



Chellis  
Glendinning

## Confessions of a Neo-Luddite

An Altiplano Tale

Tom Smith speaks to Chellis Glendinning

Released in 1994, Chellis Glendinning's book, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilisation*, captured broad discontent with hyper-technological modernity at the cusp of the digital age. The book was a touchstone for a movement of neo-Luddites throughout the '80s and '90s worried about the asymmetry of power which occurs whenever the machine of centralising civilisation meets the convivial, the rooted and the 'inefficient'. The breadth and erudition of her thought before and since *My Name is Chellis*, however, continues to be unsurpassed, published in such work as *When Technology Wounds* (1990), *Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy* (1999) and the poetry collection, *HYPER: An Electromagnetic Chapbook* (2014).

While steeped in classic analyses of technology, particularly the work of Lewis Mumford, her writings have always seemed uniquely coloured by her experience as a psychotherapist, bringing to bear a recognition of the interconnected traumas and fissures imposed by western civilisation on the human psyche. Having dedicated her life to the questioning of technology, and having done so with a humour and openness of spirit rare for someone so intimate with the many murky shadows of 'Progress', it seemed appropriate for this book to discuss with Chellis the rise of neo-Luddism, its decline from prominence and its contemporary relevance. After spending her adult life in the swirl of radical politics in northern California and the upland desert of New Mexico, Chellis made a leap into the unknown. She lives now in Chuquisaca, Bolivia, and that is where I found her.

**TS**

In your new book, *luddite.com*, marking the 200th anniversary of the Luddite uprising, you note that 'the concerned will rave about war, poverty, oil depletion and climate upheaval – as well they should. Some venture to name racism, capitalism, empire; cruelty and greed can be high on the list. But technology's role in shaping these same tragedies handily slips from the perceptual gaze.' I guess I'd like to open by addressing this slipperiness. What, for you, is technology and why is there an imperative to bring it into the perceptual gaze?

**CG**

To start, I'd like to say what an honour it is to be in communication with the movement around Dark Mountain. Thanks to a heads-up from friend and colleague Peter Barnes – 'This reminds me of you,' he said – I read the Dark Mountain manifesto. I was much fortified by the grasp of what is destroying our world. Plus, the movement's ability to articulate this understanding with so much soul.

So, to get to your question: technology is a way of life, really. The bold thinkers who went before us included the original Luddites reacting against the industrial revolution and such writer contemporaries as Percy Shelley, William Wordsworth *et al*; plus the second generation that included scholars Lewis Mumford and Jacques Ellul. To all of them, technology is not just a hair dryer or a late-model truck. It's a way of thinking, a way of organising society, a way of being. The very organisation of a contemporary house with its separate rooms for cooking, eating and sleeping, is based, like a machine, on fragmentation and efficiency. Think about the names of former pathways that have become streets and highways. They no longer describe the creatures that inhabit the trail, or the personality of the journey, or what happened there; they now hold such soulless titles as Second Avenue crossed on a mathematical grid by 110th Street; they are Route 660A. And of course Charlie Chaplin challenged his and subsequent generations to see the assembly line as an unnatural, mechanistic invention.

But you are so right: technology as a force in the rampage against the Earth is omitted from social-change discussion. Glaring oversight, eh? I remember when Jerry Mander first started talking about technology's role in bringing about the nuclear arms race in the 1980s, few in the Left in the United States saw what he could see; they thought he was 'too far out there'.

But then there were those of us who had learned to think in a systemic way from our delving in that wing of the feminist movement that looked beyond civilisation to pre-patriarchal cultures. We had learned to scratch deeper; the core of the problem wasn't just about salaries and who did the grocery shopping. In the holistic health movement we learned to think about the human body and its relationship to the world as a whole, not merely as the

expression of the mind/body or human/nature split that dominates allopathic medicine. The indigenous-rights effort that was growing and reached a grand denouement in 1992, on the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus, taught non-natives to question society from a land-based, spiritual perspective, while simultaneously Western philosophers were challenging the post-World War Two malaise with fresh ideas about taking the very nature of modern society to task.

