

NEOISM'S NEW TESTAMENT

Interviews

"I CLAIM THAT EVERYTHING WE DO IS ENTIRELY NEW"
Monty Cantsin

NEOIST CONSPIRACY
THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

Monty Cantsin Interviewed by Hate McDonald, nov/1983.

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On December 3 at the Rectum, Monty Cantsin staged Operat Blanc, a Neoist performance partly intended as a celebration and retrospective of five years of Neoism in Montreal.

Monty Cantsin has been a presence in Montreal all these five years--whether you know him from his actual performances, from posters and graffiti, or from the always scandalized reviews in the local press. He is a multifaceted international cult figure, vain, brilliant, and an individualist to the core, with many different creative ambitions: performance, music, writing, video, philosophy... He denies to be an artist, however, in spite of his anti-art commitment, he plays in a band, exhibits and performs in art galleries.

He is known to be the head of a world wide conspiracy, Neoism.

In order to find out more about the past and future of Neoism, and more about Monty Cantsin himself, we sent our reporter to the Neoist Embassy to talk to him.

DSA: The first question I have to ask is: what is Neoism? It's on walls and posters all over town, but no one seems to know what it is.

MC: Well, that's ok. Nobody suppose to know what it is. I don't think anybody seems to know. Including myself. The success of Neoism is largely in this question, because everybody wants to know what is Neoism.

DSA: Do you have a definition?

MC: Neoism has no definition. It's never what it is. It's always something different. Neoism resists definition. It rejects definition. It's an extremist stuff bent to be stimulating and subversive. It's like a new born vampire: it looks dead but it's about to rise. Today it's the musical phase of a cultural conspiracy. Neoism is the party of total freedom. At the beginning it was a local performance group. We did multimedia performances and other kinds of confusing stuff. Later then it became a network because there were many others who were interested to work with us and they became members of the Neoist organization. Nuclei of subversion. We set up a network of Neoist Research Centers in North America and Europe, and it became a communication network using mail-art as well as direct communications. Neoism is everywhere and nowhere. It exposes itself by hiding itself. We organized apartment festivals and other clandestine events--apartment festivals are one-week events when people who are members of the network come together to do things together. The whole thing began as a rebellious affair, engaged in something new and assertively optimistic. Coolness is out, pragmatism is through, sophisticated skepticism is obsolete. We've tried a whole pack of attitudes and they don't work. They cut us off from too much that's important. They don't answer enough to the real questions. Apartment festivals are parties. We try to create an atmosphere in which surrender to the implausible is possible.

DSA: They aren't public events?

MC: Neoism was born and developed secretly. Everybody use pseudonyms. At the very beginning it was an exclusively private thing, like masturbating in front of a video camera and watching it on tv. We were completely independent from the public, just like

a guerilla force that has no contact with the civilian population. We kept out of sight, and we only allowed ourselves to be seen at very few occasions, at specific times and places chosen by us. We needed this kind of protection to keep our group strong. We are into mythology and paranoia. We try the opposite of what all the supposedly smart ones are doing. They're all sheep, cattle, dumb, greedy, following this fad and that one. The apartment festivals and training camp events were the perfect situations for us. Later on the whole thing became more public and open to anyone to participate.

DSA: The very name Neoism makes one think of scientific research. Is this an appropriate association?

MC: No. We are not subject to the lies of science. I prefer the example of the shoemaker for appropriate association, the shoemaker looking for the right spot on the shoe in which to hammer the nail.

The word Neoism of course can bring to mind scientific research. Neoism is the science of subversion, the science of revolution. tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE calls himself a mad scientist. Neoism might seem irrational as it involves the idea of penetration into everything. Neoism, we say it's cultural conspiracy.

DSA: Which means--?

MC: It means Neoism.

DSA: But that's a circular argument--you said it was a group of people who shared the same ideas. What are the basic ideas?

