



the coffee table



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**The Coffee Table #2 Spring 2007**

On the cover: "New Day" by Midnight Monk

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To discover Being we must perform a phenomenological reduction. Setting aside the question of the ontological objectivity of appearances, we can classify them broadly in terms of their being *phenomenal*. Whatever we say about the relation of subject to object, our fundamental experience of reality, phenomenally, is of a manifold of overlapping, integrated qualities. The phenomenal manifold is the totality of appearances unfolded relative to a discrete point-of-view, i.e., a consciousness. Conscious awareness sits at the nexus of a set of relations between qualities that define a particular world-view or world-line. All of the objects emerging from these relations—insofar as they emerge—are phenomenal. They are interior to consciousness. Experience cannot reach beyond these bounds, nor conceive of the thing-in-itself.

Consider the manifold itself. The manifold is the *enfoldment* of every possible object that can appear relative to a given consciousness according to the parameters of its POV, which is in part defined by its spacetime coordinates (the ideal observer as a mathematical point). The manifold itself is the ground of the possibility of any particular thing appearing. Relative to any conscious POV, there exists a manifold that defines the full extent of the range of possible appearances. It defines the possibility of *hearing a thing*, or *seeing a thing*, or *feeling a thing*, &c. Relative to a pure, unified consciousness, it appears as a mesh of all possible qualities overlapping and flowing together. This initial or fundamental appearance is undifferentiated with respect to particulars.

Part of what defines a human-type manifold is the inclusion of a set of cognitive functions, i.e., *a mind*. The purpose of these functions is to differentiate the manifold—to pick out, identify, classify, and clarify sections of the manifold. Essentially, to define particular forms from within the parameters of the possible. It is limited by certain *transcendental* parameters in the Kantian sense, e.g., spacetime coordinates. Every life is unique because it occupies a unique position (or coordinate) and has a unique world-line.

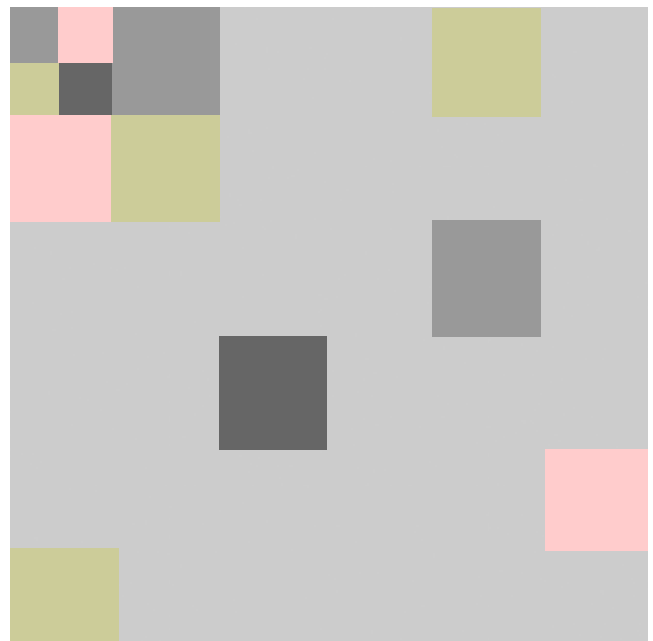
Because the manifold is the enfoldment of the possible, no world-line can exhaust its potential. What this means is that while a person may eventually

develop a stable sense of their world and its objects, these are not the only object nor the only configuration that is possible for them. The world as we perceive it is not 'given' to us in a ready-made form. Our perception does not reflect what is 'there', but a process of constructing a coherent assemblage of relations from within a limited range of possibilities.

We can discriminate between the immediate occurrence of a sensation and its perception as a product of cognition. The sensual field is the presentation of the undifferentiated manifold. The 'interior' of the mind is a reflective field that represents sections of that manifold and organizes them into logically significant patterns—concepts or *schema*. This organizes sensations according to rules.

Sensation occurs all at once and simultaneously with no regard for the differentiation of objects. It is a presentation *en masse* of phenomenal qualities. Were we to focus awareness on that field, pre-empting cognitive action, we'd be faced with the true nature of the manifold—a plenum of pure quality.

