Paris, 7pm a bottle of champagne is opened

Malcom McLaren: What is this?

Stefan Brüggemann: These are scribbles- a double negation. So I scribble then I double scribble and then there's different colours, a few, it's a very aggressive work that's very nihilistic it's about negation and about the capacity of not writing and then having it in a form that's about seduction and celebration. And I think light…

MM: So neon was the way to do it?

SB: Yes, and light and also colour. I normally don't use colour.

MM: But basically the neon has colour.

SB: Combinations. So for me, it was like having contradictions all the time between writing and non writing, visual and non visual, pop commodity and punk nihilism, on-no, black and white, expression and non expression; things that confront each other. This Obliteration series is very musical and it produces mental sounds.

MM: Really? I'm confused!

SB: There is also a type of emptiness in my work.

MM: What do you mean?

SB: Like I'm very obsessed lately about capitalism and failure.

MM: How?

SB: Well… it's not about criticizing it but more about just celebrating but then that's very empty but I kind of get attracted to that.

MM: It's difficult for me, always, to think as a visual artist. Simply because I've been so much outside of that game that I tend to think … in less abstract terms and in more obvious political, social, economic and more literary and maybe more practical terms. But that doesn't necessarily mean I don't appreciate it. I do. It's just that I've been through so many doors since I was at art school that I can't remember, any longer how to think in a purely visual way.

SB: Yeah, but for instance, I think, I think-

MM: Very hard.

SB: I think that now the role of the artist is very questionable.

MM: That is true.

SB: And I've always been doing lots of other things like I'm doing a movie now, I'm doing hotels.

MM: But nevertheless, still the same critique applies. If an artist builds a hotel, it is going to look an awful lot different to a hotel by an architect. When you're directing a movie, it's going to look very different to a movie director directing a movie simply because you're an artist. If you compare movies made by artists to movies made by movie directors, trained as part of the movie genre with certain ground rules they are different because artists try not to tell stories but destroy them. Artists generally don't behave.

SB: Of course. It's about finding a new way of communication and experimentation and not always using the same medium, each medium has its own language and it is very exciting to find new mediums that form part of your own language.

MM: So when you say NO CONTENT in that neon, I think that's interesting. It suggests the Next Big Thing. I want to know what happens without no content.

Where does that go? Where does that lead me? I think it leads me to say no sex! No show?

SB: No.

MM: And … no logo.

SB: Yes.

MM: No sex, no show, no logo is what I believe no content to mean. And what you call Punk nihilism or Punk conceptualism, is a way of describing the Punk aesthetic because Punk as a movement was definitely an artistic movement. Very few people outside of the artistic world really understand Punk from that perspective. Not that they have to. The greatest thing about Punk was it was what you wanted it to be. Its popular nature meant it could be accessed by all. Everybody could bite into the cherry.

SB: It was accessible.

MM: Everybody could grab it and do with it what they wanted. Whatever. So it gave rise to a phenomenon. And empowered, enabled, a new generation to take control. It's treated today as a cultural moment that gave hope to the young. I hate that thought. What it did, in my mind, was make you creative, removing all restrictions, allowing you to break all the rules. Once those rules

were broken, the culture changed. And with it, so did life. A new aesthetic was born.

SB: No for instance, when you were talking about hope, the Punk slogan NO FUTURE came to mind, it was there, all over the place, in the unconscious.

MM: Good point.

SB: So NO FUTURE makes you think that you think about the future. In a way.

MM: I agree with that.

SB: And right now, as a consequence of that, I don't know if I can talk about a generation now. But I can talk about my feelings about those types of hopes. Now you don't live with hopes. You only live with the idea of living in the future, living in the past, but always negating the present. So I don't feel any present right now.

MM: There is possibly a reason for that.

SB: There's always a nostalgic feeling that something is going to happen. But it's not like a kick in the head like when you feel it right now.

MM: That idea of not living in the present, about not believing in the present, about not touching the present, is because the present is very confused—because the present is about the future and about the past. If you discuss this in terms of countries, I would say America lives very much as a present-future. Its present is its future. If you live in France, its present is its past. If you live in England, its present is its future-past. England is far too arrogant to think otherwise. They have survived by being more culturally deceptive than any other country. England too, is a nation of liars, pirates, telling long, shaggy dog tales. They are world class in the culture of deception and so they live in the future past in the present, because they feel they always have another game to play. They are so deceptive, they can never be straight.