MC: This is a question we often come up against, and one to which there are many possible answers. Action is the most important element. We don't know exactly what we want but we want it right now. That's our subversive attitude. I cannot say exactly what Neoism is. It's a practice, it's a kind of radical activity you have to practice to understand what it is. You have to be a part of it. You cannot understand otherwise. Neoism is a fact of life, it's always existed and it always will. It demands no special knowledge, it can be anything banal and commonplace. Walking, getting up, sitting down, fucking, lighting a cigarette, jerking off. Everything, every "happening" is packed with significance. That's one of the definitions. When we talk about Neoism we always plug certain intellectual arguments. We know that not only our own life is being altered but that eventually the entire world will be affected. But when I think of Neoism I think of it as a domain only partially explored; the greater part remains mysterious and unknown, possibly forever unknowable. We simultaneously reject the existence of the inexplicable and accept the existence of the inexplicable. We affirm. We deny.

DSA: Is there any similarity to previous movements?

MC: No. I claim that everything we do is entirely new. In my opinion Neoism is the oldest idea in the world and everything can be explained by Neoism. In my opinion, communists or surrealists in their time were Neoists because they were doing something new, they just used a different name. So today the Neoists are the Neoists.

DSA: So you're saying it's any new movement, at any time.

MC: Yes. Do whatever you want. You just call it Neoism.

DSA: But there's no particular philosophy--it just depends what time and place you find yourself.

MC: I've committed myself to something that's altogether beyond my understanding, and there may well be danger in it for me. There is this fictitious part of Neoism. The real movement started in 1979, --the fictitious is that any artistic movement is a part of Neoism. Real Neoism starts in Montreal in 1979 and went through many, many changes, and today it's more a musical tragedy, a continuous musical tragedy.

DSA: Why do you say tragedy?

MC: It's more appropriate. But I could say comedy as well. Many people come to Neoism after failing in other fields. Someone who once dreamed of becoming a great artist ends up as a producer of Neoist confusion.

DSA: Is politics at all involved? Do you have a political attitude?

MC: It depends what you mean, political attitude--we are not a political party, we don't have a political agenda. We hate politicians. In our propaganda we like to use military terms, slogans, state language, and this makes it look like we were a political organization, a guerilla force, a rebel army or an extremist sect.

DSA: Would you say that people were anarchists who were involved?

MC: There are different politically involved people in Neoism--I mean, maybe some of us can be anarchists, but we're not an anarchist group, and again, we are not a political organization. And we don't trust any political ideologies. Constant mistrust, constant mobility, constant changes - the three golden rules. We want a way out of the nightmare of the avantgarde cul-de-sac. I don't know what can we offer in the present beside full time amusement and guaranteed glory in the eyes of posterity. I don't know who we are, I only know who we are not. We call ourselves Neoists.

DSA: People often refer to you as fascists.

MC: It's probably because of the extreme ideas, destructive elements, icons of power, gestures of violence and military terms we use in our performances and manifestos. But then they could refer to us as communists as well. We recycle history. We are marching toward Akademgorod and can't step off the road and pick flowers. It's maybe our haircut and the clothes we wear to confuse the enemy.

DSA: Maybe it's the cats you sacrificed, according to the rumors.

MC: Maybe. The killing of the cats had to do with facing reality. We wanted to sensitize people. I believe it was a strong statement and it received strong reactions as well. However, for me, personally, it was rather a stupid action and I didn't expect all the rumors afterwards. I grew up summers in the country and I used to help catching chickens and slaughter animals. As an adolescent I worked in a slaughter house. They are everywhere in the world and people often forget how most humans survive. We kill. Killing and stuffing animals was part of my life from a very early age. I was into biology. My room was full of stuffed birds, snakes, I decorated the walls with frog skins and human bones.

I suspect that people like us would be the first ones to be thrown in concentration camps in a veritably totalitarian state. Our attempt to change history is not based on an idealistic belief. We are playing a game for our own pleasure. We want to save the World from total suicide partly because life is the favorite subject matter in Neoism.

On the other hand, because we are so alienated from the way things are run today everywhere, we want to be associated with things that people hate the best, like fascism for example. People who have made the things which changed the world were always despised in their own time.

DSA: So Neoism is really an anti-philosophy.

MC: No. I would rather say pseudo-philosophy. Anti has been overused.

What makes Neoism powerful is its synthesizing character, taking elements from both popular and underground culture and running them through Neoism to their logical extreme.

DSA: And anyone can become a Neoist--you join up, is there anything official?

