

S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop)

William Copley's Atypical Periodical

SMS April 1968 No. 2

Amidst the social and political turbulence of 1968, William Copley, an American surrealist painter and art dealer, created an inventive periodical entitled *S.M.S.*, which informally stood for “Shit Must Stop.” Copley was inspired by the fluxus movement, which encouraged the blending of all aspects of art. This outlook fit neatly into Copley’s surrealist philosophy, which sought to close the gap between art and life. *S.M.S.* embodied this philosophy. Each issue was comprised of diverse art pieces, created or adapted by individual artists for the periodical. The artwork ranged from dada to pop art and took many forms of expression, including photography, audio, drawings, and writing. Beginning in February, a new issue was published bimonthly and sent to subscribers throughout 1968. The periodical lasted for a single year.

The Weingrow Collection includes the second (April) issue of *S.M.S.*, which is the focus of this presentation. Marcel Duchamp created the handwritten table of contents or index on the back of an interior envelope, which contains a wooden object described as a “tongue depressor” and stamped with the word “Eskimo.” Copley described the intention of the portfolio-like format as a way to avoid editorial and critical commentary: “I wanted something that would just open up and be full of what was going on.”¹

In praise of Copley’s project, the art critic Carter Ratcliff said that *S.M.S.* “removed all boundaries between the mediums. Everything from poetry to performance to traditional printmaking, received equal treatment . . . Moreover, SMS bypassed the hierarchical labyrinth of museums and established galleries.”

“As a Surrealist, William Copley believed in the unity of art and life. With SMS, he helped generate that unity.”²



Fig. 1. Marcel Duchamp, Table of contents or index of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968

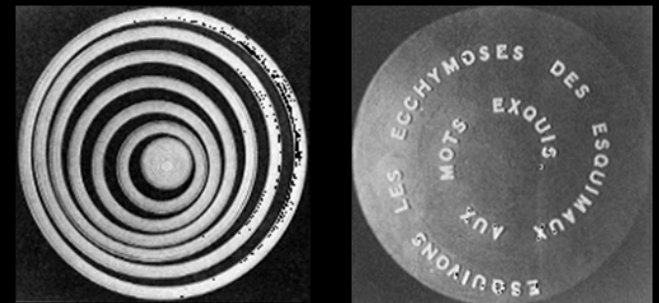


Marcel Duchamp also designed the front and back covers of the periodical, using two reconceived word plays. The front features a seven-minute audio recording entitled "Contrepèterie"; the black disc with white text in a spiral formation mirrors the subject of word play through its amusing alliterations in French: "Esquivons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis" (Let us dodge the bruises of the Eskimoes in exquisite words). It is based on an element in Duchamp's anagrammatically named film *Anemic Cinema* (1926), in which various discs were filmed as they turned on a record player, causing language to turn in on itself; low-relief images of the texts alternated with discs bearing a series of two-dimensional designs that created the illusion of depth, which were referred to as "Rotoreliefs." This interplay created further tension between image and text. Duchamp's treatment of the back cover of *S.M.S.* contrasts with the expansive French text of the front cover, offering in reproduced handwriting what has been referred to as a "contraction pun," in English: "A Guest + A Host = A Ghost," neatly bracketing the contents of the issue.³ Perhaps this was a prescient gesture: sadly, Marcel Duchamp died the same year.

Fig. 2. Previous slide: Contents of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968



Fig. 3. Marcel Duchamp, Front and back covers of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968



Figs. 4, 5. Marc Allegret, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, Film stills of discs from *Anemic Cinema*, 1926

“The hermetic message is masked and delivered by an uninvited guest. He interrupts the feast; he casts the die; ‘Am I the word?’ Find ways of wandering and wondering among the ignominious and the purple. Chewing gum and carry pearls. Maybe the poet can reduce the speed of light.”

