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You and I aren't so equal;
the visual representation of gender inequality in the contemporary
New Zealand workforce and the visual manifestation of
inequality in Wellington's southern suburbs.

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Visual and Material Culture

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Abstract

Inequality abounds. It is a complex issue that affects all manner of environmental, political, economic, and social factors. It underlies many detrimental phenomena including sexism and crime. Inequality holds an ambiguous presence in academic scholarship yet it affects the lives of many. To show how inequality is registered within the social fabric is one aim of this thesis. Epidemiologists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson (2010) begin to propose inequality as a concept that can be seen in daily life. Based on this proposition, the present studies investigate the visuality of inequality across three chapters.

Despite much progress, gender inequality and inequity remain present in the contemporary New Zealand workforce. As has been highlighted in much feminist theory, gender and women's studies, representation is a significant factor in the activation of gendered identities and positive visual representations of women can reduce gender inequity. Tertiary education providers were turned to for analysis on the basis that educational inequalities develop into workplace inequalities. Specifically, selected visuals from Massey University's College of Creative Arts and four trades training institutions (Unitec, Wintec, Weltec, and the Open Polytechnic) were analysed to reveal indexes symptomatic of inequality. These are undertaken to examine whether women are represented equivalently to data and if non-governmental organisations are implementing governmental suggestions for change.

The final chapter addresses inequality in public space manifest in the form of graffiti, poster, visual sign, and demonstration determined as 'interventions'. A set of theoretical lenses including the work of Michel Foucault, Karl Marx, and Alfred Gell, is used to examine a selection of interventions in relation to concepts of power, landownership, current affairs, authorship, site-specificity, and surveillance technologies. Here a cultural reading of the visuality of inequality is made. In sum, this thesis posits two everyday places as sites where discourse on inequality visually manifests so as to better understand its cause.

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and

...to those who believe that New Zealand is free of inequality, inequity, and poverty because without you, this research would not have been necessary.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s) please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, E-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz

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Preface

Growing up, I was always told not to complain because life's not fair. My go-to question was "But *why*, Mum?" (pronounced with emphasis on, and extension of, the 'y'), often used in response to receiving an answer contrary to my desired outcome, and often followed, to no avail, by one of my first class tantrums. Equally as consistent was Mum's response: "because life's not fair". These statements have stuck with me, not only because they say life will always be unfair but because of their compliance with, and submission to, a state of unfairness.

At the end of my undergraduate degree, coinciding with the 2008 economic recession, I sought paid employment to supplement an unpaid art opportunity. Some 60 unsuccessful job applications later, I developed a personal interest in what appeared to be gender inequality in the contemporary New Zealand workforce. This personal interest describes how it is difficult for me, with my way of thinking as a conceptual artist, not to apply my ongoing research interests to whatever is filling my world.

My days were long as I tried to balance what I wanted to do (make art) with what I had to do (make rent). Rather than give me more time, technology allowed me to cram more into my day;¹ my bus trips became my meditation time. It was during my mundane commute that I became aware of, and intrigued by, certain things I was seeing. I began photographically documenting a selection of interventions to public space.² Frustratingly, my academic art training prevented me from categorising what I was seeing as graffiti or street art. The interventions were low-fi posters or painted text protesting against Government proposals such as the sale of state owned assets. The interventions seemed full of unrest, frustration, rebellion, and intelligence; and I wanted to know more.

Still something was bothering me. It seemed both of these things – gendered inequity in the workforce and postering in public space - were indicative of something else, symptoms of a greater deceit; symptoms of inequality. As I have grown, I have come to know it is inequality that underlies the injustice in my world.

¹ Professor of Philosophy, Val Dusek, suggests technology is a double edged sword (2006). The invention of vacuum cleaners coincided with an increase in house size and the invention of the washing machine coincided with people owning more clothes. Thus, while technology saves us time, social change render progress negligible.

² For some, photographs are equivalent to an ethnographers field notes or a transcript from an interview; photographs are a record of something someone has paid attention to (Grady, 2004).