MC: We are not playing by rules. The one thing you have to do, you have to declare that you are a Neoist and you have to do everything in the name of Neoism. And call yourself Monty Cantsin.

DSA: Who is Monty Cantsin?

MC: I am. You are. Anyone. Monty Cantsin is an open pop-star, anyone can be Monty Cantsin by using the name.

DSA: That's it?

MC: Yes. The name came from David Zack, an american mail-artist who visited me in Budapest in 1976. It was his idea to develop an open pop-star mythology. He was sent to Hungary by the 14 Secret Masters of the World to find the right person to begin the game. Soon after his visit I came to North-America via Paris, where I spent a year as subway singer, to work with Zack in Portland, Oregon. I've got landed immigrant status in Canada and traveled with a homeless passport issued to Istvan Kantor.

Portland, where David lived that time was one of the most fertile places in the world with such local brains as dr.Al Ackerman, Musicmaster, The Smegma group, John Shirley, The Neo-Boys, Eva Lake, Alan Lloyd, Steve Minor, Jerry Sims, just to mention a few great ones. Through them I have got in touch with the American subculture. Zack had an unbelievable chaotic living space with six children and thousands of boxes filled with correspondence art. I went thorough the whole archives. Dr. Ackerman sent me important messages dayly, encouraging me in my love affairs, to go ahead with my projects, and helping me to survive despite my very bad financial situation. The Earth Tavern where Musicmaster was working became our meeting place and performance center. At the Smegma studio I could listen to the latest recordings of new underground bands and do my own recordings as well. I found myself in a completely new situation where I could do everything I wanted without control. People were feeding me with ideas and I was hungry for new things. I used many different names until David Zack proposed me to become Monty Cantsin, the open-pop-star. I liked both, the name and the idea immediately. It's a very simple game. You just have to do everything in the name of Monty Cantsin. However, to be more complicated I would say that it is all a question of giving oneself for some unknown cause. One must give oneself totally, in one deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love. Here is the key. Self-penetration, trance, and excess are the key terms. We intend to create a form of socio-biological chaos. Everybody is Monty Cantsin. And each Monty Cantsin is a different person.

DSA: Is the open pop-star not a dream? The road to stardom is not open to everyone. Only the chosen few can follow it.

MC: One must not take the word pop-star in the show business sense. It's rather a metaphore defining an open situation where anyone can participate. Anyone can be Monty Cantsin without restrictions of gender, age, race, religion, whatever.

DSA: You don't have leaders, is that it?

MC: Well, yes, many leaders, we have lots of leaders. Monty Cantsins.

DSA: But there's no set of commandments.

MC. I would say that a kind of opposition keeps us together, so that we don't even have to be of the same opinion to be in the same group.

Everyone is different but we are working under the same name.

We undergo an endless process of self-development. We seem to live a life of eternal self-doubting and have to prove our worth anew each day. Neoism is a quest for the truth of our mission in life.

DSA: So you'd never kick someone out of Neoism.

MC: No, because Neoism is you, and you have to decide what is your place in the movement. Neoism will never tell you what you have to do. You have to decide what you want to do with Neoism.

DSA: Who invented the word "neoism"?

MC: After I returned from Portland, Oregon to Montreal I realized that the Monty Cantsin open-pop-star idea needed another concept for a bigger impact. It was very easy to invent it. It was in the air. Lots of people were doing new stuff.

I formed a local performance group with Lion Lazer, Michelle Febvre, Yana, Zoe, Kiki Bonbon. And soon many more joined us. Neoism seemed to be a very magnetic word. Electromagnetic. It was very easy to invent it--"new" plus "ism" , just a "new-ism". A new ism for all the Monty Cantsins. All Monty Cantsins are Neoism. That's it. At the beginning it was only a name, without any meaning. Like parents have their baby's name before the baby was born. But then lots of people started using the name, doing their own thing in the name of Neoism and their involvement made Neoism grow into an international conspiracy network. We have held a series of Neoist festivals in apartments in Montreal, Toronto, Baltimore, New York. There were Neoist events in the West Coast, in San Francisco, Eugene, Portland, Vancouver. Then last year with the collaboration of some conspirators in Germany, Hungary and Yugoslavia we introduced the movement in Europe.