—Nicolas Calas⁴

The second piece belongs to the Swiss-born Greek writer Nikolaos Kalamarês, known by his pseudonym Nicolas Calas, who was part of the surrealist circle.⁵ The piece, “Cynocephalus & Co.,” was a silkscreen in red ink on a sheet of silver Mylar, which reflects the viewer’s image. This sheet was pasted into a folded, thick canvas-like material. The outer flap of canvas has a picture of the cynocephalus or St. Christopher with a dog’s head instead of a human one: one can grasp Calas’s surrealist interest in the incongruity of the creature’s body and head. Calas here creates a complementary parallel between the saint and poets; in this reading of the saint’s legend, after years of loyally carrying travelers across a river, the guide unknowingly helps the Christ child make the passage. The small boy becomes a preternaturally heavy burden but the guide manages to carry him safely across the river. Only after this act is completed does Christ reveal his identity and the saint’s inner integrity and beauty are acknowledged and fully realized. Perhaps Calas is trying to convince the reader that poets should not be expected to be the saint who will carry them across the stream. Poets persuade people to become emotional, but they are not the direct source of emotion. Interestingly, at the end, he also refers to observing people seeking emotional stimulation by pushing a button for new images and ideas—perhaps referring to TV.

Bruce Conner is known for his assemblage art, collage work, and vanguard films. His sometimes repulsive work has been linked with California funk art, which is said to be named after “the relaxed, anarchic, and funky jazz of the West Coast (as opposed to the cooler, more disciplined jazz of the East Coast).”⁶ His contribution to the second issue of *S.M.S.* is entitled “Legal Tender,” and is an interesting example of his work. It consists of a stack of eighteen identical “dollar bills,” or “play money,” each featuring reproductions of the artist’s abstract drawings, which look like large fingerprints, on the front and back. One may begin to interpret this “tender” personal touch as a commentary on the artist’s unique imprint. More likely, *Legal Tender* is another example of Conner’s blurring of fact and fiction, as also occurred in his well-known videotape entitled *A Movie* (1958), in which he inter-splices newsreel and movie footage with unsettling results.



Fig. 6. Bruce Conner, “Legal Tender,” *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection



Fig. 7. Marcia Herscovitz. "Collage 1," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection

Ten black-and-white collages on black cardstock represent the work of Marcia Herscovitz. Her art might best be described as a hybrid of surrealism and pop art, because of its dreamlike images and critiques of social conventions. She carefully chooses images and juxtaposes them to make comparisons. For instance, many of the illustrations used as collage elements beautifully mimic patterns in nature or peoples' actions in the photographs to which they are applied. In the collage at the left, a girl and a bird both dip their heads into a fountain to drink. Many of the images are clever and optimistic, but some are pessimistic and cynical. In the same set of works, Herscovitz includes a collage of a young girl sitting at a desk, with a picture of a woman tied to a chair in the corner.

French pop artist Alain Jacquet contributed “Three Color Separations” to the second issue of *S.M.S.* This work is made up of three transparent sheets consisting of dots in various patterns. One sheet is blue, another red, and the last yellow. Only when they are placed together can the multicolored image of what is described as a desktop become apparent.⁷ The overlapping colors also create purples and greens, as well as shadow and depth in the previously flat composition. The artist worked with comic strip dots or Ben Day dots, which artists such as Lichtenstein often used. In 1964–65, he recreated Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe* in a contemporary setting, using the same technique.⁸

