

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW, A SPLIT SCREEN, A REFLECTION

Philomena Epps and Octavia Bright

## PINK GLOW

Watching the light behind the door, and this beautiful pink room, and wishing I'd had a more relaxed waking up. The diaphanous curtains. Soft, diffused light. Reminds me of sleeping in a tent. And that hand appearing. A bird's eye view. A split screen, reflection. That pink glow.

The shapes made on the curtains by the plants behind them look like alien forms. The texture of the white cotton sheet like sugar. The sounds of movement beneath it. I'm in my own sheets, I think I need to change my sheets. An arm, a hand, and fingers appear at the top and the bottom of the screen, the camera moving.

Opening shots, a door and a curtain, fingers and hands partially appearing, opening blinds or fiddling with the curtain, we're seeing the bed or the sheet, the body is absent, as though the camera is a fly on the wall in the room. I feel like a voyeur. Especially that high ceiling shot, down on the bed. That cosy, swaddled feeling, when you know you have to get up, caught in the limbo between dreaming and waking.

*[She's not in the bed]*

The way the light comes round the door feels kind of like a horror movie scene. On the pink screen we can see it's a phone camera, and...

*[Hey, how are you...]*

...here's this phone recording me and you. It's grey, muggy, and miserable outside. The whisper of kids from behind the door that's glowing, hearing the voices off screen

*[Hey, how are you, thank you for your message. I got it yesterday morning. It was really nice to hear your voice, and what you were saying was very kind, so thank you. I hope you are okay. I wonder what your stresses are, and I miss you, and I'm curious to hear about what you've been up to and all of that, so sending kisses and love, and have a nice evening.]*

Then we see the kids and realise it's just a gentle domestic thing. Like when you're a child and you're told not to go in your parents' room. The light coming through the door frame is kind of tantalising.

Curtains as a threshold, a pause, a divide. In this situation, it is the border between night and day. A theatrical device, closing the curtains during the interval or at the end of a show.

*[...it was really nice to hear your voice, and also just what you were saying is very kind]  
[...I hope you are ok, I wonder what your stresses are, and...]*

I wonder what her stresses are. The voice note reminds me of when I've been far away from lovers or friends and left messages on whatsapp first thing in the morning, it's a way of feeling close when your body is still half asleep and you can mimic that feeling of intimacy even though you're physically far apart.

*[Alarm goes off]*

## ALARM

Oh my god that alarm, the iPhone alarm. It's brutal. I hate that noise, the horror of being shocked into waking. That sound really unites us, It feels so familiar watching this, watching this in the morning!

The door slams open. Suddenly we're seeing things from the perspective of each of the artists so clearly that it no longer feels like a voyeur's perspective.

It's funny how if you watch something in a different state you begin to notice different elements. The softness of the sheets. The shot of the mirror with the crescent moon shape on it reminds me how many different points there are in a home, there are all these cameras but also the windows and mirrors. Reflections and portals that we can see through. That warm, rosy light looks much nicer than the damp smog outside.

*[Last night I dreamt that...]*

*[Last night I dreamt that...]*

Her chest is rising and falling and we're under the covers with her, very close to her body. The pink light recalls Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Lola*, where Barbara Sukowa as Lola is sitting in her bedroom, which is diffused with this incredible visceral pink, yellow, and blue light. A florid, Technicolor nod to his reinterpretation of the mode of melodrama. We can see the phones, a reminder of this intermediary, I'm holding my phone while I record this, feeling connected to the videos through that act.

*[...good morning, good morning, to you...]*

The first thing I touch is my phone, on waking, that cold screen. Really close up shots of fingers inside the white duvet. There's something lonely about that shot from outside the door, with the pink, I think because we've just seen the kids piling in the bed in the other channel and it's different, it's a very different space.

The scene with kids makes me anxious about what gets lost and also gained if you have a family.

Where my eye is drawn, which video captures my attention - it changes each time I watch it. I'm drawn to the strongest colours. From this shot from above the glow of the phone on the bed is supernatural, totally different texturally from all the fabric.