We must remember, of course, that thinking in a systemic way is hard to do. The English language is structured for commercial transaction in the service of societal expansion – with a subject acting upon an object; its structure and vocabulary don't convey the complexities of inter-relations among multiple forces and events. Or a concept of the whole of things. Well, except through poetry; pardon my omission! Speaking to you, Dark Mountaineers of all people, such passionate admirers of the genre.

## TS

Poetry, perhaps the least instrumentalised and standardised human expression. This is an apt launching point for exploring its root, *poiesis*, to make. The creative act, *poiesis*, and its relation to an omnipresent, quasi-autonomous technology, is part of what interests us in the book. You assert, along with Ellul, Mumford *et al.* that modern society is, contrary to the radical openness of poetry, rigidly technologically organised. To play devil's advocate, though, as those in what seems like religious thrall to the possibility of a Singularity would put it, there may be no decisive break. In his essay for this book, Paul Kingsnorth quotes an assertion by Kevin Kelly that 'We can see more of God in a cell phone than in a tree frog'. Technology here is rather the greatest expression of *poiesis*, the creative evolution of the universe finally unleashed, consciously.

## CG

[laughs] The cogent question would then be: But do we see more of the Goddess? Kelly is right. God has become the narcissistic, authoritative, punishing deity removed from nature and poetry, dividing sky from Earth, intellect from sensuality, right from wrong, humanity from all the 'lesser' beings – while the Goddess has been disappeared. I mean that in the sense of Latin American dictatorships: carted off, raped, drugged and thrown out the hold of an airplane into the ocean.

And on the eighth day God made the cell phone. Inherent in its processes and qualities lie the values that God pushes. It is made of materials whose extraction is foisting the bleeding of toxic materials upon the soil, water and air of *Pachamama*. Also the murdering of indigenous peoples via civil war, as in the battle for cobalt in the Congo. And this is not to mention the hurling of health-threatening electromagnetic radiation upon every inch of the planet – upon

innocent children at school, cows in their pastures, wild birds attempting traditional flight patterns, and on and on. This is God's work: to be so powerful that He can destroy all that exists, while rationalising that such a murderous thrust equals Progress.

A tree frog, though, is a perfect creature to show the bent of the Goddess. Small. Humble. Ever so lovely in its colours. Communitarian.

But, really, aren't we beyond the polarities that the modern world has palmed off on us? As a means of conceptualising the Whole of the universe, I can look to the invention of diverse characters to embody qualities amidst our utter lack of comprehension of the mysteries of this life. When I lived in the upland desert of New Mexico, I was surrounded by *Chicanos* whose roots were in pre-Colonial Mexico, who felt strongly about *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, a goddess of kindness, care and connection. Now, here in Bolivia – of all things – I live in the city whose patron saint is... the Guadalupe. The Greeks gave us a laudable pantheon of goddesses and gods, and through their exploits and relations we can penetrate into the workings of the human mind. And how about the spirit energies found in the indigenous world?

And yet, let's turn to the work of John Zerzan. He points to the invention of shamanism as the culprit, wherein tribal members gave over their individual connection to the invisible world to a designated 'expert'. To Zerzan, this event marked the beginning of division of labour, hierarchy and internalised powerlessness. Our task is to bring it all together: to heal, to remember our pre-hierarchical roots, to cultivate a vision of the Whole and all the various means of experiencing its mystery, to celebrate Life.

## TS

As for your role in that attempted healing, your most recent work operates as a reflection from the inside of a vigorous and, for many, exciting movement of 'neo-Luddism' in the '80s and '90s, perhaps coming to a crescendo with the media attention after the publication of Ted Kaczynski's manifesto *Industrial Society and Its Future*. Given that the original movement of Ned Ludd's followers posed such a passionate threat that it was descended on by more soldiers than were fighting Napoleon on the Iberian peninsula at the time, do you feel contemporary (neo-)Luddism lived up to the inheritance of its name?

