

**Everything you Read and See Just Might be a Lie  
AKA Don't Believe a Word I Say (A Series of Proofs)  
Christina Battle**

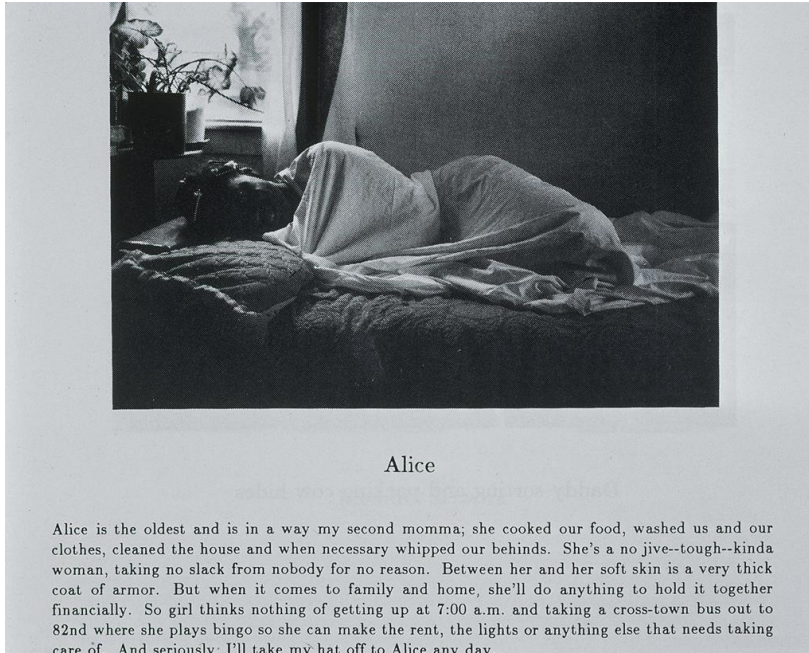


Image 1: Carrie Mae Weems, *Alice on the Bed*, from *Family and Pictures and Stories*, 1978-1984. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

**Proof #1**

If...

As Weems explains, there “*is no one meaning that you walk away with from this show, but you engage in a trilevel experience – interacting with the images, reading the text, and listening to the audio portion*”<sup>i</sup>

Thirty years ago, with her *Family Pictures and Stories* (1981-1982) Weems broke against perceived notions of truth in order to contradict and undermine the skewed perceptions of her viewers as a tool to help them better understand the Black experience. I can't help but wonder how the complexities of this trilevel experience Weems refers to might be shifted had these works been made today. *Family Pictures and Stories* leaves me contemplating the degree to which, three decades later, we have come to expect this level of undermining within the image.

And if...

This strategy was essential during a time when “*there was a general dearth of representations of African Americans both in the mainstream mass media and in the fine-art world.*”<sup>ii</sup>

With contradiction stitched into the very fabric of the work itself, Weems reminds us that we shouldn't believe everything we've been told and sets the tone to come for artists

wanting to similarly implicate their viewers within their works. By distilling the voice of the artist, including it alongside the perspectives of those documented, and simultaneously pushing against the stereotypes viewers might hold, the work reminds us that no story is quite that simple and that perspective matters; that no one group can be summed up by any one voice and that anyone attempting to do so can't be trusted.

And if...

1. We are in an age when anyone (with an internet connection) can share their own voice with a global audience;
2. We exist within a global economy where our understanding of other groups and cultures seems available at the touch of a button;

## Current YouTube Statistics

**48 hours** of video are uploaded every minute [the equivalent of nearly 8 years of content uploaded every day].

That means more video is uploaded to YouTube in one month than the 3 major US networks created in 60 years.

Over **3 billion** videos are viewed a day.

**800 million** unique users visit YouTube each month.

YouTube reached over **700 billion** playbacks in 2010.

*Statistics gathered from: [http://www.youtube.com/t/press\\_statistics](http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics)*

Image 2: YouTube Statistics gathered from < [http://www.youtube.com/t/press\\_statistics](http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics)>

And if...



Image 3: Google Search Results for the Terms YOU and I – Christina Battle, 2012.

Then...

*Beyond the hype, so don't believe  
What you read, 'cause they'll deceive*

*So now I come to you  
Telling no lies, the truth is in my eyes<sup>iii</sup>*

## **Proof #2**

If...

Weems quickly came to realize that *"a photograph can be slanted. How can you ensure that it is understood within your intended context?"*<sup>iv</sup>

And if...

*fiction allows us to experience reality and simultaneously what reality hides.*<sup>v</sup>

And if...

1. We are in an age when anonymous voices are read with the same level of truth as the named;
2. Issues of authorship surface on a daily basis;
3. We live in a world filled with fakers, posers and hoaxers.

