

# The Encounter Whose Dazzlement Remains

*Phanuel Antwi*

## I

In 1933, in a sunlit corner of Alicante, Spain, sits a tableau of more-thans margining respectability.

In this pause, this junction of dynamism stuffed still into tableau, three figures carnivalling circumstance set thinking eyes on we who make art out of the living.

In this photographic pause, the viewfinder, touched by the clock of sun-crossed eyes, appeals to a whole sort of dance of language, to Eros: who, in the careful storm of hands doing hair, when tips of fingers matchstick possibilities, where the intonation of care is labour, mischievously reigns.

Perched between surprise and protest, listen, the movement in stillness travels light, waves into hands, into the anatomy of windows, the apron, the stool, the sash, wrinkles the flesh of the wall, and, in a conversational touch of eyes and hands and hair, labouring, hear the noisy fillers in this tableau, note a pause is choreography in stillness.



Henri Cartier-Bresson  
*Alicante, Spain, 1933*  
gelatin silver print, 24.5 x 36.7 cm

## II

"Women doing hair." This sound bite headlines a scene in a shanty salon in Alicante, Spain, in 1933, unnamed beauty queens, unmarked with poised poses pitched against the certainty of *is*, ferry noisy frequencies, unsecuring known nodes.

It is as if they say women and hair are tired gateways to culture, that that nail file is a rifle at borders they don't like.

Let the war come, as if they are saying, let the port swell with men, who sum their lives in labour.

Day shifts and the elbows snake a rhythm, refracting all that surrounds friendship, of how walls travel onto dress, of women labouring on for each other.

Beauty is a citadel, they say, gender is a labouring journey, marooning selves into tones into gestures; even a smile into a shooting eye is labour, when done with ease.

Here, ease rests its myth, curls into its own labour, embraces the rest of labour.

### III

Here now on Davie, in Vancouver, steps away from 1933, a rose cross in a wardrobe alphabets a dream we can't pin down, frustrating our appetites to know more: after all, bent shapes smear lines; found greys crack a wall, unzip memory from skin; hands reject plotline, reach for *and*, instability's transit, surf curves and jawlines, jungle and fever found grace.

Let's not front and be moved by the intercorporeal transfer in this photographic pause; let's let its noisy stillness compel us to them again, and again arriving to this speckled bunch, their sculptured brows, the potbellied singletted woman, in her riding pose, hanging on a handful of nappy hair, grow on searching; the lives in the curl sprouting from the forehead, the homes of those dimples chafing against the wall, wrinkling degradation, exposing its life force; let's let everything everywhere in this tableau arrest us into communion with the more-thans who look back.