SB: They can never decide.

MM: That's why when they describe anything, it takes them forever because they have to go around this way then go around that way. They're like the roads in London, you know, all higgledy piggledy.

SB: It's not like New York.

MM: The architecture describes the people. So that for me is how I see the present. But what about the world wide web where there are no cultural barriers? No geographical barriers. No frontiers. Just one gigantic virtual space.

A real global village. What do they think? Well my answer would be that by blurring the cultural barriers and frontiers, it gives rise to a new phenomenon driven in part by children's culture. The world wide web is getting younger and younger and younger. The young are computer literate at a very early age. The intelligent eight year old is already well-informed because she or he can access most information. The web is the first global audio-visual culture. It is primarily driven by iconography and symbols. Before a kid learns to read, it understands what signs mean—like McDonalds. It knows that's where you buy food. Therefore, they don't necessarily need to read. I think the web is very much like that. And what we are seeing is a rise in children's culture. A culture that adults care more and more about, to the extent that adults are trying to be children. And coming back to your idea of the present, because we're now living in a world where the generations are beginning to dissolve. There's no longer a gap. The edges are being blurred. Just as the edges with high art and low art. They're all being blurred. We can now say art is fashion, as well as fashion is art. Everything's blurred.

SB: I think…

MM: But the age gap is being blurred. And that is important because when you blur the ages.

SB: That's the no generation. The word generation disappears leaving the word no only.

MM: Disappears. If we look at it culturally, we can see the beginnings and birth of teen artists, or even younger.

SB: Or a mix.

MM: Today Los Angeles is a city that grows younger and younger. A city, where middle-aged married women shave their pussies so they can go out on the same dating games as their teenage daughters, and compete with them! Fathers and sons play video games together. The interactive pop culture finally resolves in the whole millennial nuclear family going to see the Rolling Stones. Once upon a time, this Rock 'n' Roll outlaw culture divided generations. A new generation swept the old aside but this ceases to exist, and because of that, the present is getting more and more confused because we are attached to the past and the future in the present at the same time. Contemporary culture is getting younger and younger. There's a positive vanity within contemporary art. There has never been an era in my lifetime where contemporary has been as popular. More popular than the classical art of previous eras and even the art of just fifty

years ago. If the art that we make today is immediately accepted tomorrow, that means contemporary art has become mainstream. And with it, there is no longer an avant garde. All of its content is culturally accepted. It's sold like salami!

SB: Like pancakes!

MM: If it's sold like salami what does that make us? When I look at the culture on the web I see people trying to be younger and younger. That is a kind of vanity. A positive vanity. It means objective beauty, part of the old traditional classical world is not important. We don't have those references. You can't put a Titian there and put a Paul McCarthy there and actually cross-reference them. It's impossible because this is coming from a different world. You cannot talk about contemporary art in the same context as the classical world. It's very different. The classical world wasn't really sold as salami! The classical world had different criteria.

SB: There was a different situation. But because of that it would be interesting to have a Titian confronting Paul McCarthy, I think Paul McCarthy is the Titan of our times.

MM: For the first time, we can be totally honest when I say we cannot treat the culture in the same way.

SB: Another thing I'm interested in -when we talk about these boundaries, a problem for me, and I'm talking about people from my generation, and it's a no generation, there's not a common ideology to follow. The idea of ideology is lost. So then there's like a very critical or maybe strange relationship with the old and the past, with the future and the new, that you start connecting. For instance, I can get a dialogue with an artist that is maybe 70 years old now than some art student, I didn't go to art school but- maybe. So in those terms, we have the idea of hedonism?

MM: Of hedonism?

SB: Yes.

MM: Since 1950 the world has moved from a culture of necessity— in other words, buying things we genuinely need to survive— to a culture of desire. A culture where we can buy anything simply because we desire it, not because we need it. It is a very different world and this world began shortly after the Second World War. It began in the United States because they set about dominating the planet with their culture. And to do that, they needed to develop a culture of desire. To understand how this came about, you need to appreciate how the

Nazis understood the media. The media was never truly understood before. How do you disseminate information and control a crowd, how do you fake the truth? How could you do that? How this gave rise to the birth of the advertising industry. There was a man in the U.S. who single handedly created the words, “Public Relations”.