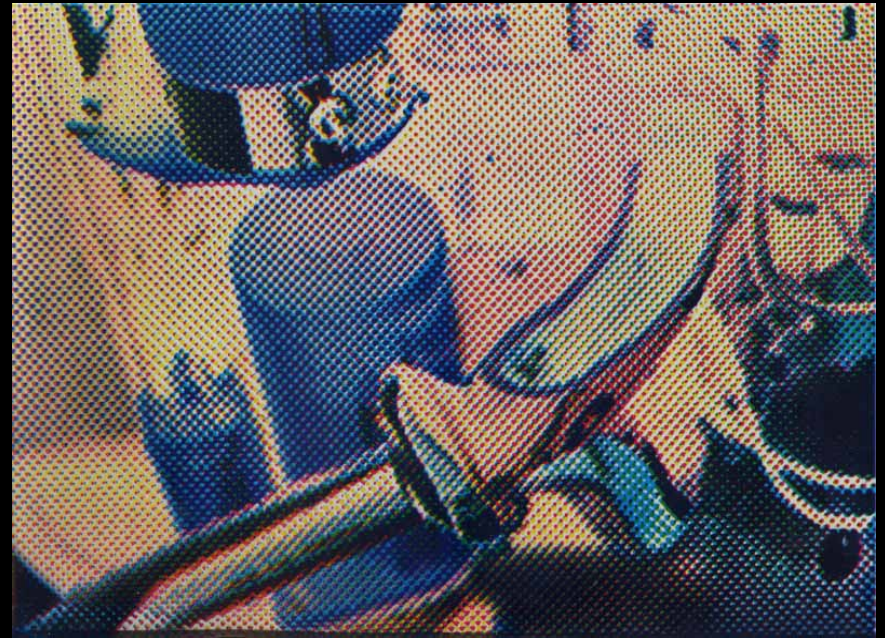
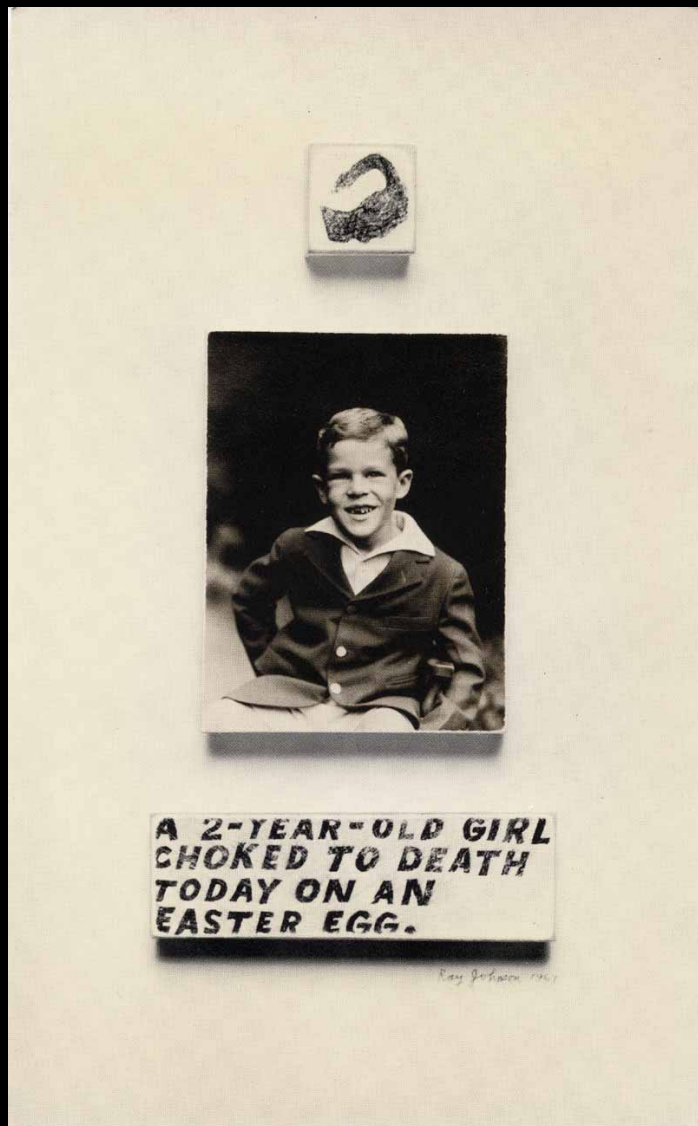


Fig. 8. Alain Jacquet, “Three Color Separations,” *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection



Ray Johnson is represented by his collage "A 2-Year-Old Girl Choked to Death Today on an Easter Egg." Johnson is known for using photocopy machines to their fullest potential, and made many visual puns with his technique. In conceptual art fashion, he focused on the idea before the actual object itself. Johnson rarely exhibited his work, and was happy to give it away instead. He was an enthusiastic supporter of and participant in mail art,⁹ so it is peculiarly appropriate that his work can be found in *S.M.S.*, which was available by subscription.