The way the light shines through their curtains reminds me of Felix Gonzalez Torres' sheer, pale blue *Loverboy* curtains. When I saw it exhibited, the whole space was empty, bar from these three windows and three curtains. They are so elegant and so sad.

*[I dreamt that we were being chased by a bear, and you were driving this jeep thing...]*

*[I dreamt that we were being chased by a bear, and you were driving this jeep thing...]*

Pink curtains opening while she's talking about dreaming, like the other channel is illustrative of her dream for a moment, before you realise it's not. The shadowy outlines of the plants behind the yellow blinds.

*[...and it was like really scary because we were like being chased, and then for some reason you couldn't drive any further...]*

The close up of the mouth, we're lying in bed next to her and she's whispering into our ear. She's describing running from a bear and now in these shots behind the plants we're in the forest - I feel like I'm in a Gauguin painting in this scene, where the camera's behind the geranium leaves - and we're...

*[...we're in each other's arms...]*

When the cameras move in a chaotic way it's a reminder of the change in state from waking in the bed to getting up and moving the body and having to really be awake.

*[...yeah...]*

Images of doors, the question of privacy, whether you have to guard your privacy closely or whether it's naturally available to you, if you live by yourself you can have open doors.

I'm glancing away from the video briefly to look at my back window, and I can see someone opening their curtains. This scene is mirroring what I'm doing and what I'm seeing the artists do, and I like thinking about everyone slowly unfurling for the day ahead at the same time. *And is total privacy even possible if you have children?*

There is a subtle evocation of the season, with the green and verdant trees I can see through the windows in the video, it feels like spring or summer. Outside my window now, the trees are going yellow and orange, and there are piles of leaves everywhere.

*The shot of the disembodied legs, and then her blinds rising as if automatically because she's out of shot. Little domestic abstractions.* The reflections in the round, pink mirror remind me of the spot mirrors you get on a car. The white room, the white bedding, the wooden bed, the pink room, the striped sheets. *The way that screens and reflections cut the body up into bits.*

Have you heard of those aesthetic vloggers whose videos are sometimes called things like 'Morning Routine' or 'Wake Up With Me'? This video feels like it exists in relation to that kind of visual culture, but while the vlogs are all about an aspirational way of starting the day, the artists aren't trying to sell a lifestyle - they're trying to reflect lived experience.

*That mirror looks like the moon, or an eclipse maybe.* I can't remember what I dreamt last night. *We can see and also not see things, there's always a slightly obstructed view. How truthfully can you ever see someone else's life represented?*

*[Birdsong]*

Opening the window. *The sound of birdsong!* Looking through the foliage, the sense of nature. The process of opening the blinds and letting the day in, letting the light in, a renewal, a refresher. *Such a beautiful interruption. Makes you feel immediately like you're outside.*

There's a brief shot in which the curtains are blue, not pink, I remember her saying she had switched them halfway through.

*The focus on windows, how we frame our lives, how we frame our experiences in the world. And how we have more control over that than we might think.* I feel strange and tentative trying to talk over the video while I'm watching. It feels as if it is interrupting my thoughts. I can hear someone outside walking down the street. The sound of their shoes clip-clopping has ruptured it even further. *We can choose from which angle we decide to look at ourselves.*

*Moments in the videos where you see evidence of other camera angles, the other camera, the other apparatus.* That view of the legs makes me think about painters like Joan Semmel or Maria Lassnig, perceiving the body in its relaxed form, viewed from above, rather than the vertical, regulated ideal. Seeing the body upside down and inside out. *It turns the very intimate space of the bedroom into a film set.*

*Blue sky on one channel matches the blue sky on the other, a sense of the videos happening at the same time, made on the same day. The two window shots match.* The angles: the body breathing, shoulders, chin, legs stretched. The shadow of the bodily form outlined on the bed sheets. *The videos speak to one another. Like twins. Siblings, maybe.*

I'm doing this from bed, I can't remember if I said. When I'm watching the shots of the bed I'm in a similar tangle of white sheets and duvet and still wearing my pyjamas.

