement of an oppositional logic and a reading of it as radical,” a moving radicality that ultimately inscribes the X as a designation for that “punctual rhythm of an en medias res inauguration” (4).

Between is a “word” in the text, or alternatively a word. There is such an emphasis on between’s wordness, an emphasis that is not incidental. Chandler, in writing that between is a “word” or word, is looking to make a distinction. We reference something that we may not truly be able to reference when we say “between.” “Between” is not the thing itself, a thing that may in

fact not be a thing but a force or process, or spatiality, unable to be delimited lexically. As a “word,” between is more than a string of letters with a definition; as a word, between is being distinguished from the thing that cannot be named but is nonetheless usefully named in order to know it is something that exceeds its nominative. I will be speaking of the thing captivated, not captured, by the “word” and word between—and this is to say that I’ll be speaking of between, my notation of this—as that is what bears the generative relation to the Negro and the trans; that is the problematizing rejoinder to ontology.

Between is “the disruptive and desedimenting movement” (9) Chandler writes as “between,” with scare quotes. The preeminent utility in Du Bois’s oeuvre and in the first word of Souls is what it announces, at least for Chandler, and, I’ve decided, for my purposes as well: it announces, “in radical fashion,” a “preoccupation and making trembling of the logic of being” (9, emphasis original). This making trembling is a desedimentary move, a loosening of the hold being has on ontological grounds. Between connotes, and tries but fails to name, this making trembling, this reverberatory and quaking mutability fissuring the bastion of ontology. Important to note is that it doesn’t tremble; it makes tremble, a distinction expressive of the very movement desedimentation and, too, the Negro and the trans characterize. Being has a logic that allows it not only to be legible as being but also to exist as being, a logic that is alogicized by between and Du Bois’s inauguration of Souls with that “word” and word. Between makes impure the purity of being’s logic by making tremble—perhaps as verb and noun, inasmuch as between connotes that which bears the status of the tremble, of trembling, of a kind of, if you will, tremblation.

Via Du Bois, between does something different: it disrupts any notion of boundary, of an identifiable inside and outside. It is a syntactical movement with (para)ontological ramifications,
that of a dissipation of the limits imposed from without, and also, maybe, from within. *Between*, when met with inside/outside, with strict—or any—limits and delimitations, is irreverent. Inside and outside imply location and locatedness. *Between* is nonlocatable, an impure spatiality.

Taken as radical oppositional logic, betweenness poses a tremendous problem: its betweenness. Its problematics rest in itself, its existence in a nonspace that is disallowed from existence insofar as the poles between which betweenness is (un)situated determine existence. It poses its own logic by finding livability in the nonsanctioned. To *move* in the between, which is to say to dwell in betweenness, since inhabiting betweenness is to not “be” in a locatable spot and thus to be moving inasmuch as movement is the refusal of “being in” one gridlocked vector, proposes a radical kind of logic. It is another logic and an other logic in subversion of that which sustains the syntactical and grammatical integrity of the poles. As indexical of this, X subsequently becomes the “punctual rhythm” that conditions ontological betweenness, an ontology that is more accurately a paraontology, or further still, a negaontology—ontology that cannot abide ontological tenets and thus lives, exists, be’s in the evacuated bowels of ontological apparatuses; negaontology, tentatively, as being without ontology. This rhythmic punctuality begins in the middle. Beginning in the middle, it inaugurates those proximal to X’s subjective force into this middle—the between—and they become through subjectivity in that middle radical logic of opposition. X inaugurates another kind of subjectivity by way of a beginning in the middle, opposing teleologics.

Or perhaps “begin” is a misnomer. To begin inhabits a temporal frame of linearity that belies the fundamental problematics the X and its betweenness set forth. But Chandler provides more suitable language in the very title of his opening chapter: “Anacrusis.” The *anacrusis*, the titular opening of Chandler’s
Between

text and, semantically, the preceding striking up or prelude to the beginning of a verse of prose or music—which is to say, the anoriginal transitivity, the nothingness and dispersive indistinction upon which sedimented meaning rests—is language that befits the anoriginality toward which the X is striving. Saidiya Hartman has labeled Chandler’s use of anacrusis “the expectant music of the before,” his “step-by-step guide to paraontology.”

Anacrusis is a precursory setting in motion, but one that has always already been occurring in ways that prove unintelligible to extant logics of measurement. The anacrusis gives us a timid glimpse into that which happens, and is always already happening, before the onset of categorizing regimes, and it is there where the radical alternative force finds a definitional solace. To think of the X in intimate proximity to anacrusis, we come to get at X’s betweenity, its displacing anoriginality, its preceding problematic, its evasive previousness that exceeds the obsession with a beginning natality.