Fig. 9. Ray Johnson, "A 2-Year-Old Girl Choked to Death Today on an Easter Egg," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection

The artist Lee Lozano created this small booklet entitled "Thesis" (1960). Her thesis, for what is described to be a "Master's Degree in Biology, the Humanities, and the Social Science," was "All Men are Hardly Created Equal."¹⁰ The booklet primarily consists of descriptions of various tools used in the laboratory. Their reference to male genitalia could be described as "ironic erotica." The book is beautifully bound in a decorative dragon print and tied together with a violet ribbon.

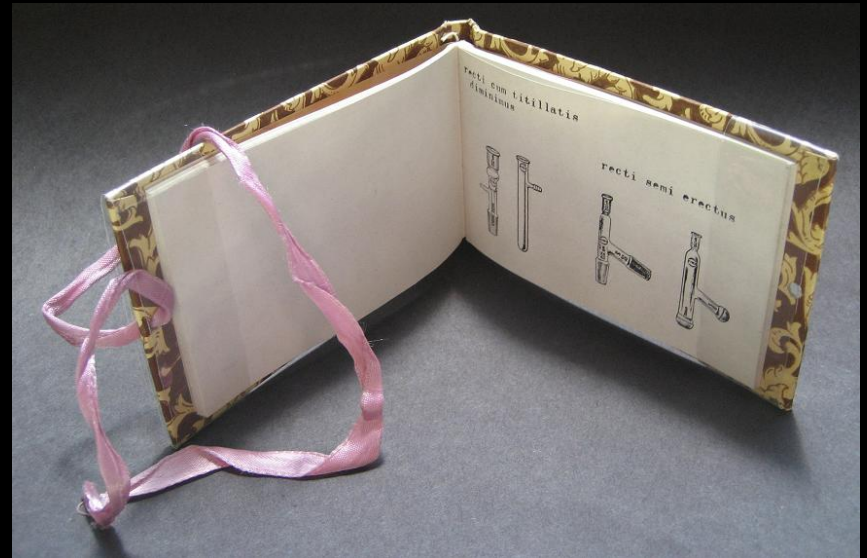
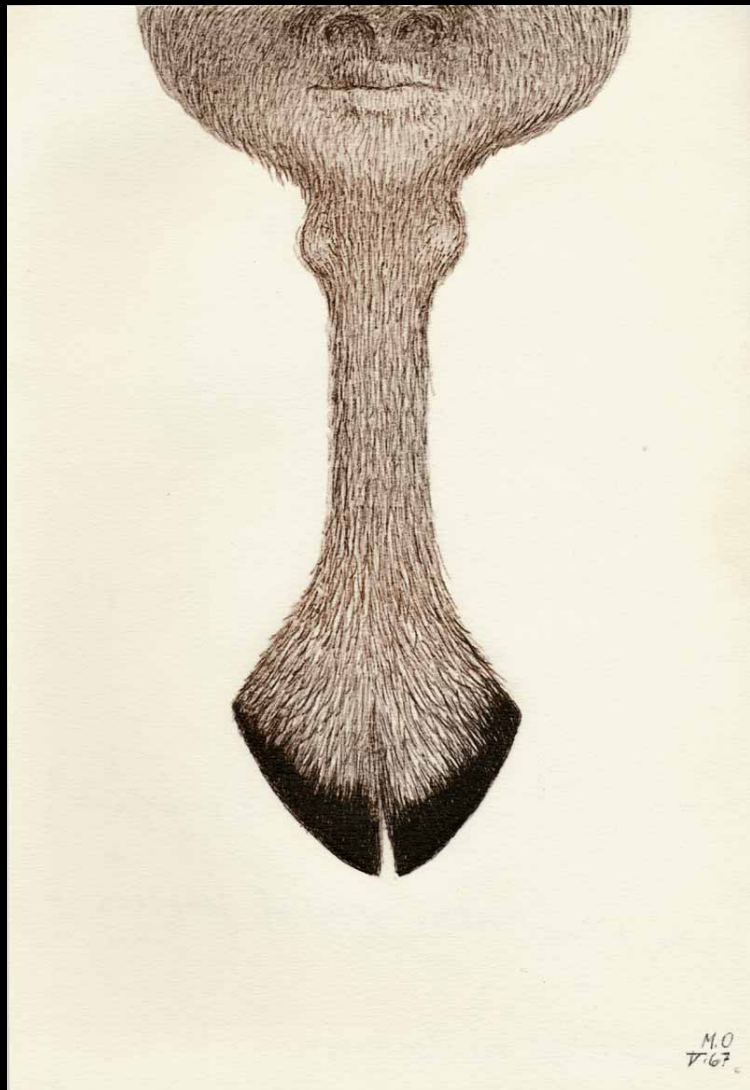