DSA: You say that right now it mostly involves music--that implies that there could be other forms of Neoism, Neoist artists or writers.

MC: Anything. We're working on many different projects. We are different individuals and you would have to interview all of us individually to get all the ideas. But we also have collective projects such as the apartment festival series. Presently I'm working on a book, on the Neoist book, the New Testament of Neoism. It will include information about our activities of the first five years, stories, slogans, interviews, photos, manifestos, flyers, stickers, whatever...But I'm a bit worried about printing a book because people can look at it as THE book and it will stop developments. I would like to see at least 5 books published at the same time, with the same title "NEOISM", printed with gold on red. And of course all the five books would be very different, this would really reflect the idea of Neoism, its variety, revolutionary and subversive force, confusing state, changing theories, free practical activities, the whole thing, ok? (OK means all confusing)

DSA: How many Neoists are there in the world?

MC: In my opinion everyone is a Neoist. There are conscious and unconscious Neoists, people who know or don't know they are Neoists.

DSA: So everyone's a Neoist, only some people don't know it yet. It's hard to pin it down, isn't it?

MC: But why do you have to pin it down?

DSA: It's just that you use the word "ism"--that's always implied a set of beliefs.

MC: Yes, but Neoism can be anything. Beliefs would remove all spontaneity. Nowadays, we live in something like the Babylonian Empire. People are confused and confusion is the most characteristic state of mind of our time. This confusion is basically our living environment and I feel very familiar with it. Confusion is my home. Chaos is my living room. That's the best way to confuse the enemy. Neoism implies everything and nothing. Monty Cantsin is synonymous with Neoism. If you you want to be Monty Cantsin you have to communicate through Neoism.

DSA: You're having a stage show at the Rectum--what is it you do onstage, what are you trying to communicate?

MC: Well, I'm going to play music.

DSA: Just music, or is there more to it? I've never seen one of your performances, but I've heard some descriptions.

MC: What descriptions?

DSA: Things friends have said--they always talk about the blood.

MC: My work involves blood. Mostly I use my own blood, sometimes I drink it, perform blood-kiss with another person, splash it on the wall, stick blood tubes in my anus. In '79, to try to make money and to finance the operations of the Neoist conspiracy, I started to sell my blood, I started to do performances with my blood, and after each performance I would try to sell my blood. I decided to turn my blood in to gold. In any performance I do there is always a nurse or a doctor to draw blood. It's a very simple action. I don't see it as a ritual or something shocking. I don't try to climb upon the stake and perform an act of self-sacrifice. I want to point to the fact that the active phase of a movement always involves excessive bloodletting.

DSA: Lots of artists use blood in their work, like Hermann Nitsch for example.

MC: Yes, but my Blood Campaign has a completely different form and philosophical aspect.

DSA: I don't exactly understand the philosophical aspect.

MC: What Hermann Nitsch does is a big ritualistic action that involves animal organs and blood to shock and heal our body and mind with a therapeutic orgy. My blood performance has no relation with collective catharsis. It is a very individualistic and superficial action, and something anyone can relate to. Forget about the subconscious, sexual repression, the genetic codes and ancient rituals. I don't know if there is anyone on this planet who never had his/her blood taken for some reason. When I do it in front of an audience that came to see an art performance then the whole thing turns into something different. And this change gives me the capacity to talk. The act of blood taking makes me able to give my message. Neoism can not be defended but blood itself is a definition. It means me. I am the one who deals with this world. I am the one who gives and receives the questions. We are having a discussion here, we are doing something together but I am different from you. And I express myself a different way, through my blood. Without blood we are dead flesh. Blood is the vitalizing stream of social stupidity. I'm experimenting with new ideas. And that takes all my energy and intelligence. And it takes time to make a statement clear. I'm still at the very beginning of this project and I need many more years to accomplish something that makes more sense. Blood Campaign is a long term project, in fact, I plan to do it until I die. So I have to repeat the same action over and over again in order to manifest my ideas. I draw blood from my arm to expose myself in a situation that is suitable to my mental and physical condition.

DSA: What do you expect from the spectator?

