

## **"These Transient Times"...by Ameena Mayer**

**by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, July 15, 2005**

<http://politicsrespun.org/2005/07/these-transient-times/>

These Transient Times

-Ameena Mayer

Today, the human mind is assailed with all sorts of plastic paraphernalia: credit cards, DVD's, McDonalds, breast implants and Britney Spears to name a few. With such artificiality comes the gradual corrosion of the human spirit, leading to a cold, gray society in which people are as disposable as plastic cups. Whether it comes to friends, lovers or jobs, people simply don't have the time to deal with anything else but extreme pleasure and the instantaneous gratification of their raging desires. As a result, we have become the living dead, creatures so bereft of that awesome crimson creature called love that we endlessly attempt to fill the tender, wet place it once occupied with dried up material junk.

In the city, we have no choice but to lay our eyes upon mounds and mounds of what can't be labeled as anything else except death. The concrete roads are coffin lids hiding the carcasses of earth worms and tree roots, each street pole the grave marker of the fecund green life that once flourished with ebullient vivacity. The skyscrapers indeed crassly scrape, with their pointed glass and metal, the fragile belly of sky, murdering our view of the sun and heavens that once inspired so much awe and reminded us of our insignificance. This is not to mention the Starbucks coffee cups exploding from the bloated stomachs of garbage cans, thrown out without thinking from where they came and where they will go. Cities are like etherized patients hooked up to intravenous tubes that suck the life from lakes, forests, soils and oceans, glittering in gaudy fluorescence and belching with car engines and machines when they get their fix.

In a society in which Mother Earth is misused and discarded so easily, it is not surprising that we are driven to treat each other in the same ugly way; after all, we are nature, our roots tracing the same path as those of the trees, and unfortunately, stretching toward the very same graves. When we speak of preserving the environment, we are not entirely alluding to saving Mother Nature, for regardless of what disasters we blunt-headed homo sapiens incur, she will live on in some form or the other, even if it is indeed cockroaches and weeds. What we are really discussing is preserving life as we know it with all its present forms, including us.

If indeed we are attempting to save our physical lives, we are certainly struggling to retain our emotional and psychological sanity. We have only to look in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver to see our fellow homo sapiens who are bent over with memories that hold years of slow killing from racist and classist words, from an abusive father or mother, and whose bodies are full of deadly substances to blunt these memories. Because they have been denied the privileges of the middle and upper classes, their wounds rage on the surface to be judged by those who couldn't begin to comprehend their stories. However, among the privileged, the wounds fester on the heart's pale surface due to the illnesses of postmodern living. Gone are the days in which a man and woman married at twenty and remained tightly coiled in each other until their hairs were gray and skin handsomely wrinkled, when codes of loyalty, honour and love held people together like dew merging blades of soft grass. What began as the clan or tribe dissolved

into the extended family which fragmented into the nuclear family which has now eroded into the single person living in a cold, quiet bachelor apartment filled only with the drone of the television and melancholic love songs. Indeed, how many people even take the time to spend a whole day a week with friends, not simply zoning out in front of a movie or pickling themselves with shots at a bar, but conversing about their lives, their emotions, society, the traumatizing camping trip they went on when they were in grade 7? These days, it seems to be too much effort to even pick up the phone and call friends; the ever-invasive e-mail system with its headachy screen and skinny, black letters saves time, saves listening, saves experiencing the sound of another's voice, another's breathing, the signature of who they are that informs one that there is another real person out there with flesh and bones and blood, not just a flat line in cyberspace.

As nature and the organic physical world vanish, leaving behind landscapes of toxicity, so do organic emotional bonds. More and more friendships and romantic relationships are built upon selfishness, a "what can you do for me" standpoint, bred from the West's cultish obsession with individualism and the success of the "I". Undoubtedly, the warm, nurturing, intoxicating notion of "we" has been disastrously displaced by the cryptic, dull, isolating concept of "I". Thus, when we look into a lover's eyes, a subliminal glaze often prevents us from seeing in, barring us from making any real connection with his or her mind and heart, and of course, we often do the same in return. This makes it easy for us to dispose of each other once we get the physical, financial or psychological thrill we wished to extract. Like the Starbucks coffee cups, we care not from where the person has come and what effect our disposal of them will have on their lives and well-being. We have become oil fields to each other, for we drill for the satiating black gold of momentary sexual and emotional gratification, leaving behind dry, gaping holes.

Inevitably, our attempts to fill these ailing chasms are futile, since we often look for the stuffing in external sources such as the enhancement of our physical appearance, money and careers, all of which are transient and dependent upon the permission of another, be it our peers' acceptance or our employers. Indeed, our tendency to use each other in intimate relations has trickled like a poison into the work place (or perhaps vice-versa; what did come first: the chicken or the egg?), where there is rarely any sort of real caring or compassion between employer and employee, where 'business is business' even if your mother has just died of cancer or you are inflicted with an injury or you have a new idea that would really work if only someone had the open ears to listen. We think what we look like, what we do and what we earn can gain us the love that has escaped us, only to find ourselves punctured with more holes, the stigmata of past pains we have inadvertently manifested in our quest for fulfillment. Just like fast food that hypnotizes the stomach into feeling full but leaves the individual malnourished and diseased, the stuffing we seek leads to our demise.

As animals on the top of the food chain, nature has at least endowed us with a strong will to survive. Faced with these harrowing problems of our transient times, we inevitably wish for answers. Though there are many, one that has exceptional curative powers derives from the notion of constancy. As M. Scott Peck articulates, "anyone who is truly concerned for the spiritual growth of another knows...that he or she can significantly foster that growth only through a relationship of constancy" (Peck in Hooks 51). This applies to our relations with others and with ourselves. We must refrain from leaping from person to person, stimulus to stimulus, plastic cup to plastic cup and practise commitment to friends, partners and enviro-mugs. Only then can we plant the seeds for the ultimate remedy: community. Hooks imparts a great truth when she states, "There is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community" (129). Once we start to really see and appreciate the subjectivity of nature and our fellow human instead of

viewing everything as an object to be exploited in our war-zones of ambition and individualism, we can join hands with Mother Nature and our peers and work together for our basic physical and emotional needs, taking only what we require and never at the expense of another. Then, the blood in our veins will rage with the health and warmth that comes with love and the cool glaze will sublimate off our eyes, exposing our funky, innermost selves to the world. Our souls will be resurrected from their silent, still graves, billowing inside us like wind-born sails. In short, we will be alive once more, stepping sure-footedly into more stable times, holding as a mascot that awesome crimson creature we thought had long ago been buried beneath the pavement.

#### Works Cited

Hooks, Bell. *All About Love* New York: Perennial, 2000.