Sensation itself thus does not discriminate objects. The identification of objects happens through cognition. The mind is originally a blank slate, save for its cognitive parameters, the so-called categories of thought. It reflects the sensual field. Through an act of selective focus an object is defined for the mind to operate on. Focus is the localization of awareness.



## Interview with libertygrl



**Yogi Bear:** What kind of movies do you generally enjoy?

**libertygrl:** I especially enjoy fairy tales, or stories with strong mythological themes, and/or metaphorical/allegorical elements. For example, "The Matrix", "What Dreams May Come", "Lady in the Water".

I also love suspense thrillers. Dance movies. 3-D animated films. Action films occasionally, and a romantic comedy now and then. Not too keen on horror, although I did enjoy the "Scream" trilogy.

**Midnight\_Monk:** Do you feel that taking the initiative, starting and administrating your own discussion forum, has changed the way you approach and value virtual discussion?

### Selected excerpts from "Interview with libertygrl"<sup>1</sup>

**Yogi Bear:** What was your first encounter with mystery like? Did the unknown sneak up on you bit by bit, or did it hit you like a Mack truck?

**libertygrl:** Life has always been mysterious to me, for as long as I can remember. I would say that my first "encounter" with mystery was when I was six years old. On our school break they would let all of us kids out into the school yard to play; this was in Germany. I found a tree that was far at the end of the yard, a quiet place away from the pavement where the kids were playing. The next thing I knew, all the kids were gone and I had no idea how long I had been sitting there. I went back inside the schoolhouse and the teacher hadn't even noticed I was gone.

While I was sitting out there alone, I was thinking about things without having words to express them, feeling things without knowing what they meant, overwhelmed by something I couldn't understand. It was also mysterious to go back inside and find that so much time had passed without me realizing. It was mysterious not to have heard the school bell ring. It wasn't until over 25 years later that I was able to begin to process what that memory was about. Lots of heavy things, trauma-related.

**libertygrl:** The value I place on virtual discussion has always remained the same. What I value most about it is that it gives people like myself, who in the "3D" world may be considered "anti-social", the opportunity to have a sense of community.