The hard lines of the harness against soft flesh is striking. They frame the breasts like a BDSM harness. Bringing this form of surveillance into the domestic space and actually attaching it to the body, both artists become

'post-human', moving from cameras external to the body, watching the body, to actually becoming a part of the body in a literal way, carried near the heart centre.

Our view is partially obscured by clothing, and now behind the distorted glass of the shower. Suddenly we're viewing their feet through the phone screen, but we can also see the arms holding the phone over the feet, and there is this jumbling and layering of cameras and images and body parts. *The framing of our feet in our phones makes them look separate from our bodies, and very delicate.* A screen within a screen within a screen. The iPhone screen with its timestamp and the big red button. The mechanics are really present, the way it's made is being quite openly shared and revealed. The use of phones, cameras, tripods, bodily harnesses.

I'm struck by how much there is to see in the calm spaces of these bedrooms - there's not much going on in them but there is still so much to see - the way the body interacts with its space, and the fabrics, and the colours. You can see through an open door into a room, and also with the view from the window, there is a sense of architectural layering. *In all these little details we learn a bit more.*

The double lens. The GoPro. Wearing this armour of cameras. Our bodies are often being tracked, our phones count our steps, people's watches record their heart rate, we are constantly collecting our own data.

## HEY GOOGLE

*[Hey Google, play BBC Radio 3]*

Hey Google. Hello Alexa. Thinking about the way that technology has been gendered.

*[Streaming BBC radio 3]*

Talking to Google, that digital robotic presence in the room, you're alone but not alone when there's a robot you can talk to. I like seeing the dice. *I want to know more about the blue dice.* Lots of symbolism in this video. Chance. Play. Throw again. Repeat.

*[Music]*

The shots from the GoPro harness underneath the tops remind me that you can never get under somebody else's skin.

*[Music]*

I can't tell where the music's coming from, I can't tell which channel. *Speak for your soul.* The abstraction of shapes through the bubbled glass mirrors the texture of the stones. The rough versus the smooth, there's a stone and a shell, and the blue dice, the colours that come through, orange and red inside the mug and the orange shorts, blues in the bathroom and the blue glass, and blue sea on the laptop screen.

*[Music. Alright friends, we're going to begin today standing at the top of your mat, feet together...]  
[standing at the top of your mat, feet together... hello... hi hi hi... yesterday I think I got sunburnt]*

Okay, I'm going to stretch too! *These yoga videos always have the same kind of music.*

It's haptic and fairly frantic, the way the images keep cutting and moving. The focus goes from crisp to soft and back again. Occasionally it shakes subtly, the handheld nature of the camera.

*[...reach those arms up to the sky, releasing the hands here, and just taking a moment to walk it out, bending one knee at a time...]*

The lens focuses on some flowers, an armpit. *It's almost like she's on the beach. God I'm desperate to be on a beach, doing some yoga.*

*[...stretching your left arm up to the sky...]*

Every time I watch this part of the video with the stretching I think how much I want to stretch, again I'm having a body reaction to it. There is a moment where her legs in the blue bathroom are completely in line with the plant's root. They're both upright, growing, stretching.

The camera on her wrist is like a geotag, the same with the camera on the ankle, they remind me of Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton and all those socialites getting done for drunk driving and having to wear ankle tags while confined to their homes. That relationship between the confined space and the body confined within it: whether it's confined by choice or by necessity, by an external force or by desire.

Watching her doing yoga in the bathroom I feel anxiety again about parenthood, and the limitation of space or how mothers...

*[Hello?]*

...have to work harder to find private space in the domestic, once there are children in the picture.

*[Hello! Hi hi hi. Yesterday I think I got sunburned for like the second time in my life. Oh really? I guess I have been in the house for like an entire year...]*

Routine of exercise juxtaposed with the routine of everyday life. Arranging your body into different shapes, moving forwards, the propulsion of the body towards the end of the day. *The movement of the shirt fabric on one channel contrasts with the moving body's shadows on the other.* In an exercise class, how everyone follows the instructor, a sense of synchronicity, the feeling of being alone but in company. *Together they make a circle, a whirling circle or a spiral of blues and blacks and textured fabrics, and join both artists' bodies together in movement.*

Watching her shadow on the yoga mat, thinking about the shadow self and the traces that our bodies leave behind, how the traces our bodies leave in our interior spaces are well worn, like marks on the carpet or mug stains in the kitchen.