MC: All the conditions are set to my own needs. I create a situation where I can say what I want.

This means that I can't really have expectations. I do not intend to manipulate people's emotions, to make them feel happier or even more depressed. On the other hand, I expect them to be open and receptive to my ideas. I want to turn everybody into Neoists.

DSA: But don't you try to shock them?

MC: I can't deny that it's a great pleasure for me if the audience, if there is any, gets shocked by what I do. Being arrested during or after a performance is the best guarantee of successful execution. But the reaction of the public always comes as a surprise. I do not care for the spectator who comes to see me to satisfy a social need for contact with culture. I am not here to satisfy cultural needs. If you want to relax after a hard day's work you might just stay home and watch tv. Sometimes I hate to perform in public, but I am a masochist.

DSA: One of the things people in the street see is your graffiti.

MN: We use graffiti for free communication, yeah, sure. Graffiti is illegal propaganda and that's why it is very powerful. In '78, maybe, when we started to do graffiti campaigns in Montreal, it was very effective and almost instantly everybody got the idea. I did a lot of graffiti, day and night. For me it was a gesture of propaganda without much artistic research. Lion Lazer was much better in the aesthetic part and he turned graffiti into his own creative expression. His urban faces and my Neoism signs were everywhere. Spray can and black marker power. A threat to the whole city. My background basically is that of a vandal. I actively vandalized public property. From history we know that vandalism has always been a driving force of human evolution and creativity.

DSA: Did you have trouble with the police?

MC: Always. Trouble with the police is always fun. I have been arrested many times, in Montreal, New York, Baltimore, in Europe. In June, 1982, in Würzburg, Germany, during a Neoist event (The Neoist Network's First European Training Camp), the German secret police investigated us because of our local graffiti campaign. Würzburg is surrounded by American military forces. They suspected we were connected with international terrorism.

DSA: Were you?

MC: If we were I would of course deny it, as any true terrorist would do. We are people crucified by society and considered outlaws, we are some kind of modern-day saints. Perhaps our attitude connects us with terrorism. We can find satisfaction only in some conspiratorial activity of the mind, in perpetually plotting the disintegration of whatever the set-up of the moment happens to be.

Shortly after the German event the same shit happened in Yugoslavia. We were arrested and almost every event of Balkan Campaign has been banned by the police. A couple of months ago I was in jail in Baltimore and only two days ago I was arrested in Montreal again and charged with illegal postering.

I often wilfully incorporate the police into my performance work.

DSA: I read something in the paper about Neoists getting into trouble somewhere outside Montreal, something about burning cars...

MC: It was in Sherbrooke. Yeah, another one. They said in the Gazette and in all the other newspapers, it was national news, radio and television and all the mass media got this information that we burned rats, and we put fire in a car and there were rats in the car and they burned or something. (Petting one of his rats, which is sitting on his shoulder) This was one of the rats in the car, but before we put fire on the car we removed the rats. I have all of them here, I have six rats... It was a performance festival in Sherbrooke, and I was invited to do something there, so my project was called "Noah's Ark" and the performance was a street action. I bought a used car, an old wreck, and put it on a concrete stage somewhere near the river. It was representing Noah's Ark. And there were my conspirators in this car as well my rats. And there were many different actions, a nurse taking blood, Neoists dancing with flaming irons, Moondog was doing

graffiti, and many different things simultaneously, music, flaming bread hat, propaganda songs, some kind of a parade, and in a moment we put fire on this... Ah yeah, there was a manifesto written by some of us. We burned Noah's Ark to make it clear that we don't want to escape. We got arrested for making fire illegally and trespassing private property.

DSA: And of course the media got it all wrong.

MC: Yeah. Absolutely. They made up their own version of burning little rats.

DSA: I don't imagine Sherbrooke was ready for it.

MC: By the end of the performance there was the police, the firemen and city officials. It was a great performance. A real social event with the participation of the whole city. And later it went into a national tragicomedy. They made a really big thing out of it. It even went to Parliament. They were talking about our performance in the Parliament because the festival got money from the Canada Council and, well, they questioned why should artists get money to burn cars and rats. Of course nobody contacted us. They got all the information from the cops.

DSA: So that's part of your program, to do events like that--get together and do street theatre?