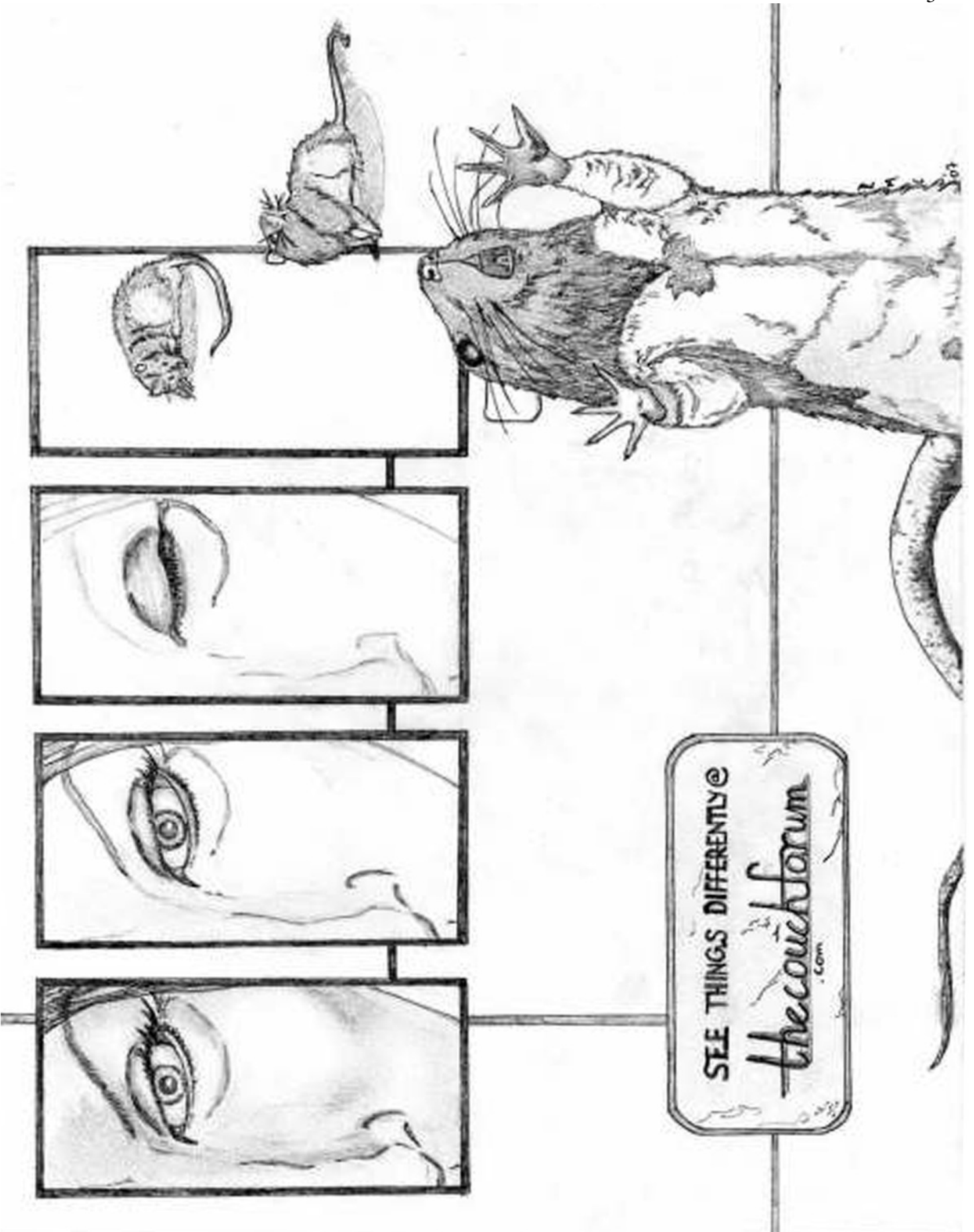
Administrating The Couch has definitely changed my approach toward online discussion. Before I became admin, I was a strong proponent of freedom of speech barring any kind of censorship. I feel differently about that now. As you've mentioned in a previous thread, our freedoms are naturally limited by our values, and this is something I've learned a lot about since starting The Couch. Paul, who is also the creator and admin of PhilosophyForums, has been greatly influential in setting an example of productive moderating. There is also a largely intuitive component.

**IammyaspectofUs:** If you could pass one national law in the United States, what would it be and why? Of course it must be constitutional, unlike the newly actuated Presidential abilities.

**libertygrl:** I would implement Ben [Jordan]'s idea of a vagrant wage. Basic food supply for everyone, whether they can afford it or not. The money for that wage can come from military spending cuts, or a corporation tax.

*(Continued on page 6)*

1. Cf. <http://www.thecouchforum.com/comments.php?id=446>



by Ryan M. Cairns

## Interview with libertygrl...(continued from page 5)

**IammyaspectofUs:** What type of shoe do you most often wear, and what type would you rather most often wear, if they are not the same?

**libertygrl:** If I had my way, I would wear sandals all the time, everywhere, to everything. I love sandals and I hate wearing socks. Unfortunately, here in San Francisco, it's too cold to wear sandals. We had an unusually warm summer this last year so I got to break out my sandals for a bit, but usually I wear tennis shoes most of the time. I walk about forty minutes a day, to and from work, so comfortable shoes are a must.

**IammyaspectofUs:** Imagine that you are at this time required to hold a public office and that you get to choose that office out of all of them. It can be an existing one or you can create a new one to serve the public. It must be subject to the constitution. You can be The President of the United States of America, or anything else.

**libertygrl:** I wouldn't mind being mayor of San Francisco.

**IammyaspectofUs:** Explain your intentions and what you would hope to accomplish with your service.

**libertygrl:** I just love this city, and I would love to have the opportunity to help make things better here, although it's already on the right track, in my opinion. I would work with immigration reform and address the homeless problem here. These are things Mayor Gavin Newsom is already working on, and I respect his work. He's declared San Francisco a "city of refuge" and said that he would not criminalize illegal immigration, regardless of federal mandates. Anyone can get medical treatment and police assistance, regardless of immigration status, no questions asked. It's an interesting policy. I would also work toward legalizing the use of drugs such as marijuana, MDMA (ecstasy), and LSD in a medical context.