From middle-aged men posing as Queer Middle Eastern women, to a young girl faking cancer in order to scam donations out of sympathetic Facebook users, one is forced to navigate today's interconnected world with a strong degree of skepticism.



Image 4: Frame grab of online news article. *The Guardian*, Sunday 12 June 2011  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/13/syrian-lesbian-blogger-tom-macmaster>>

And if...

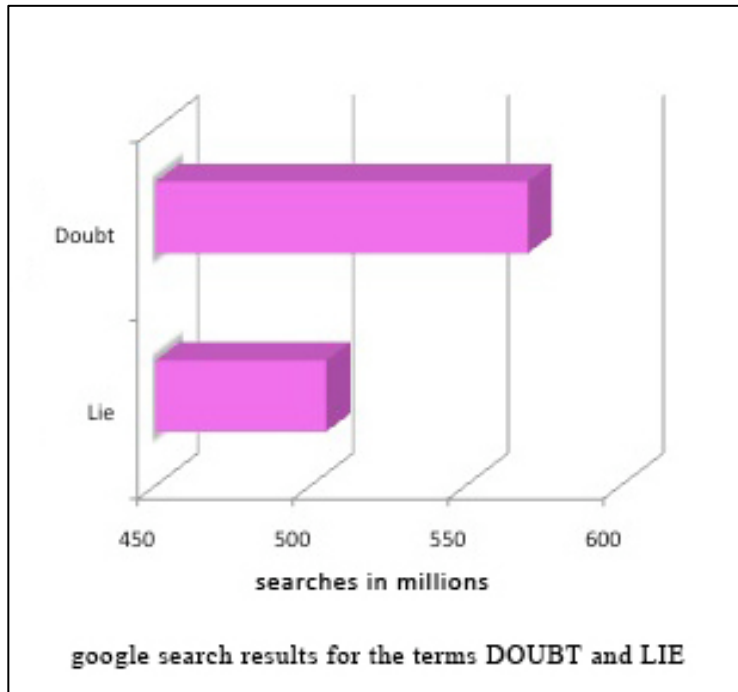


Image 5: Google Search Results for the Terms DOUBT and LIE – Christina Battle, 2012.

Then...

*I'm a phony fuck just like my dad. Just like everybody.*<sup>vi</sup>

### **Proof #3**

If...

*I am both subject and object; performer and director*<sup>vii</sup>

And if...

Artist activists like the Yes Men spread their hijinks on a global scale, taking extreme measures to remind us of what is right and what could be.



Image 6: Jude Finisterra on BBC World News, November 29, 2004. Frame grab from the Yes Men's website <<http://theyesmen.org/>> Image used with permission of the artists.

*"Over the past dozen years (the Yes Men) have fearlessly taken on the world's biggest corporations and bureaucracies through a process they call "Identity Correction." <sup>viii</sup>*

On November 29, 2004, Yes Man Jude Finisterra,<sup>ix</sup> posing as a spokesman for Dow Chemical, appeared on BBC World News and announced that Dow would finally take responsibility for its 1984 chemical spill in Bhopal by offering \$12 billion in retribution to survivors.

And if...

Artists like Renzo Martens blur the lines between journalism and performance.

*I made Episode 1... as a delegate of the viewing public, an audience that is mostly interested in themselves. So I didn't ask the people how they felt now their legs had been amputated and those kinds of questions. But I asked them how they thought I felt. If they thought I was handsome or how I should seduce my girlfriend back in Brussels. ... I turned it around because in reality it's much more about how we feel and less about how they feel." <sup>x</sup>*

In his 2002 *Episode 1*, Martens inserted himself in a refugee camp in Chechnya. Posing as a journalist, he asked refugees questions only about himself in order to remind us of the problematic form of the investigative documentary and leaving us to wonder how much it is about them and how much of it is about us.

And if...