MC: It's a real thing. We call it sometime Psycho-Industrial-Physio-Alchemy opera, sometime Shock and Glue theater. This show at the Rectum will be something like both, but at the same time it represents reality because the elements of this theatre--everything is real, everything that we do as everyday activities are represented in this theatre. There is a conspirator from Toronto, Gordon W. Zealot, who is going to cook. He is the official Neoist cook, he makes chapatis. He is going to bring his mobile kitchen, set it up on the stage and distribute food during the performance. TENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE from Baltimore(MD) will do his dead dog ritual. His act involves a dead dog hanging on a rop, being the target of tENTA's black-jack. At the Rectum he will use a flamenco guitar to beat the dog carcass till he'd smashed it. Meanwhile Michael Keane, another Neoist conspirator from New York, will strip off his clothes and sing a Frank Sinatra hit. I'll have my band, First Aid Brigade, on stage, and of course a nurse to draw blood from my arm. My rats will be running around and shit all over the place. They are stachanovist workmen in the Shit Factory at the Neoist Embassy. I'll put on my flaming fish hat, Gordon will flame special gold chapaties. The public is encouraged to bring steam irons and we'll have a collective flaming steam iron dance at midnight. We plan to change the stage into a Neoist Public Altar. We want to use an airless, illogical space with unnatural colors, exaggerated, stupid, artificial decoration. So--this kind of things.

DSA: What are your musical influences?

MC: I always played music and I've got influences from many, many different sources. Folk music. Wagner. Bartok. Cage. Military marches. Popular dance tunes. Propaganda songs. I learned some piano and guitar but I'm rather an autodidact. As a child I listened to my mother's record collection, sweet melodies from the 30s and 40s, italian operas, american musicals. I also learned the communist workman and revolutionary songs, soviet military marches in school. In elementary school, when my teachers discovered my talent for acting and singing, I've become some kind of an orator and I had to give speeches and sing soul-stirring melodies at school festivals. That's how I began my carrier as a singer and performance artist. Later I have got involved with original hungarian folk music and politically oriented songs, protest-songs. And my interest was always very devided, I played in anti-music groups and rock bands.

I have no taste. Mostly I like everything. From the most obscure avantgarde stuff to David Bowie. I like Steve Reich just as much as the Virgin Prunes, sometimes Philip Glass, I like otherwise Kraftwerk, so these are very different things.

DSA: I can see the Kraftwerk influence on your record.

MC: This is only a technical thing because I was working with Bill Vorn for a while. Bill is totally involved with synthesizer and computer music, and he is a Kraftwerk maniac. So that's why...well, we were working together and I liked what he did. He was playing with Rational Youth before, and now he's into very different music... And right now my band isn't electro-pop, not any more. We are not playing the music of Neoist Songs. We are very different. All my songs are built on the rhythms and themes of hungarian folk music, the music of a mysterious language of an oppressed people. This is something about Neoism, that it doesn't have to be a specific music that is Neoist music, but it can be any kind... from bubblegum propaganda via military music to experimental noise... no definition.

DSA: Are you doing any Neoist art now that isn't music?

MC: The struggle is on all fronts and it is ceaseless and remorseless.

I make videos and I write manifestos and I do performances,--but you want to know if I do any visual art?

DSA: I wondered if there would be anything like that at the Rectum--objects.

MC: Yeah... We always end up stuffing the stage with objects. We always integrate whatever we can find. In earlier years I used to invite the whole mail-art network to send stuff to be used in my performances. For RED SUPPER at Vehicule Art, in june/79, I received "ingredients" from a few hundred participants. I made a soup from all kind of shit, including dead birds, a gun, obscure messages, plastic spiders, and my own blood. As I already mentioned we will turn the stage of the Rectum into a Neoist Public Altar. A Neoist altar is something that Neoists have in their living room; on a Neoist altar it is important to have a bottle of rubber cement and an iron. The public altar is different. It's like a sculpture that is also an open situation for free participation. So the altar is created by the whole society and it is a meeting place, a center of the universe. In other words we will create an environment to recreate our mythology and our fictitious world with reality.

DSA: What does the iron symbolize?