**MrPeabody:** On the immigration issue, have you changed your mind since the "illegal immigration in the U.S." thread? You had sounded like you were against free medical treatments of illegals; do you feel different now?

**libertygrl:** I've definitely given the issue a lot more thought since that thread. I do continue to be concerned about the inequities that would lead to 60 hospitals being closed down due to giving away so much free treatment. As was also pointed out in that thread, there are a lot of problems with our western medical system, a lot of corruption, and I believe that corruption at the top (especially the health insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies who exploit the system) is what facilitates exploitation from the outside. In other words, people don't seem to have too much of a moral issue stealing from thieves.

Mayor Newsom's work with illegal immigration has gotten me interested in seeing more systems (and entire cities) functioning on principles of integrity. It's not that I object to charitable donations to people who need it; that was never the case. It's that we also need to figure out how to take care of the people who are contributing to the system. As a rule, you have to take care of yourself first before you can take care of other people. That is true for individuals as well as for societies. I don't believe that Newsom's "city of refuge" policy would work everywhere, because it's also necessary to have that foundation of personal integrity (and consistency) in order to get a handle on the corruption & exploitation, whether it comes from within or without.

**e.:** What colours do you like to have around you, in the apartment, etc.?

**libertygrl:** Orange is my favorite color, and I have a lot of orange around my apartment, especially in my paintings. Orange is very warm & dynamic. Blue is another favorite color, and it complements orange well. Cool and laid-back. I generally like bright colors. I do a lot of painting with black-light (UV) reactive paint so I've got a lot of bright colors on my walls.

**IammyaspectofUs:** How were you inspired to create The Couch? How are you and have you been inspired by the life and times of your creation?

**libertygrl:** The Couch came into existence due to some complicated disagreements between me and the admin of the forum I used to frequent—

## Interview with libertygrl...

—Mad Philosophers Guild. It's not something I begrudge her for. As I see it, the bottom line is that we simply had different ideas about the ideal environment for a discussion forum. We were moving in different directions and so it became necessary that we part ways.

From the very first moment that I discovered discussion forums on the Internet, I was very excited about the potential they had to draw people together in a way that had never before been explored. Upon realizing that I would not be able to explore that potential at MPG in the way I had hoped, I decided to give the admin position a shot for myself and see where it led.

What inspires me about The Couch is the consideration and sincerity of its members. In some sense it's true that it is my creation, because I have put down the framework and worked to set the tone, but I did not invent the idea of the discussion forum and it would be quite a boring place if I sat here alone. So I'm thankful to everyone who helps to bring this place to life, because I cannot do it alone. The Couch is everything I imagined it could be and more, and who can ask for more than that.

Long live The Couch,  
lib

□

### *Being as the Undifferentiated Manifold* (continued from page 3)

A *non-localized* awareness would be aware of the totality of the phenomenal manifold. A *localized* awareness picks out a particular field of possibilities and concentrates upon them. This reflects the intentional directive of consciousness—to move towards a possible object.

But the mere localization of awareness only defines a formal placeholder, a logically possible object—an 'it', a 'there'. Consciousness's only power is to direct focus towards the possible. Now, upon attaining such a focus, the mind, reflecting this action, is able to retain it, record it in memory. So the entire section of the manifold localized by focus is retained as

a holistic impression within the mind. By repeating this process over and over again eventually patterns begin to emerge from within the manifold. The mind is able to differentiate forms of the possible with more and more acute exactness. Starting from an undifferentiated plenum of quality, we arrive at the perception of trees, rocks, people—the familiar phenomenal world.