SB: PR.

MM: His name was Edward Bernays. Back in the 30´s, Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda for the Nazi Party, prayed at this man’s altar. Bernays was his mentor. Bernays was invited to the Berlin 1936 Olympics. He was flown in as a special guest from the United States. Goebbels had studied everything Bernays had written. So, after the war, Edward Bernays was employed by a covert intelligence organization set up within the American government and called the CIA. This organization’s mandate was to sell their culture of desire, their cultural propaganda. Edward Bernays was a shadowy figure. He rarely ever was photographed. After the war, he sold this desire to be sexy. He sold to women the idea of smoking for and on behalf of Phillip Morris tobacco. The U.S. government couldn’t take over the world with tanks and guns but they could take over the world with Coca-Cola and blue denim.

SB: How strange that…….

MM: Marilyn Monroe and perversely, Rock ‘n’ Roll.

SB: But Coca-Cola is black. I’m very intrigued that Coca-Cola is black liquid.

MM: Truly.

SB: But it’s like…it’s totally the colour you don’t want to drink but you want to wear.

MM: That may be so, but nevertheless, I simply say this as an example of American products. You don’t need Coca-Cola to survive. You don’t need Levi's jeans or Marilyin Monroe and not in truth, Rock ‘n’ Roll. However, Rock ‘n’ Roll was the only part of American culture that they couldn’t control. This outlawed culture started out as a culture of liberated sex. A culture that celebrates the spirit of the outlaw. It also originated in a part of America that was difficult to control; the segregated South. Nevertheless, society, its establishment, eventually managed to control pop culture and sell it to the rest of the world. To cut a long story short, Edward Bernays succeeded. His job was to turn on the world to a culture of desire and in doing so, the US would become the most powerful country in the world. The CIA decided they should also sell contemporary art. Edward Bernays set up a way to try to do that. After all, this was an American product too. Art bigger than a house! Abstract Expressionism.

SB: The first American movement.

MM: Edward Bernays was its PR consultant. Jackson Pollock became a catch-phrase. Hey -take your brush out [and] paint your walls with drip paint. Paint this! Paint that!-

SB: And also he was the only American American- the first American artist.

MM: Today, we are complete victims drugged by such PR exercises. We believe in, pray at, eat, sell, this culture of desire. Our contemporary art. We don't even see it anymore. It is part of our chemical makeup.

SB: You think it still operates that same way?

MM: Yeah, it's endemic now. We don't even see it anymore. It's in our skin.

SB: It's in our system.

MM: Yes, in the system.

SB: There's no choice?

MM: We have no choice. I was born just after the war. I grew up in the 50´s. I lived in a culture of necessity and saw it slowly replaced by a culture of desire. Much much later, after Punk, this culture began to crumble. Art would no longer be necessary. No longer be something to acquire self-knowledge, to be

humbled by, as once was the role of the church. Just something to desire. To consume. I was a student at art school during those winds of change. Many of my generation were confused. We had entered art school and had been taught an old world philosophy. The practice of failure. Our professors would teach us how the art of failure was a noble one, an everlasting journey, a quest that would never end, a struggle to enjoy an impossible job but as that professor would say, helps take the pillow off your head in the morning, allows you to get up, roll up your sleeves, muck in, do the job. The messy process of creativity. “Don’t just think you can fail”, he said, “learn how to fail magnificently!”

SB: Exactly.

MM: You’ve got to learn how to be the most brilliant failure because it’s better to be a flamboyant failure than any kind of benign success. That’s the point. This was the philosophy.

SB: Who taught you?

MM: Oh, those old art professors were part of a 19th century Romantic legacy that began with William Morris and continued throughout the 20th century in Europe. It was normal. Not unusual. It was particular to art. These were the art professors. It was normal. It was not unusual. It was particular to art.

SB: It was one person?

MM: Yeah. My lecturer was Clifford Frith, son of a Victorian painter, William Frith, whose famous painting hung in the Tate Gallery called “Darby Day”.

SB: And who was he?

MM: Nobody of any particular repute but he lived with this old-fashioned code of behaviour -like all art professors of the period, corduroyed, bearded, sex-mad. He taught that an artist had a different role in life from ordinary folks. He managed to turn one’s upbringing and Middle-class homestead and all that that implied, upside down. Eventually, I couldn’t go back home as my life and understanding of life had changed so much-.