MC: It symbolizes Neoism.

DSA: Why?

MC: Because there was an apartment festival in 1980, in February at the Peking Poolroom in Montreal, and two of our members were giving a conference about Neoism, and to represent its very severe and very strong ideology they said that this object (picking up clothes iron that has no electrical cord) can be the one to... Because this is an object which is a very everyday object, you can find it anywhere, in any apartment, so it's something like, it corresponds to this Neoist idea that everybody's a Neoist...If you look at an iron today and twenty years ago you can see this development of modern shapes and the changes of aesthetics and something like an iron changes always, and for Neoists it was always very important to have changes, to change... Also, it's something that when you put fire on an object like that, this object is to make beauty, and then you put fire on something which represents or which can represent beauty, it's something you put fire on, so you destroy that ideal of beauty.

DSA: How do you set them on fire?

MC: That's why you have rubber cement. (He takes the rubber cement and spreads some on the bottom of the iron.)

DSA: I was afraid you might use gasoline.

MC: No, rubber cement is better, because it stays on the surface. (He ignites the rubber cement and holds up the flaming iron.) And you can dance with it.

DSA: Your rat must be used to it.

MC: Yes.

DSA: Does it have a name?

MC: Of course. Monty Cantsin. (The flame dies down and he replaces the iron on his altar.) A Neoist must have a Neoist altar, in the living room, so this is something you see you must have if you are a Neoist. And what you must have on the altar is rubber cement and an iron, otherwise you can put on your altar anything you like, something that represents yourself. That's why I have these blood tubes, because they represent my work. This is my sculpture, this is myself.

DSA: It seems almost like a religion is some ways.

MC: Well, because if someone came to visit you, then you can put fire on the iron and dance--today it has much more of a religious aspect than before, it's much more religious than anything.

DSA: It's as big as a religion.

MC: Yes, Neoism is all about the creation of one's own personal religion, but it also has lots of humor. It's more like you take things from any kind of religious, political, social activities, and put it into these Neoist activities and then it becomes very different and very political, very ecstatic and very sarcastic. Irony is the most revolutionary sentiment of all. Flaming an iron can be interpreted as practicing a religion, or being involved in a cult.

DSA: Can you tell me more about Akademgorod?

MC: Well, Akademgorod is the Promised Land of Neoism, and this is our next project, to establish this place. As the Neoist movement it has a fictitious part and a real part; the fictitious part is like any promised land, it's the place of milk and honey, and songs, and total freedom, it's a powerful place in our mind --in reality, in the future, in the next ten years, we are going to get something like a big house, a building, a big space where we can have our own studios and all the technology we need. We refuse to leave technology in the hands of those who control it for their own profit. We want our toys and play. There must be a place where we can be ourselves and do our job. If we can't turn the world into a promised land then we have to create our own world. All we need is a bread oven and a xerox machine to begin with. This does not necessarily mean to be separated from the rest of the world but to live in a situation where we are not controlled by the mechanisms of everyday oppression. We are for total freedom. Some people tried this already without much success. It remains a utopia. Now it's our turn. I'm not sure of details yet. We have time to work on it. Movements usually have short life but Neoism should go on for ever. Our vanity is the guarantee of the success.

Akademgorod is the center of immortality.

DSA: What does the name mean?

MC: Akademgorod? Well, it's a Russian word--"gorod" means city. Academic city. And the original idea is in any very traditional philosophies to have this kind of place of learning, it's kind of a place of learning and thinking... In Siberia this Akademgorod is the centre of scientists, and this place where all the Russian scientists live, they can't go out of the city. In a moment of war Akademgorod is the operation center of all the

actions. The name and basic idea was proposed by Napoleon Moffat, during the 5th International Neoist Apartment Festival in New York, in march, 1982. In his manifesto "The Legitimacy of Akademgorod", Moffat urged everyone to search for the city.

DSA: Why name your place after a thing like that?

MC: Because this is a kind of thing we always do. That's our method. We take ready-made ideas, names, places, objects, whatever rubbish and turn them into something brilliant. This is what Neoism is about.

DSA: More satire.

MC: Akademgorod is a place where we are never going to be, so it is always interesting to think about a place that exists but you are never going to see.