## CG

*luddite.com* is a memoir of the wildly astute activists and thinkers who came together to attempt to catalyse a widespread movement against the unfettered, hysterical, Gorgon-like explosion of technologies that came of unfettered, hysterical, Gorgon-like capitalism. Enough intelligent folks around the world had written books,

made films, given speeches, gone on strike from as many endangering technologies as possible, and/or battered nuclear weapons casings, that it seemed high time to see what we could do. *We* included Jerry, of course; Vandana Shiva, Kirkpatrick Sale, Stephanie Mills, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Wendell Berry, Satish Kumar, Langdon Winner, Gustavo Esteva, Beth Burrows and many more. Plus, others outside our group were doing important, related work – like primitive-anarchist John Zerzan, the Plain magazine folks who had chosen to live like the Amish, the Earth Liberation Front with its Luddite-like methods of bringing down high-tension electrical lines, all the movements and individuals advocating natural foods, holistic health, home-grown gardens, eco-spirituality, conflict resolution and sustainable living.

Looking back – and I do mean ‘back,’ as our last gathering was around the mid-1990s – I’d have to say we had a rockin’ good time. As Stephanie put it in her book garnished from the various meetings of our Jacques Ellul Society, *Turning Away from Technology*, she never felt so ‘sane’. What with all the negation in the outer world of our way of thinking and seeing, being together gave us a sense of freedom.

Do I think this third generation of Luddites lived up to our inheritance? Well, Kirk and Stephanie and I addressed this very question in a conversation that was published in the US progressive magazine *Counterpunch*. It was called ‘Three Luddites Talking’. I was feeling frustrated. It was 2009, and due to a number of dynamics beyond our control, the Jacques Ellul Society had fallen apart; some of our members had taken up other callings like anti-globalisation work and the political wing of bioregionalism, secession. Computers had come in full-force and taken over the minds, hearts and free time of whole new generations. There were so many nasty invasions into our lives that viable movements in general had become harder to launch. Citizens everywhere were feeling overwhelmed. It was hard for me to accept that the ever so cogent factor of technology had fallen from consideration as people were walking around like robots with their omnipresent telephones attached to their brains.

So I said to Kirk and Steph: ‘Let’s resuscitate the technology question. What with genetically-modified everything, supercomputers and wireless communications, peak oil, ongoing wars, collapsing economies etc., it’s needed now more than ever.’

I have here a snippet of our conversation that I’d like to read to you. It’s about how our efforts as neo-Luddites fell by the wayside.

**KS (Kirkpatrick Sale):**

There were some great and heady moments (at Jacques Ellul), some excellent conferences, some inspiring speeches, a lot of important friendships. But it wasn't really a movement and we all knew, as Stephanie suggests, that not only were we in a distinct minority but a minority regarded by many as not quite sane.

**SM (Stephanie Mills):**

The effort petered out...maybe because Doug Tompkins (our funder) decided that his philanthropy could be more useful in preserving large pristine hunks of Chile, and I can't fault him for that. I believe in art for art's sake and discourse for its own sake. I think intellectual conclaves are worth doing if only to gather and tone up the widely-scattered intellectuals involved. But those are expensive activities. And we were fortunate to have been participants. Now we have to maintain that perspective in our several settings, along with doing the homely work of surviving at the margins.

**CG**

Well, I don't think the effort 'petered out'. I'm more in a *hasta-la-victoria-siempre* mood. As long as there is oppression, there is resistance; so long as there is mass technology organising life for efficiency and aggrandisement, there are people for decent values. Humans have a deeply embedded knowing when things are wrong.

To me, what happened to our generation of Luddites is that when the 'new technologies' took hold, they literally reconfigured the patterns of connectivity. I'm talking about computers and cell phones and BlackBerries, mega-freeways and shopping malls, the Big Boxes, genetic engineering and websites, hyper-surveillance technologies – and giant transnational corporations took over our arena of expression, the publishing business. Communities that had made their way via land line and letters and meeting in cafés disintegrated. I think for a good ten years folks like us were confused, left behind. Or we were left striving, against the grain, to catch up. Or we fell into new groupings connected by new means. Or we simply became isolated in a world of near-total technology encasement. This new world caused some of our colleagues to forge a politic shaped by different words and concepts and – for fear of being dismissed by all the people with their laptops and iPods – to purposefully stop talking about technology's centrality to control and oppression.

