

This much I know

Malcolm McLaren, entrepreneur, 61, London

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Entrepreneur Malcolm McLaren. Photograph: Ellis Parrinder

I always said punk was an attitude. It was never about having a Mohican haircut or wearing a ripped T-shirt. It was all about destruction, and the creative potential within that. It turns out that the bankers may have been the biggest punks of all; they were making punk investments. Julie Burchill apparently once said, of her generation, that they were all McLaren's and Thatcher's children. That conjoining may have been more prescient than she realised. But I think this is a transformative moment. We're at the end of the culture of desires; we may be going back to a culture of necessity.

I've always embraced failure as a noble pursuit. It allows you to be anti whatever anyone wants you to be, and to break all the rules. It was one of my tutors at Saint Martins, when I was an art student, that really brought it home to me. He said that only by being willing to fail can you become fearless. He compared the role of an artist to that of being an alchemist or magician. And he thought the real magic was found in flamboyant, provocative failure rather than benign success. So that's what I've been striving for ever since.

I had a portrait of Francis Bacon on my bedroom wall when I was a teenager. He looked like a romantic ruin even then - a dissolute trickster. A great role model.

There are two rules I've always tried to live by: turn left, if you're supposed to turn right; go through any door that you're not supposed to enter. It's the only way to fight your way through to any kind of authentic feeling in a world beset by fakery. Tony Blair exalted the fake - he ushered in a karaoke culture. Never mind Iraq - that's his real legacy.

I believe in ideas, not products. Any survivor of a Sixties art school will tell you that the idea of making a product was anathema. That meant commodification.

I've never had the family gene. I was raised by my grandmother, a willful iconoclast who was more interested in destroying families than nurturing them. She insisted that I share her bed till I was 14 or so. She was terrified that I'd be corrupted by some slapper. As it was, I lost my virginity to Vivienne Westwood when I was 17. We shared an art-school squat and she liked to walk around naked. She got pregnant almost immediately. My grandmother gave us the money for an abortion and was horrified when Vivienne spent it on a cashmere twinset instead. I remember her shouting at me: 'You've been entrapped! Entrapped!' She never forgave me.

I've lived in Paris for the past few years. I have a crumbling sixth-floor atelier on top of the Folies Bergères that used to belong to Kees van Dongen. But my girlfriend is giving me grief about the climb, even though she's half my age. The thing about Paris, it's a great city for wandering around and buying shoes and nursing a café au lait for hours on end and pretending you're Baudelaire. But it's not a city where you can work. So I'm thinking of moving to Berlin. It's currently the centre of the art world, as well as a party-animal town, so I might as well be there. I wouldn't move back to London - there's too much baggage here.

I'm not slowing up as I get older. I'm going faster. I always wanted to write a musical. I've had this idea of doing the life of Christian Dior as a sort of metaphor for Paris trying to reposition itself as the centre of civilised Europe after the Second World War. It's a hugely romantic and tragic idea.

Childlike or childish? I try to be both. Every artist needs a dose of infantilism in their make-up.

Interview by Stuart Husband

• *Shallow*, a multimedia work by Malcolm McLaren, will be screened as part of GSK Contemporary at the Royal Academy of Arts from 8 December to 19 January (www.royalacademy.org.uk)