Fig. 10. Lee Lozano, "Thesis," S.M.S., no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection



The surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim contributed a work called "The Mirror of Genoveva." Famous for *Object*, a teacup, saucer, and spoon lined with light brown fur, the artist showed her continued faith in ideas born of the subconscious and dream.¹¹ "The Mirror of Genoveva," which is an etching of a hand mirror with a nose, a mouth, and a chin, with a leg and a hoof extending from the jaw. It recalls *Object* in its representation of a common object covered with fur, but elaborates on the concept in its use of zoomorphic forms, suggesting a possible fable or allegory related to vanity. The area above the nose—where the viewer's eyes might meet the image—is above the top of this intriguing print, calling attention to the viewer's participation in looking at it.

Fig. 11. Meret Oppenheim, "The Mirror of Genoveva," S.M.S., no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection

The pop artist Bernard Pfriem is represented by "A Proposed Comic Section for the *New York Times*." The section is brightly colored and consists of very little text, which is described as "cryptic messages." It is mostly made up of reproduced Polaroid photographs. The subjects seem to be small curiously shaped metal structures that are actually hat molds.¹² Some are in groups, others in couples, as if in conversation, but without the dialogue balloons of conventional comics. There are also plain colored blocks with no information in them at all.

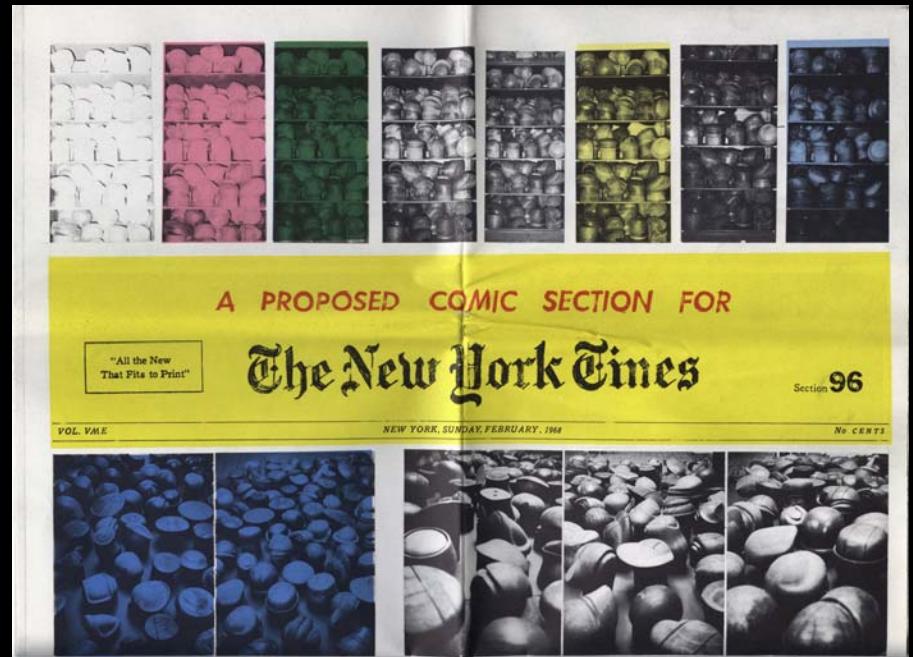


Fig. 12. Bernard Pfriem, "A Proposed Comic Section for the *New York Times*," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection

