

## Panoptomically Incorrect

[artist statement]

Stephanie Negriff

California State University, Northridge



“Panoptomically Incorrect” was written to give feminine voice to Michel Foucault’s (1975) interpretation of panopticism. It was inspired by the readings of bell hooks (2010), Judith Butler (1988) and Helene Cixous (1976), whose *l’écriture féminine* challenged women to examine literary and critical theory outside of the realm of common patriarchal structures. The poem implicates Jeremy Bentham’s (Foucault, 1975) architectural design of disciplinary surveillance systems as a masculine power construct whose effect on women is exacerbated by gender-biased marginalization and the negative social influences of the oppositional gaze. The artist uses a free verse poetic style to assail its pervasiveness which has been exacerbated through the development of advanced surveillance technology.

Visual images of literary and performance artists recognize women of color as uniquely vulnerable to excessive surveillance. African American women writers, poets, and performers were so scrutinized by the J. Edgar Hoover - era Federal Bureau of Investigation during the 1960s civil rights movement, along with their male artistic counterparts (Maxwell, 2015). As part of counterintelligence programs designed to neutralize threats of social and civil discourse, these artists were routinely monitored, and their works diminished through propaganda campaigns to mitigate their social influence (Maxwell, 2015). Despite these efforts, dancer Pearl Primus (Griffin, 2013), scholar and activist Angela Davis (2016), writer Gloria Naylor, and poets Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez (Maxwell, 2015) were fearless in their pursuit of truth in their social critiques through literature, art and performance. Their strength epitomizes the essence of the “Nasty Woman” and in their persistence in speaking truth to power they have laid a foundation for the indomitable resistance activists of today, exemplified in this piece by performance artist, Margaret Cho and the triptych trope of the Women’s March.

Building on Jeremy Bentham’s concept of panopticon is significant in the construction of Othering, to the extent that its racialization signals those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries, borders and bodies along racial

---

**Stephanie G. Negriff** is a writer, activist, feminist and cultural theorist who brings a perspective to intercultural communications based on several decades of work in local government. “My career in the public sector afforded me the opportunity to interact with people of varied backgrounds, cultures, interests and outlooks. In reflecting on my experiences, I am certain that most people are willing to accept others for who they are, if they will only take the time to learn about them. The main thing that prohibits this willingness is fear.” Her desire to help others overcome this fear led her to graduate studies as California State University, Northridge, where she recently completed her M. A. in Communications Studies.

rsgn@msn.com

lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment toward those deemed as out of place (Browne, 2015, p. 16). Despite this intense watch, abuses of power against racialized bodies are commonly ignored or normalized. “Panoptomically Incorrect” juxtaposes this anomaly to challenge the design’s efficacy as well as its ethics.

### References

- Browne, S. (2015). *Dark Matters on the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theater Journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Cixous, H. (1976). Laugh of the Medusa. (K. Cohen & P. Cohen, Trans.). *Signs*, 1 (4), 875-893.
- Davis, A. Y. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline & punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Griffin, F. J. (2013). *Harlem nocturne: Women artists & progressive politics during World War II*. New York: Perseus Books Group.
- hooks, b. (2010). Oppositional Gaze. In M. Furstenau, (Ed.). *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*.(pp. 229-242). New York: Routledge.
- Maxwell, W. J. (2015). *F. B. Eyes How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.