SB: So he didn’t fail flamboyantly?

MM: I´m not certain what he did but he was handing down the baton from those nobler than us. The Romantics and Symbolists of fin de siècle Europe. These artists were still regarded as the Gods in art schools of post-war suburbia. You have to understand, art schools were not fashionable as they are today. They were not in touch with Pop culture.

SB: So how do you think he failed?

MM: Well failure for him was more like a condition of hope. If he were forever successful, as he said, he would never paint another picture. It was only by understanding that he failed that forced him to get up in the morning to try again. This was why he was talking about art and an artist's life as a journey that never ends. Because you never get to where you're trying to get to. It's always trying to look at, criticize and move on. It made us realize that making art was not a career. It was a hand-me-down from the 19th century thinking- art was not a career. It might be an adventure but it wasn't a career. And if it was an adventure, it was an adventure which was going to be a very tough adventure and [you needed to] be prepared for it. So all they were going to do in art school was prepare us to deal with this quest for the rest of our lives. Now, at the same time, fresh winds were blowing in from the United States. We were going along to see exhibitions by Robert Rauschenberg, these Combines-

SB: He has a show right now in the Centre Pompidou a few streets from where we are.

MM: Yeah, I know. I've seen them all before 30-35 years ago! And we see this guy Jackson Pollock, and we see this guy, Mark Rothko, and then we see this guy Andy Warhol and Roy Litchenstein. It was beginning to change our way of thinking. We had been taught that art was never for sale. Art was a state of mind which [was] not for sale. It may be a way to acquire certain knowledge, -

some sort of salvation like once upon a time you used to when you went to a church but it was never really for sale. You didn't sell yourself. That would be considered a sin. Don't even think such things. The very words "commercial", "for sale", "career"- these were taken out of your vocabulary. You were made to think something else. Art as something unique. Not easily manufactured. But then we were looking at Andy Warhol which was factory made art, so to speak. Reproducible. It was art as salami! There was a different idea.

SB: A major different cultural expression.

MM: That changed our way of thinking. We didn't understand. But the way it made sense to us was through its link to pop culture. To Rock 'n' Roll. That's the only way we could measure it. We couldn't measure it -look at Andy Warhol then go back and look at what these guys were teaching us, whether it be Matisse, Pablo Picasso, German Expressionism- we couldn't look at it like that. We didn't even bother. We could connect to Duchamp, Dada, touch upon Surrealism. We loved the reproducibility. We liked that art could be whatever you wanted it to be. But that wasn't seemingly what Warhol was saying. Warhol was saying art is about being glamorous, being famous and it's about being nothing too. And it's about being good at business. It was different.

SB: That's changed the whole direction in the way the art was business too.

MM: This was a different value system to what I was being taught. We felt this old professor didn't understand pop art. Pop culture. It wasn't his world. It was my world. A world I knew, so I could measure everything against that. And that is how pop culture and with it, pop art became important to me. So, upon leaving art school, what did I want to do? Did I want to live in an attic and take on this cultural journey, quest for failure this professor described? It felt terribly lonely. I didn't like this idea but I couldn't leave it alone. No. So, I sought out a store. As a bridge between my artistic feelings back at school, and the street. Trying to be like Warhol in the marketplace. I felt I was right there on the King's Road in Chelsea in 1970. I was in a shop, my shop, and I could make my shop my art. That's what I will do. I'll make anti-fashion.

SB: It can also be seen as a future of an artist's studio; I've always questioned the idea of a traditional studio. My studio is my head, a company of hundreds of employees and my provocations, the studio could be set anywhere, anyhow, any format and it is always constantly transforming, it's a flexible structure.

MM: Maybe. But I didn't think that far.

SB: Now you can see it.

MM: Then, I was just thinking, I don't care if I don't sell anything. I might even keep the shop permanently closed. I just want to feel I am in touch with what I built: a bridge between art school and the street. This is how I began. I made clothes best described today as anti-fashion. Uncommercial. Not for sale. Those clothes I made were my art. My way of working, or getting to know myself. Or as Robert Rauschenberg said, "getting along with myself".

SB: And at that time it was rationalized or it was pure instinct?