*[Three, two, one, go!]*

While we're watching the beach yoga the shot of the bright light on the other channel is like sunshine. The bathroom transforms into an artificial beach, the closest you can get to a beach inside a house: all that water. Great looking bath.

The lens of the camera takes us inside and outside, we are inside a vest, in the creases of their flesh, we're on the floor, peeping through the plants, or positioned on a dresser. *We're watching the room from the perspective of an ankle while it's bicycling.* A roving eye, a bit like a CCTV camera, constantly refreshing and moving, rolling around. *Like those GoPro films made by skateboarders.* The disjointed, DIY nature of surveillance. *Wonder what it would be like to have eyes on all the different parts of our bodies.*

*[Three, two, one, rest.]*

*[Mama!]*

There are the kids, asking to come in or wanting their mum.

*[I'll just be a minute!]*

Because I'm tired this morning I'm finding...

*[Three, two, one, go...hands together... halfway there!... over to your right knee...]*

...the visual abstractions are incredibly hypnotic and I'm struggling to articulate what I'm noticing because I'm free floating in my mind.

The yoga instructor says halfway there when we are halfway through the video.

## HALFWAY THERE

Halfway there...

*[Three, two...]*

...happens...

*[...one, rest.]*

...right at the middle of the video, when the yoga teacher says 'halfway there' it's really halfway there.

The head, hand, shoulder stand shot from behind the plant, the shape of her orange shorts behind the plant growing, it looks like her bum is a flower! Echoes the red geraniums from earlier on.

*[Three, two, one, rest. Last one!]*

The shadows of the body on the yoga mat. I wonder what this would have looked like if it was a grey day, or if there was a storm, or it was raining. *I wish I'd done some movement this morning, I just got up and started writing.* It's amazing how watching other bodies move makes my body want to move. It wants to mirror what it sees.

*[Bye! Bye, bye. Thanks so much for watching, if you liked this video you can give it a thumbs up and also check out more yoga work on the sun channel...]*

There's something cultish about that woman's voice. That American yoga teacher.

*[Music]*

Footsteps, outstretched hands. The shot of the yellow and green hand on plastic, the body's traces, how we capture the body in images. It's much more immediate to capture the body and its processes on video than in words. If I were to write the equivalent of these videos in equal detail it would be pages and pages and pages of text. A moment in which you can see one of the artist's green and yellow photographs which is a parallel to her own outstretched hand which hovers over it. It looks like this particular Claude Cahun photograph, *I Extend My Arms*, which portrays a gesturing pair of slender arms reaching out from inside a large rock.

The pairing of sky seen through the window on one channel and the blues and greys of bathroom tiles on the other, how often these spaces - bathrooms, wet spaces - are designed so the whole room looks like water or sky. Like the whole room has to be an experience of what happens in the room.

*[Water sounds]*

## WATER SOUNDS

That blue flashing kettle reminds me that at the beginning of lockdown, our kettle broke so myself and my flatmates at the time bought a very cheap, similar version. We thought it might cheer us up, we called it the disco

kettle, but it broke within a week, and never shone blue, just flashed a very sinister red, which felt like a metaphor for something.

*[Running water]*

Morning routines unite so many people. We live in a system where the vast majority of people are, on the whole, getting up within the same few hours every day and performing the same rituals, maybe not quite in the same order but there is a cultural synchronicity to a lot of these actions.

*[Kettle sounds]*

*[Shit!]*

*[Singing]*

Watching a woman have a shower has all kinds of connotations of sexuality and desire but these videos are not titillating because they are honest about the process of having a shower in the morning. Of course there is this exposure of the naked female body running throughout, but it's very natural, it's not gratuitous, I don't feel like it's making a point, it's just consistent with the honest and laidback nature of the video.

They're not framed as sexual. It's unassuming. Often we see women's bodies in the shower in films or in popular culture in a way that is deliberately designed to be erotic, when actually the act of showering is extremely banal, and sometimes erotic, but for the most part not erotic at all.

