

CULTURES, HISTORIES, IDENTITIES IN VISUAL STUDIES

Research Network

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

Room F209, F Block, Otago Polytechnic, Forth Street, Dunedin

5:00 pm refreshments; start 5:30 – 7:00 pm

THE BARBIE LIBERATION ORGANISATION: A STUDY IN UNAUTHORISED *DÉTOURNEMENT*

Rebecca Stringer, Associate Professor

Sociology, Gender Studies and Criminology, University of Otago



Left: Mushroom Barbie Eco Warrior Edition Advertisement.
Right: The Barbie Liberation Organization with Daryl Hannah (left) and Nadya Tolokonnikova (right).
Images are reproduced with permission.

This seminar explores the radical cultural practice of *détournement* (also called culture jamming) through the example of the Barbie Liberation Organisation (BLO). I first work through the theory, describing how *détournement* aims to disturb the private property arrangements constitutive of the consumer capitalist spectacle, by appropriating its cultural artefacts and recontextualising them in ways that contradict their intended meanings, giving voice to critique. Then I take a visual tour through two examples of *détournement*: the BLO's 1993 action focussed on Barbie, G.I. Joe and the marketing of sexist gender norms for profit, and their Eco Warrior Barbie action thirty years later, which used Greta Gerwig's 2023 *Barbie* movie as occasion to spotlight Mattel's persistence in plastics manufacturing despite the wider context of climate emergency. These examples illustrate McKenzie Wark's argument that while *détournement* is vulnerable to recuperation by the spectacle, it remains always available as a means of disturbing the dominant economic order and opening onto a commons.

Rebecca Stringer completed her undergraduate studies in Art History and Criticism at Western Sydney University before interning at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy. The politics of victimhood and victim-blaming are the core focus of Rebecca's research, which she approaches through a feminist lens, as evidenced in her book *Knowing Victims: Feminism, Agency and Victim Politics in Neoliberal Times* (Routledge, 2014).

Contact [Ed Hanfling](#) for a link to attend online

Dunedin School of Art and University of Otago (Languages and Cultures)