I also believe that the inevitable internal dynamics of our



specific group contributed to its fade-out. I say 'inevitable' because empire sets up a class system: some have access more than others; some have more utilitarian knowledge than others; some, more money. In the Jacques Ellul Society this dynamic played out unconsciously as a gap between a clique that made the behind-the-scenes decisions – and the others who came to the gatherings to learn and share. Too, a few were working the scene to raise funds for their own projects, which to my mind was inappropriate. And, you know what? We didn't lay out an ethic of respect; gossiping and back-stabbing happened – and this type of trust-breaking behaviour is bound to break up any effort.

### **KS**

I doubt that gossiping and back-stabbing brought us down! The movement petered out – and I think that's the right phrase, for it doesn't exist as a movement for reasons much larger than our funding, our foibles or our follies. It ended because it lost. The other side won!

Think of the transformation of the world in the years since, let us say, 1990. All the things Chellis mentions, fundamentally based on the computer chip, swept social and economic worlds with a tsunamic power within a decade, breezed past Y2K and penetrated every profession, every setting, every means of communication, every transaction. How could any critique of technology overcome that? What sense did it make to go on saying that there will be ugly consequences, that there are terrible downsides? It was – and is – inescapable, and getting more so. Even if anyone wanted to believe it – and I think many did, or as the New Yorker said, 'there's a little bit of the Unabomber in all of us' – no one, individually or collectively, had the power to stop the technological onslaught. It was the way of life chosen by the economic and governmental powers-that-be, with all the money and all the laws, and it could not be stopped.

### **TS**

A fascinating divergence. When we think, for example, of the lack of effective response to Edward Snowden's revelations on mass surveillance, or the rise of state-sanctioned murder by drone strike, it's hard not to believe that, as Sale puts it, the other side won. Every day, extrication from the global machine becomes more challenging, risking alienation from friends and family and raising the suspicion of the authorities (for example, if you're 'dark', lacking in web presences, Facebook accounts *etc.*) who are increasingly vocal in seeing citizens as enemies. If intellectual work and consciousness-raising couldn't avert this in the '90s – and in fact the debate is continuously shifting in the face of pernicious 'neo-environmentalism'/'

eco-modernism' and the embrace of the Anthropocene terminology – what are the forms of resistance this 'fight' you mention could take? Is the imagery of resistance and struggle itself now even problematic and outdated?

**CG**

Oh dear. I don't have a Facebook account!...but really, Tom, you have posed The Very Question gnawing at our souls.

A Bolivian friend, Pedro Susz, wrote a book called *Para una filosofía de la insubordinación* (*For a Philosophy of Insubordination*). Its premise is that, just as each era has had its own form of development and so its own words to make sense of that reality, so ours does – and ours behooves us to express our urge to make radical change through the budding philosophy of our times: quantum physics. I was so excited about this book that every morning at 6a.m. I would plunge into its 560 pages to get to the part where he tells what such a politics would look like. And mind you, this is all in Spanish, so every other paragraph I had to consult a dictionary. The reading took three months, and all the while I was so charged up with excitement for what was about to be revealed, I was tingling. The joke was on me, though. As a part of his own 'walking his talk', Pedro never offered his perspective about what this might look like. He left it to the reader.