*[Smiling smiling smiling there]*

Water running, kettle boiling, the sonic landscape of the daily routine. The turmoil of the boiling kettle versus the calm waterfall from the shower, a beautiful description of how water is an element that can take different forms, can be something gentle or can be something scalding or aggressive.

The alarm, the radio, a voicemail message, a phone ringing, a child singing.

To see a shower scene that doesn't feel objectifying. To see from all of these different angles makes it feel less voyeuristic because we're not just viewing it from one perspective. It feels more like we're watching from the perspective of inanimate objects - I feel like I'm the soap, when her hand reaches down to pick me up.

*[Water sounds]*

I just had to pause the video and move rooms because the bin men came and it was really loud because I have my window open. I realised then that you're not aware of anyone outside of the artist's homes, you don't hear other people on the street, or noise from outside the window. I often hear my neighbours going to work, their keys locking their front door, or their car pulling away.

Now we're in the bath and I'm reminded of the Frida Kahlo painting *What The Water Gave Me*, the one in the bath with her feet surrounded by symbols from her life. The sounds from inside a bath are a specific kind of thunk.

Seeing the world reflected through the kitchen window. Bathrooms glimpsed through frosted doors. The reflection on the window gives a greater sense of context, the reflections of other buildings and chimneys, an external world. The material textures of the home, the rug, the tiles, the floorboards, the waffle of the bedspread.

*[Music, running water]*

I can't bear the fact we're already waking up in the dark, watching this bright sunny morning on screen. What shall I wear today? What do I need to do today? I like knowing that you and I are watching this at the same time.

I'm wondering whether you have already done your morning routine before sitting down, like I did, or whether you're going to do it after.

*[Music, kitchen sounds, kettle sounds]*

*[Water sounds]*

*[... and then, I think the thing about the cats and the babies [the thing about the cats and the babies...] [was, my friend is, she's fostering a kid at the moment, and, um...]*

The washing machine appears like another eye at the same time as she's fixing the camera harness onto her body.

The light coming through her shirt recalls that initial light filtering through the curtains at the beginning of the video. The shirt makes for a lovely filter, another lens. The way people hang silk scarves or handkerchiefs over lamps.

*[...and all these spaces for, in the dream she had all these mattresses, in her, on her floor, free, extra mattresses...]*

Thinking again about parenthood, how it's constant...

*[...children...]*

...laundry.

*[Washing machine sounds]*

*[Fuck!]*

The carpet, the distorted bathroom glass, the slow drip of the coffee maker which mirrors the fast drip of the shower. Echoes of each video in the other.

*[Dear Google. Dear Google. What's the news? Here's the news, here's the news]*

*[the headlines for BBC News at 9:30am...]*

There are only a certain number of variations in how a person can get up, within a certain set of conventions. The radio I can hear in her kitchen is announcing that it is 9:30, and that's a nice crossover, considering it's 9:20 for me right now, thinking about how we're mirroring their video in unexpected, tangible ways.

If you're going to meet the demands of the body - food, cleanliness, movement - there's only so many things you can try. It's been unexpectedly easy to embody our new routine as part of my morning practice, spending the time watching the video, talking, thinking aloud.

## WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

It says she's in the waiting room" while we can see her, not in a waiting room at all...

*[Pardon? Hey Google]*

...these virtual...

*[What are you saying?]*



...waiting rooms that don't exist. Suddenly we're in the world of mediated imagery, watching both artists appear on both channels. It's a powerful moment of togetherness and connection across geographical distance.

I'm wondering how interesting my recordings are going to be. I'm wondering what you're thinking and saying.

*[hi, hi...]*

*[...Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Yeah. Yeah. Ok what did you say? What did you say? I was speaking to Google...]*

Speaking to Google. The doubling of the echo on one of their voices matches the doubling of both of them in the video. I feel a bit bereft now knowing that we're not going to do this practice another time. Watching this has become part of my own morning routine, and doing these voice notes has been a bit like doing the morning pages, just waking up and recording a stream of consciousness of one kind or another. In dialogue with you, and also with them, like we're in a community of morning people together.