Racially echoing that famous Du Boisian question, I want to query how the Negro problem resounds pervasively, putting pressure on racialized identification and contemporary thought; I want to query, too, what it might mean for the trans/gender problem to resound pervasively, to ask if those of trans experience are problem people—we might say, a blackened gender insofar as blackness indexes a problematic, the problematic, given in referential overlapping relation with nonnormative/trans genders. Then it can be argued that the “double question,” the displacing question Chandler highlights, circulates around the very meaning, the very effects, of the Negro problem and the (trans)gender problem. But, let me back up, if only to get us to move ever more forward.

The fragmentary text that is of concern in X—the Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought is Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk, and concerning the first chapter of Chandler’s book is the very first word of Du Bois’s. One word that inaugurates, that unsettles, so much: Between. Many of you know the passage already, perhaps committed it to memory, able to spew its gorgeous discursive tunes, as they say, by heart. “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question,” Du Bois writes.

Unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

This serves as an opening for Chandler, an opening into the fracturous space of the between, a space that demands an inhabitation precisely because it asks to be inhabited yet does not appear habitable. Between’s radicality stems from its positioning as seeming to stabilize and give coherence to what follows (“me and the other . . .”) yet lacking in predication—there is no “There is” or “There” or “In” preceding the word “Between,” making it its own position, unmoored in a no-place, a prepositional referent without a reference—and thus offering a disjointed groove from which to usher in “the radical possibility of this other logic” (4).

This other logic, indeed an Other logic or logic not-as-such, errs away from the stabilizing of poles and opts for the instability and uncertainty of the very position that acts more as a non-
position. Du Bois’s “Between” gives a grounding for the other logic the Negro, via the X, operates on, but reading in Du Bois’s “Between” a riff on the word, as betweenity in the trans poetic language of Meg Day, is a way to think through the noted gender troubling of the trans and nonbinary that happen precisely between the dimorphic male and female, man and woman.\(^5\) I wish to say more here, and hope I succeed in this problemat- ic and problematizing endeavor, than simply that trans people might also make recourse to the Du Boisian and, hence, racial language. Though surely this is partly my aim, to end here is not enough. The task at hand is, as I’ve said, to note that those given to trans experience may, too, make use of and find home in this language shrouded by the vector of blackness; it is also, I posit, to uncover how the semantic, logical, and conceptual bedrock that underpins ontological status is displaced by the desedi- mentary logics of the paraontological, to which the trans—the gender nonnormative, the nonbinary—lays claim due to its potency under the heading of deregulation, unmooring, and a kind of deconstruction. Negro problematics are BFFs with gen- der problematics.

Being problematic in this sense is to trouble, by way of a lack of adherence to the holds that would allow ontology to grasp, domesticating problems, taming them into nonproblems at best and answers, resolved things, at worst. The problematic Du Bois initiates is via the between, as between cannot be placed at the poles that would allow knowability and emplotment into the on- tological grid. There is a between that is more than the word—it

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is the preceding “ancient volcano” (4) that presents the possibility for radicality by implying but disavowing predication. The predication is a grounding, a stable one, that between refuses, makes impure, makes tremble. Via Du Bois’s style, between is no longer a thing that sets up an oppositional logic but a disorganized incoherence, a perpetual movement of concealment of finalized meaning, a constant suspension permitting an instability, a refusal of the poles endemic to an opposition, a binary—between as disorganizing the coherence of a binary, making it, too, a trans sensibility. Gender is organized by, made coherent through, a fundamental and biologized binary that between unfixes. Where Du Bois’s between spatializes the relation between “me [Du Bois] and the other . . . ,” or between as indexical of the Negro problem, the problematic Negro, between also must be taken to imply a betweenity extant within Du Bois’s between, as a synecdoche for blackness. That is, Du Bois is not the ground of the Negro; the Negro, as an ungrounded ground, is fractured along the lines of, and does the fracturing of the lines of, gender. There is movement occurring even at the level of the Negro, a movement of gender, a problematizing of gender, which is to say the transness of the between.

Let me say this again, in another way, explicitly. The Negro gives us gender as a problem first for the Negro and then, in a generalizing move of which Chandler is fond, for being. (I might also drop the temporal qualifier and say simply that the Negro is coeval with trans/gender as a problem.) As C. Riley Snorton explained, “blackness, [i]s a condition of possibility that made transness conceivable in the twilight of formal slavery,” which is to conclude that “gender for the black and blackened takes on an anagrammatical quality, subject to reiterative rearrangement.” Or, citing Lamonda Horton-Stallings’s transaesthetics, which Snorton also makes use of and which dovetail with the funk of blackness, blackness “disturb[s] forms, biological and
otherwise.” If the Negro-cum-blackness anagrammatizes gender by definition, and if grammatical gender is gender as such—the grammar being ontological predication—and, further still, if blackness makes transness possible in the era of Western enslavement, there is an inextricable relationship between the Negro and the trans, such that the Negro as a problem cannot be spoken of, cannot do its problematizing, without a meditation on how it necessitates a problem for and of gender.