MM: It was both. You couldn't be purely instinctive. The rationale from art school was too strong to dismiss. How do you take something new and make something old? In other words, how do you take something that is present, new, a t-shirt, and how do you make it old? I would dye, cut it up, destroy it, turn it inside out, throw things on it, paint all over it, make it as unattractive as possible. Like an old dirty rag and then I would lift it up and put it on a hanger. So I was suddenly making these things; they were looking less like clothes and more like objects, talisman, magical things— for me, I felt it was Rock 'n' Roll. But the ruins of that culture, ruins I cared about- my culture of necessity, as I thought at that time, something I felt was true. Not manufactured but made from the heart and soul. I was a luddite. I had fulfilled what that professor had explained. I was making failures. Brilliant magnificent failures. And in doing so, the projected a certain authenticity that was an attack on a more manufactured

and corporate world outside on that street. That's the way I entered the world from art school, trying to turn fashion into art. It wasn't very long after that, maybe one or maybe two years maximum, before it led me to be able to do the same thing with music. I somehow managed to make music and fashion one. How do you take a group and make them become cool by not playing, not being able to play; how do you make them cool by promoting that attitude? Very simple, I realized, by making the fan the star. How do you get fans to become more important than the band? How do you set that up? How did I? By arming a generation with all this self-importance and positive vanity, by dressing them as an army of disenfranchised youth, by making clothes to go to war with, and those thoughts, I believe, students at art school in the 1980´s, inherited. They couldn't help but have that Punk aesthetic all over them. They were injected with it, just as I was injected. They were infected with Punk.

SB: For instance, the t-shirts of the Sex Pistols, how were they made?

MM: Like I told you -making new things old- a future past in the present.

SB: You cut letters from newspapers?

MM: Yeah, taking something old and making it new. It began by being lazy -it's like, I don't want to be bothered to buy manufactured lettering from stationers- a

Letraset. Just cut out letters from a newspaper and stick them together any old way. Jumbled.

SB: You dyed the t-shirts?

MM: Always! I tried to dye everything dirty grey.

SB: In my experience with those t-shirts, I remember in Mexico City when I was 13, it was like mid-80´s, there was an underground flea market called El Chopo where they imitated those t-shirts.

MM: Imitation is everything. It is flattering. But more important than that, it was a proclamation of a DIY culture. I never set any copyrights at all. Quite the opposite. I felt people should copy as much as they like. Take the ideas, make them bigger.

SB: I remember I was fascinated by that idea.

MM: It was a do-it-yourself culture. That's what people don't understand. It made everyone feel fabulous because they could do it all themselves.

SB: Those t-shirts relate to a lot of my work. An extra thing that was a misunderstanding.

MM: Great.

SB: And that really triggered me. Because putting it out of the context of London, of English language, translated to a big city like Mexico City. They're related but for different reasons. But at the same time, it was like a wave that could join, no?

MM: Sure.

SB: So for me that was very interesting because they look modern and they look chaotic in the city also, but in a different way. And I think the misunderstanding is a positive, creative action and this point for me is important. So for me it was really, like, it blew my mind. Sex Pistols -who are the Sex Pistols? The t-shirts were very attractive but in the context of a different city- this was wrong. This is what makes it interesting. And the other thing that is very interesting is that these t-shirts were worn by bands, but street bands, gangs, low class who had big street battles with each other. The most famous gang was called the Sex Panchitos; it reminded my a lot of Ford Coppola's film Rumble Fish but in the context of the Mexico City outskirts in what are call the 'belts of misery' or 'lost cities'.

MM: The idea stems from the imagination of an art school hooligan. That's who we were. By the dawn of the 70´s, my friends and I were thrown out of art

school onto the streets. We were treated as common refuse, rubbish. We were the dustbins of history. We were the disenfranchised looking at the real world and trying to figure out how we can become magnificent failures? How do we do that in the real world? We could see how we could do that a little whilst we were in art school but now we were on the streets in the real world and it was really difficult so you know, making those clothes was our act. The Sex Pistols were our ammunition. It's a bit like if we go back to the man, Edward Bernays, I can figure out how to manipulate a crowd, how to get all these ladies to smoke cigarettes in America. We're going to need the U.S. government and we're going to need Philip Morris to help do that. He needed ammunition. And I always thought we've got all these clothes and if we're not careful, no one will ever see anything we're doing. The only way people are going to see what we're doing is if we get this group on the stage and have them photographed and have them understood and have their counterparts, their generation, join up and do likewise and create this scene. So we pushed the show onto the street and we tried to control it. It went completely uncontrolled. It was complete chaos but we actually enjoyed the chaos. That was ultimately what we did.