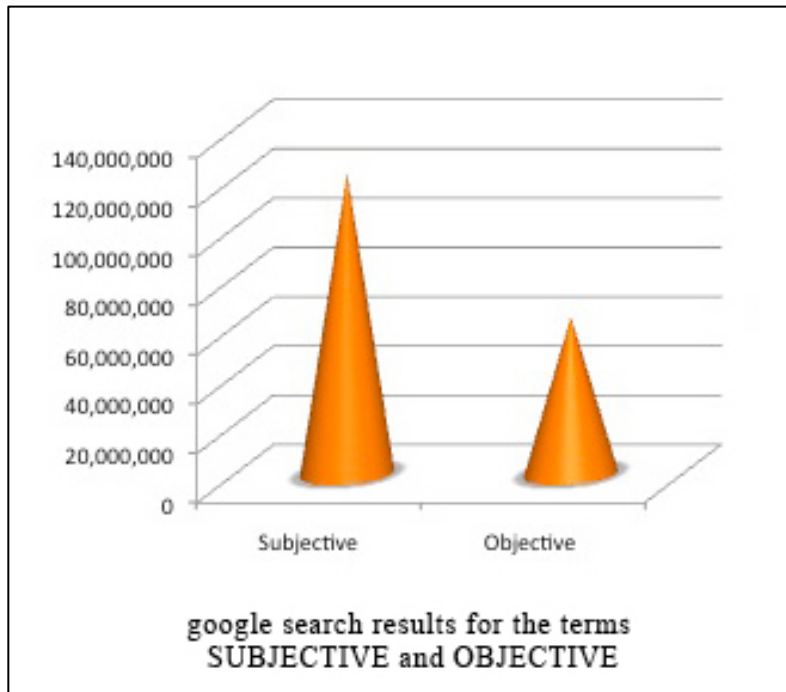


Image 7: Google Search Results for the Terms SUBJECTIVE and OBJECTIVE – Christina Battle, 2012.

Then...

*Don't believe a word we say<sup>xi</sup>*

#### **Proof #4**

If...

*The initial questions are these: How do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power? As I've already suggested, if these questions are asked only within the institutional boundaries of elite culture, only within the "art world," then the answers will be academic.<sup>xii</sup>*

And if...

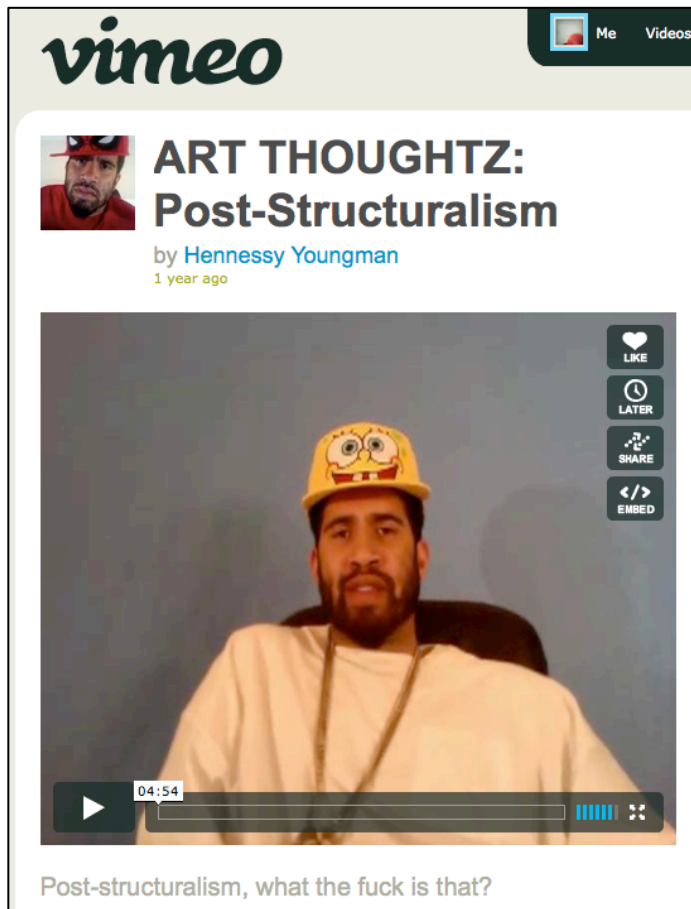


Image 8: Frame Grab from Hennessy Youngman's Vimeo on Post-Structuralism (aka Henrokallah aka Hen RokObama aka Jayson Musson), Posted Fri December 03, 2010 <<http://vimeo.com/17431354>> Image used with permission of the artist

*Now, the chances of you actually hearing this word used by real people, like me or you is pretty, pretty slim, its really rare but you know, if you're an artist and you know you enter into some kind of philosophical conversation by accident you'll most likely hear this word being tossed around by scholars or art historians or you know other artists - insecure artists whose work is pretty boring but they like to use big words in order to make their work seem more interesting. And you know the old motto – if you can't make it...fake it...by over explaining it.<sup>xiii</sup>*

And if...

1. We are in an age that feels on the verge of revolution against ruling authorities;
2. We are beginning to question the motives of the elite & those in power.



