

La grande transformation

From and around the works of Jean-Jacques Dumont

Éric Arlix, 2026

“The theory of détournement in and of itself is of little interest to us. But we find it linked to almost every constructive aspect of the ‘pre-situationist’ transitional period. Its enrichment through practice therefore appears necessary.”
Les Lèvres Nues, magazine, 1956, Gil J. Wolman, Guy Debord

J.: We’ve transformed everything.

V.: I see.

J.: Nothing is created, everything is transformed — we really had to commit. It’s done.

V.: It’s definitely unsettling, visually at least.

J.: On the scale of our neighbourhood, two years of work; for the whole world, a century?

V.: If everyone gets on board at the same time, maybe two years as well?

J.: Manipulating, transforming, diverting, detuning, diverging, upending, modifying, recasting, and transfiguring can become second nature, a norm, a state of mind, a momentum.

V.: You’re really going for it.

J.: Take your car, for example. It drains you through repayments, maintenance, insurance, and fossil fuels. All you’d have to do is reverse the flow of money.

Park it by the roadside, put up a sign saying “Best Restaurant Ever,” (or of all times) whip up a simple local plant-based dish, stylish and a bit pricey, play post-punk while your first two customers eat, and you’ll quickly start making money instead of spending it.

Otherwise you can go protest at a roundabout asking for crumbs, but you might lose an eye.

V.: Yeah, I know. You convinced me of the benefits of the great transformation a long time ago. Locally it might work, but globally?

J.: It works. Look at our birdcages, our drawing folders, our construction tools, our pierced whistles, our silent compasses, our cut-up ledgers, our straw hats, our dishcloth-shirts, our micro-paychecks, our stepladders, our selfies, our placebos, our window-boxes, our cut-up books, our signs — they compel us, they pull us out of our lethargy, out of the functional world.

V.: The invented world is small; the transformed one is big.

J.: Nice slogan—I’m writing that down.

V.: None of this is easy.

J.: If this world displeases you, change it.

V.: Can’t be bothered.

J.: Then go back to a roundabout and ask for twenty cents off your liter of petrol — but wear a full-face helmet.

V.: Yes, I know, we must climb the ladder, repair social mobility, all together, all together.

J.: It’s always a question of scale; the only effective collective brings everyone together, not just twenty people or two million.

V.: Ambitious, you are; I've always known you that way.

J.: It's an attitude we propose, permanent responsiveness.

V.: Art is life, all that stuff.

J.: Yes, everyone participates, everyone transforms, and we stop complaining.

V.: By the way, did you keep cafés and bars? It's about time for an aperitif.

J.: Not really. Everything happens in the streets, even in the rain: improvised, collective, itinerant aperitifs. At least it's fun. Come on.