SB: Do you think you set up a kind of know-how for contemporary music?

MM: What's a know-how?

SB: Like what you were explaining just now, it's very applied to what is happening right now. In bands, they look like they don't play so well and it's more the attitude. It's more the lifestyle.

MM: Probably.

SB: But then it doesn't have the same feeling as when you did it.

MM: No, but so what?

SB: That's a know-how. It's a formula.

MM: I think I understand.

SB: But it still works.

MM: I don't think it is as powerful because as I told you, we live in a world where the avant-garde is mainstream. There is no avant-garde today. Not that there ever truly was but 50-100 years ago, there was something called the avant-garde. There were people pushing the cultural barriers, pushing but remaining only understood by a few. Today you might as well say contemporary art is understood by millions. It is part of everyday shopping. Contemporary arts stands bang in the centre of the zeitgeist. There's pop music to the left and there's fashion to the right. But out front, in the middle, there is this monster, called contemporary art that has an enormous appetite. It's just gobbling up. It

gobbles music up; it gobbles everything design. It's getting bigger and bigger. It's like this huge, fat, horrible, ugly, nasty.

SB: Yeah, that's true, isn't it?

MM: When you think about it- it's frightening!

SB: Yeah, it's super frightening! It's like cocaine, hyper consumption, hyper commodity and a forbidden pleasure.

MM: Damien Hirst called me a few weeks ago. He was considering buying all these old clothes that I had made and he wanted me to look at them. He needed to know if they were authentic, if I had personally made them. He wasn't exactly sure they were genuine. I said, what do you mean by genuine? He said, well, that they were real clothes from your shop, that they weren't copies. Fair enough, but the idea was though, that they were made to copy and hopefully the copies would be as good as the originals. In any event, he emailed me pictures of all these different T-shirts and I eventually had to tell him they were mostly copies, by Vivienne Westwood, and our son, Joe CorrÈ and possibly his friends. But I didn't think that was what he was looking for.

SB: Another thing I am interested in is the way that text can be displayed; it could be neon, text on the wall, a book, a song, and like when you talk in your music - it's like singing talking.

MM: I suppose.

SB: How did you, for instance, decide to do it?

MM: I wanted to tell a story and I found it very difficult to do that singing. I discovered Hip Hop in 1980, at its very beginning. I felt it was cooler not to sing. The very first record I made was "Buffalo Gals" with the World Famous Supreme Team.

SB: It's a really good record. I always hear that album on my iPod while I am training box, boxing is about rhythm and punch.

MM: It was a hit but soon after, I decided I didn't need to be a rapper. I instinctively felt I could just jump on the rhythm and music and talk my way through it. Somehow, it felt right, true, authentic for me. I tried to sing a bit here and there if I felt it could work. I liked the sound and I also liked the fact that that way, I could become a character, create characters. I didn't want to be a singer, a star, as such. I just wanted to create characters, tell stories. I just wanted to be inside my paintings, be someone, disappear within. And so, if I was to become Pinkerton in Madame Butterfly, I wasn't going to sing like the tenor in

the opera. I was just going to be him, an actor. When I worked with Catherine Deneuve on my album, Paris, I realized she can't sing so well so I managed to get her to do the same. It became a technique, a way of doing things. Recording companies made it a contractual obligation that whenever I made an album, I had to appear on it. And that forced me to find a way to make it work, though I wasn't a singer, per se. I still had to appear on it and I wasn't even a musician.

SB: Another thing- you think of art, I think your generation, or my generation, we become producers of nothing and at the end of the day. Do you think that way? Do you feel that way?

MM: There's no question we're making lots more garbage than the world really knows how to deal with. We have a culture which is becoming more and more difficult for us to defend because it doesn't do anything but tell people how to buy more and more and more. Edward Bernays started it all.

SB: It's all his fault!