***“So this is you, old mammet of a Faust,
damned long ago to chew the cud of
glories potential in the scudding
spaces.”***

—George Reavey¹³

***“The past is psalmety to forget
This lande, this voice, this
severed ground
Belongs to us, belongs the
mound of historie and poetrie.***

***And personae of all our past
Will make for us the longing last.”***

—Wife of George Reavery¹⁴

George Reavey, an Irish writer of Russian descent, wrote the poem “Farewell to Faust” as part of his book *Faust’s Metamorphoses*.¹⁵ The book is known as an artistic commentary on the play *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe. The poem speaks of the wind coming into and ravaging the room of a seemingly well-off, intelligent man. Only the wind is able to strip him down to what he truly is, a Faust who is wasting his life throughout eternity. Within the folds of this poem is a handwritten poem purported to be from Reavey’s wife, who saw Marlowe’s ghost and wrote down what he channeled to her.¹⁶



Fig. 13. Clovis Trouille, "Album," S.M.S., no. 2, 1968

The French surrealist painter Clovis Trouille often created satirical images, poking fun at religion and the pompousness of serious ritualized situations. In the red-velvet-bound "Album" he created for the second issue of S.M.S., Trouille showcases many of his drawings of racy nuns and scantily clad women. In *Souvenir sans Suite* (*Discontinued Memory*), nuns are concentrating deeply in prayer as a bubbly blonde holds bananas up very close to her face, making an obvious reference to phallic symbols. The image clearly mocks the intentions of the religious women. Trouille is not necessarily a strict surrealist, for his work bleeds into pop art with its use of the enticing blonde, an image that could often be seen in the media at the time.



Fig. 14. Clovis Trouille, "Souvenir Sans Suite," a detail of "Album," S.M.S., no. 2, 1968
Weingrow Collection

A risk taker, William Copley opened a gallery of surrealist art in Beverly Hills, CA, in 1948, when the art markets in the U.S.— including even New York—were still in their beginning stages. Despite Copley's ambitious exhibitions and a public awareness of surrealism through the presence of such artists as Salvador Dalí and Man Ray in Hollywood, his gallery undertaking lasted only a year. Copley made the connection between the gallery venture and the ending of *S.M.S.*: "And then of course the same thing happened in my gallery. I just got scared after about the fourth issue because I was spending a lot and nothing was coming in."¹⁷ Perhaps, however, the connection between the two undertakings is more complex. Copley has also stated, "I find everything interesting the first time I do it," giving examples of procrastination and an inexplicable lack of continuity.¹⁸ In relationship to some of the unique technical and conceptual publishing issues that he and another surrealist painter Dmitri Petroff faced in the production of *S.M.S.*, Copley hinted at the utopian desires that often necessitate a lack of practicality: "We were always looking for the impossible at that point."¹⁹ With this vision, Copley created a progressive publication that encouraged new perceptions of art by melding all media and presenting them in a new and personal fashion.