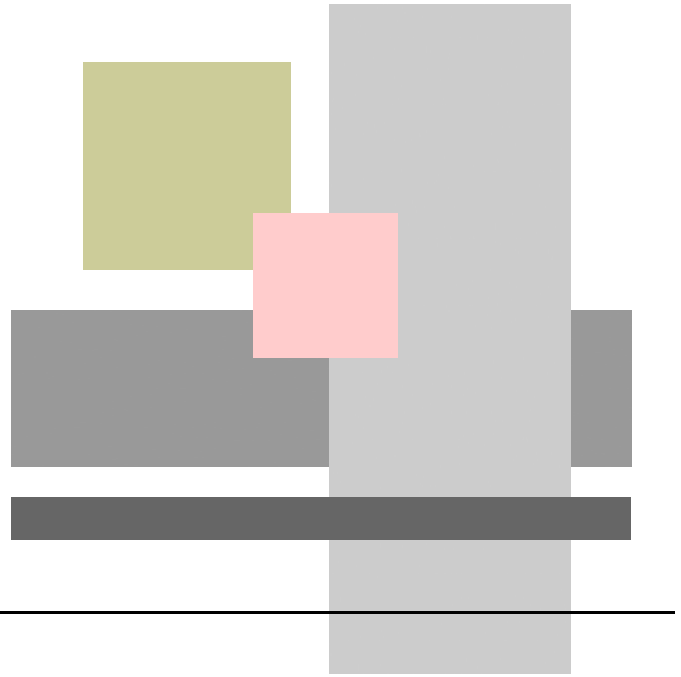
*Being* is the most abstract concept we use to describe all possible appearances. Being is the concept of the totality of appearances. But, since the natural movement of cognition is from the undifferentiated to the discretely differentiated, how are we to perceive Being? In fact, we cannot even conceive of Being until we reach a relatively high level of concept development, and are able to abstract from all commonalities to project a single *class* under which they all fall. The conception of Being is a product of logic. But is it a mere abstraction? If it is to have an ontological relevance it must be *experientable* as well as thinkable. Is it possible to experience Being?

Being itself is the is-ness of objects. For us, what that means is a bracketing of conceptualized qualities of a given object in lieu of a direct apprehension of its presentation in appearance. But as we've seen, this direct apprehension of the undifferentiated manifold is merely an intentional thrusting of consciousness towards a categorical (possible) object. The particular bereft of its qualities becomes a categorical placeholder, a formal object-of-awareness.

If we perform this reduction with any and all other objects, we find that at the level of *being* they cannot be differentiated. In Being, as the totality of the possible manifold, there is no natural differentiation. To apprehend Being in itself we must transcend the divisions engrained in the mind separating the manifold into subject and object. Not only must the qualities of all possible objects be bracketed, but also the functions of the mind and the persona constructed through them. At that point it is possible for awareness to be directed solely upon the manifold in its pure form—as an undifferentiated totality. This is *Being*—the absolute at the end of all analysis, the true ground of the possible, the platform beyond which it is not possible to experience.

## Being as the Undifferentiated Manifold...

When the mystic becomes one with the Divine this is the experience she attains—a direct seeing into the 'true' or undifferentiated nature of reality. At this point no division is possible. Consciousness itself is not separate from Being; it is realized as the *activity* of Being, Being-in-motion, the force that allows the possibility of Being's assuming a determinate form through a phenomenal presentation. In apprehending Being consciousness dissolves its focus, and thus has within its scope the whole of the manifold. Phenomenally speaking, it doesn't matter if one searches after the *being of objects* or the *being of consciousness*—they both return to Being as the undifferentiated manifold of possibilities. □



### Submission Guidelines for the Summer 2007 Issue:

Submission deadline is  
**May 20, 2007.**

Release date will be June 5, 2007.

1. One submission per active member. Submissions must be your own original work. You will retain the copyright for your own work. Send submissions to libertygrl by email () or by private messaging.
2. Graphic contributions such as art or photography must be submitted in JPG format, no larger than 1200 x 1500 dpi. The image may be resized depending on the layout of the newsletter. You may also submit up to 500 words of text with your image, if you would like to include some description or background on the image. Text is optional.
3. Written contributions must be 1,500 words or less. Cited references are included in the word count. Written contributions may be fiction or non-fiction, and may be edited with spelling or grammar corrections. You will have the opportunity to approve any corrections before the issue is released. Some examples of written contributions would be essays, stories, articles, reviews, or poetry.
4. A photo or drawing may accompany your written contribution (to illustrate an article or a review, for example). If you wish to include an image of this type with your written submission, then the word count for the piece must be 1,000 words or less. If the photo or drawing is not your own, credit the source. Do not submit it unless you have copyright permission to publish it.
5. Specify what name you would like to have used to credit you for your work in the newsletter.

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Stay tuned for the next issue of  
**the Coffee Table**, summer 2007





**Chicken Crossing**  
by *Susan Lien Whigham*