MM: And I don't really know where that will end. In some countries, people still believe they are not for sale. There is still a place where people think that whatever they do or whoever they are, they are not for sale. But it is rare. In this culture of desire, everything on this planet is for sale. So, it is rare when somebody or something isn't. When that happens en masse, then the culture is

going to seriously change. It is very difficult today to find something that is authentic. Everything appears to be karaoke. It is a karaoke culture where everybody can be an artist for 15 minutes and take no responsibility for their action or words from the moment their performance ends. Everyone is like a karaoke performer. Guy Debord, amongst many artists in the 50´s, saw this culture of desire as a spectacle. They saw it as a corporate takeover. They saw it as an attack of the individual— how the whole world would be commodified including the culture itself. They saw it in 1950— they saw that vision. What did they do? One day, they decided to attack Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. They got into the cathedral early on Sunday morning. They tied up the priest, took his clothes, and one guy dressed as the priest, went out to the congregation, stood at the pulpit and declared “God is dead. Jesus Christ is a sausage!”

SB: Fantastic!

MM: The Swiss Guards, (the protectors of Notre Dame) set about trying to arrest the guilty party. Those arrested went to trial. It was a scandal. For us, [in] art school, such incidents were inspiring. It made us appreciate that art school professor who preached the noble pursuit of failure. The Situationists made us understand the importance and its relevance to where we were in 1967-68 inspired us a hell of a lot more than an Andy Warhol painting, or a Jackson Pollock or a Robert Rauschenberg combine. It made us really understand things

in a much more profound way. It made us think of politics as a real Rock ‘n’ Roll, outlaw culture. It made us see what the world was about. It made us understand this culture of necessity and culture of desire- authenticity as opposed to karaoke. It made us understand it. There were other moments in my art school life that I shall never forget-- reading a Situationist leaflet that said, if given the opportunity to believe in love or a new garbage disposal unit, most people would actually choose a new garbage disposal unit. That was very interesting. Those thoughts really affected me. I also will never forget Jean-Luc Godard, the film director, answering questions on stage from a well-known English film critic. He was asked who was his favorite director? Godard answered, “Roger Vadim”. The critic almost fell off his chair. Why not Eisenstein or Murnau? Or Renoir? Godard simply said no, Roger Vadim is the greatest amateur. I was barely 18 at the time and couldn’t understand at first what he meant by the greatest amateur, as if this was something good. Amateurs, I thought, aren’t professional and therefore shouldn’t be taken seriously in art. However, it stayed with me and made me understand something more profound. Amateurs don’t understand the rules. And to some extent, the amateur creates mistakes that in any language, including the movie language, possibly give rise to something new in the media. And more than that, give life. At the time, I was studying the painter, Pierre Bonnard. Reading his notes and letters, he was at pains to point out the mistakes in his paintings, he was unashamedly thrilled by them, as they gave what he called his paintings, life. Punk for me was about defending the role of

the amateur. All Punks are great amateurs. These incidents created flagstones on my journey. My struggle to understand my role as an artist. Stuff like this is what I used to back up all my actions, back in the 70´s and 80´s. I distinctly remember such a phrase as, “It’s forbidden to forbid” scrolled on walls in Paris in 1968 when I visited that city. I thought that was quite a wonderful line.

SB: I now like art auctions as a hypermodern cultural experience.

MM: I’ve only ever attended one or two. It’s a new experience for me. There was a very exciting auction on Saturday, which I liked very much. It was an auction of pornography, not really. Soft pornography. The pin-up. I like these American paintings where people choose to take a pretty girl, photograph or paint her, in the most banal situation and then at the same time, show her knickers falling to the ground. I think it’s very funny! There was a painting of a girl who was carrying a tray of freshly made hamburgers at a big barbeque in the garden. In the distance, there was her boyfriend or husband, cooking on the barbie and a little table in the distance where people would gather and there she was in the foreground, carrying this plate of hamburgers and the dog looking up at her in anticipation, and then you realize around her ankles were these knickers that had been dropped. These sorts of things are very funny! I just sort of thought what a wonderful, funny, mad painting. It denies having anything to do with any innate sense of beauty, acquisition of any self-knowledge. There

was no real irony, any references to art of any kind but somehow, it spoke about the world we live in.

SB: Completely.

MM: There was a whole auction of this stuff here in Paris on a forlorn Saturday afternoon.

SB: You know it's very strange because in the script of my film, I'm not going to tell you the story, but there's a woman with her knickers around her ankles!

MM: These painters are your mentors then.

SB: It's a very important scene, image. It's more dramatic than this.

MM: No kidding, Stefan.

SB: Okay sounds fantastic!