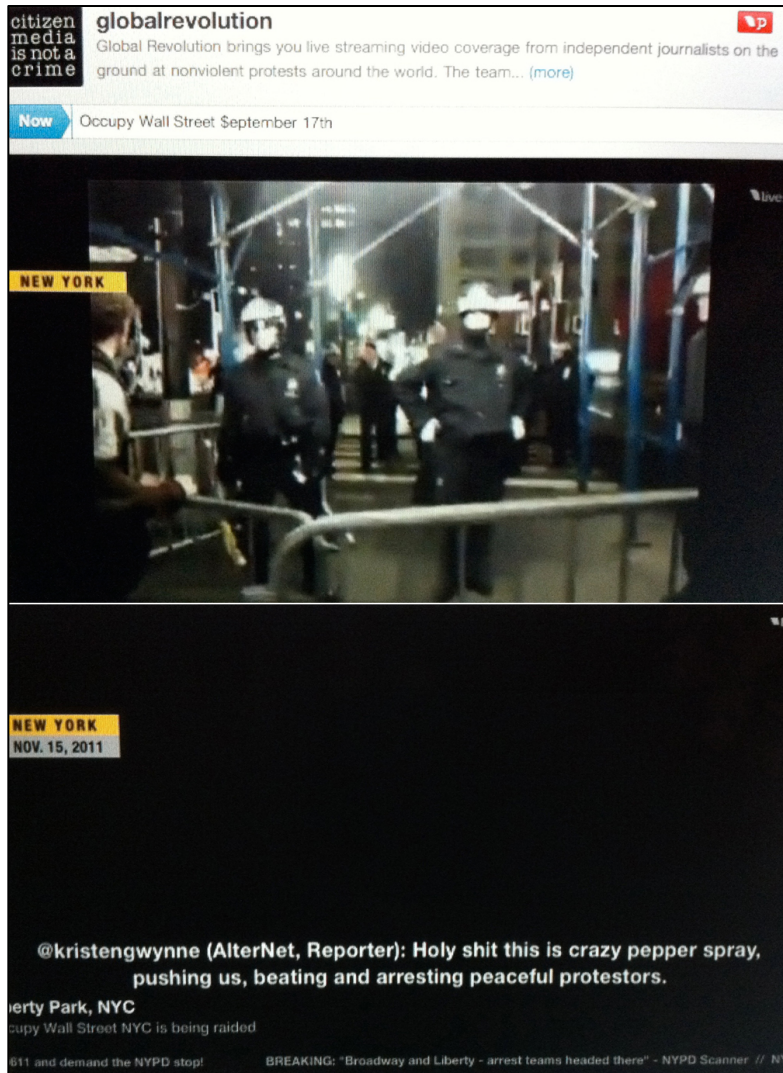


Image 9: Collage of photos captured while watching OWS live stream footage on globalrevolution.com – Christina Battle, 2011.

Then...

*That goes for us all, there ain't nobody to trust<sup>xiv</sup>*

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Carrie Mae Weems, interview by Lois Tarlow, *Art New England* (August/September 1991), 11: quoted in Erina Duganne, "Family Folktales, Carrie Mae Weems, Allan Sekula, and the Critique of Documentary Photography," *English Language Notes* 49, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011):44.

<sup>ii</sup> Duganne, "Family Folktales," 43.

<sup>iii</sup> MC Lyte aka Lana Moorer, *Beyond the Hype* from *Act Like you Know*, 1991.

<sup>iv</sup> Weems, interview by Tarlow, 11; quoted in Duganne, "Family Folktales," 42.

<sup>v</sup> Marcel Broodthaers "Uncertainty Principles – How art can provide new tools for living in a precarious age – Jochen Vilz," *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 144, January/February, 2012, 13.

<sup>vi</sup> Hard Harry aka Mark Hunter (played by Christian Slater) - *Pump Up the Volume*, 1990.

<sup>vii</sup> Carrie Maw Weems, interview by Dawoud Bey, *Bomb* 108 (Summer 2009), 66; quoted in Duganne, "Family Folktales," 50

<sup>viii</sup> Astria Suparak, "KEEP IT SLICK: Infiltrating Capitalism with The Yes Men," Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, Curated by Astria Suparak, 2009.

<sup>ix</sup> aka Andy Bichlbaum, aka Jacques Servin.

<sup>x</sup> "Going Dutch: New contemporary art from the Netherlands," Modern Edition, accessed December 2011, <<http://www.modernedition.com/art-articles/contemporary-dutch-art/dutch-contemporary-artists.html>>

<sup>xi</sup> An exhibition that was to be at Counterpath Press in Denver in December, 2011 but which was cancelled (post-poned to January 2012). Featuring new work by Mark Banzhoff, Max Bernstein, Sarah Jane Biagini, Adán de la Garza, Taylor Dunne, Paul Echeverria, Ryan Everson, Jenna Maurice Montazeri, Nicholas O'Brien, Clarissa Rose Peppers, Julie Rooney, and Laura Shill.

<sup>xii</sup> Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 19, No. 4, Photography (Winter, 1978). 862.

<sup>xiii</sup> Hennesey Youngman aka Henrokallah aka Hen RokObama (performed by Jayson Musson) On this thing called post-structuralism  
<<http://www.youtube.com/user/HenneseyYoungman>>;  
<<http://vimeo.com/hennessyyoungman>>; <http://twitter.com/therealhennessy>.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Gang Starr: MC Guru (aka Keith Elam) & DJ Premier (aka Christopher Martin),  
*Moment of Truth* from the album *Moment of Truth*, 1998