Fig. 15. Contents of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968

Notes

1. William Copley, interview by Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art, January 30, [1969?], <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/copley68.htm> (accessed December 15, 2005).
2. Steven Heller, *Merz to Émigré and Beyond: Avant-Garde Magazine Design of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003), 178. For the full, unattributed text by Carter Ratcliff, see SMS, <http://cwww.colophon.com/SMS/> (accessed December 15, 2005).
3. Stephen Jay Gould, "The Substantial Ghost: Towards a General Exegesis of Duchamp's Artful Wordplays," *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 1, no. 2 (2000), under "Articles," <http://www.toutfait.com/duchamp.jsp?postid=898&keyword=#> (accessed December 15, 2005).
4. Nicolas Calas, "Cynocephalus & Co.," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968.
5. Effie Rentzou, "Nicolas Calas: A Life in the Avant-Guard," *Greek Works*, http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/nicolas_calas_a_life_in_the_avant_garde/ (accessed December 15, 2005).
6. Karl Ruhrberg et al., *Art of the 20th Century* (Cologne: Taschen, 1998), 2:511.
7. *S.M.S.*, under "SMS 2," "Alain Jacquet," <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005) and Karl Junghans, under "Contemporary Art: Works on Paper, Artist Prints, Multiples, Pop Art," "SMS Collection," http://www.junghans-art.de/art/sms/sms_2.html# (accessed December 15, 2005).
8. Insecula, <http://www.insecula.com/us/oeuvre/O0016355.html> (December 15, 2005).
9. Allan Revich, "Ray Johnson—Educator," *Digital Salon*, 2004, http://www.digitalsalon.com/ray_johnson.html (accessed December 15, 2005).
10. *S.M.S.*, under "SMS 2," "Lee Lozano," <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005).
11. *IMAGO Meret Oppenheim*. The Roland Collection, <http://www.roland-collection.com/rolandcollection/section/32/569.htm> (accessed December 13, 2005).
12. *S.M.S.*, under "SMS 2," "Bernard Pfreim," <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005).

13. George Reavey. "Farewell to Faust," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968.
14. Ibid.
15. Wikipedia, s.v., "George Reavey," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Reavey (accessed December 15, 2005).
16. *S.M.S.*, under "SMS 2," "George Reavey," <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005).
17. William Copley, interview by Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art, January 30, [1969?], <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/copley68.htm> (accessed December 15, 2005).
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

Illustrations

1. Marcel Duchamp, Table of contents or index. Envelope: 4 1/8 x 9 1/2 in.; Tongue depressor: 7/16 x 4 1/2 in., *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of Karl Junghans, under "Contemporary Art: Works on Paper, Artist Prints, Multiples, Pop Art," "SMS Collection," http://www.junghans-art.de/art/sms/sms_2.html# (accessed December 15, 2005).
2. Contents of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of Colophon Page, <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005).
3. Marcel Duchamp, Front and back covers of *S.M.S.*, 1968. Stephen Jay Gould, "The Substantial Ghost: Towards a General Exegesis of Duchamp's Artful Wordplays," *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 1, no. 2 (2000), under "Articles." Courtesy of *Tout-Fait*, © 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris, <http://www.toutfait.com/duchamp.jsp?postid=898&keyword=#> (accessed December 15, 2005).
4. Film still of disc from *Anemic Cinema*, 1926. Courtesy of St. Octopus, under "Movie Index," "15 Avant-Garde," http://www5f.biglobe.ne.jp/~st_octopus/MOVIE/SILENT/Anemic_Cinema.png (accessed December 15, 2005).

Illustrations (continued)

5. Film still of disc from *Anemic Cinema*, 1926. Courtesy of St. Octopus, under "Movie Index," "15 Avant-Garde," http://www5f.biglobe.ne.jp/~st_octopus/MOVI/SILENT/Anemic_Cinema2.png (accessed December 15, 2005).

6. Bruce Conner, "Legal Tender," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

7. Marcia Herscovitz, "Collage 1," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

8. Alain Jacquet, "Three Color Separations," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

9. Ray Johnson, "A 2-Year-Old Girl Choked to Death Today on an Easter Egg," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

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12. Bernard Pfriem, "A Proposed Comic Section for the *New York Times*," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

13. Clovis Trouille, "Album," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of Insecula, http://www.insecula.com/oeuvre/photo_ME0000056305.html (accessed December 15, 2005).

14. Clovis Trouille, "Souvenir Sans Suite," a detail of "Album," *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

15. Contents of *S.M.S.*, no. 2, 1968. Courtesy of Colophon Page, <http://www.colophon.com/SMS/frames2.html> (accessed December 15, 2005)

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