When I wrote a review of Pedro's book for *Counterpunch* and *Le Monde Diplomatique/Bolivia*, I attempted to slip one hesitant toe into the unanswered terrain. I came up with a tornado of questions:

How might we change the current obsession with time? Like a Tibetan Buddhist with her demons and deities, meditate on the forces of destruction, the quality of courage, and proud rebels of the past? Instead of shopping or aimlessly surfing the web, get together with our comrades to make history? Like a Luddite with his hammer, sever/scramble the sources of operation of the media, their satellite dishes, wireless antennas, and computer programs? Re-take art/craft via the traditions/visions of artists and land-based people? Participate in Slow Food and Slow Money? What would Slow Media look like? Slow Technology? In our meetings of the Jacques Ellul Society, we made a list of questions for judging technologies – for instance, what are its effects on the health of planet and person? Does it preserve or destroy biodiversity? Serve community? Produce equality – or concentrate power? Who does it benefit? How does it affect perception of our needs? Does it reduce, deaden, or enhance human creativity?

And what of the usurpation of space by the forces of Power? Might we re-dream dignity via the reuniting of mind



with body, of human with nature? Launch movements without solo leaders, but with everyone equal and participating? Reflecting the Mariposa (Butterfly) Effect, acknowledge that each radical provocation and each creation of sanctuary ricochets to all, thereby multiplying actions like springtime waterfalls? Inspired by India's Salt Marchers and today's cyber-whistleblowers, reject the construction of destructive public works like giant dams, oil pipelines, industrial-size mines, and towers spreading electromagnetic radiation? Join indigenous and secession movements seeking human-scale self-determination? Reclaim places 'owned' by Power – farms, buildings, parks, factories, websites, ideas, interpretation – as do the hacienda-claimers in Brazil, the squatters of London, neighbours creating community gardens, hackerjournalists divulging Power's manipulations? Márgara Millán proposes that we think of cities – constructed for the circulation of capital and machines – as 'spaces in dispute'; that we resist the separation between city and country by defending parks, planting seeds in every crack and plot, and farming public spaces; that we challenge the velocity of time by amplifying spaces for walkers and bicycles.

Perhaps the task would require the perception of a shaman balanced between the nature of the cosmos and the laws of this world? Perhaps the result would be a politics like that of the Zapatistas – with its phenomenological confrontation in every moment (Now) in every place (Here)? With its vision of Mexico as a net of horizontal communities and its reconstruction of ancient/horizontal modes of selfgovernment in *caracoles*/snail shells? With its dedication to land-based sustainability and celebration of the purity of a 'future primitive'? With its Buddhist-like mindfulness and patience?

So, yes. We are left with a mammoth dare.

## TS

As for quantum physics and the cultivation of reconstructed, post-Cartesian modes of existence, what gives me hope, energy and nourishment are the exciting changes afoot within feminism, philosophy and other fields of what have historically been abstracted intellectual thought. Concepts which previously would have been off-limits – such as non-human agency (Jane Bennett, Andrew Pickering), embodied philosophy (George Lakoff), quantum entanglement (Karen Barad), animism (Isabelle Stengers), panpsychism (Alexander Wendt/David Skrbina), transcending the Cartesian subject-object division (Donna Haraway) – are suddenly taken more seriously, or at least placed on the agenda at the 11th hour. Of course, feminism has led the charge in many respects. Much of this has been spurred on by the gradual percolation into intellectual life

of insights from quantum physics and other sciences characterised by unimaginable complexity, of the outdatedness of the notion of a Newtonian universe comprised of discrete, separable bits and atoms. Metaphysics is back, and it is finally acknowledged that non-human beings have an existence and power apart from human interpretation of them. Cultural mythologies seem to be shifting in areas which formerly would've been resistant.

## **CG**

You give worthy words to the dare of going forward.

First off, it would be important to recognise that to the polar bear clutching a throw-rug-sized piece of ice, it is already too late. To scientists who in the 1990s predicted that in ten years it would be too late, it now is: the distinguished population biology researcher Paul Ehrlich informs us that the Sixth Great Mass Extinction is in full swing. And for a member of the Dodo family and the Passenger Pigeon, it has been too late for some time: they are gone.

At the same time, we humans have a remarkable ability to honour the past, to live in the present even as we think about the future. Somehow, we just keep on keepin' on, don't we? How gratifying that – whether facing death or life – the realisation that metaphysics 'is back' becomes a pathway to possibility. Not to mention a symptom of the fact that, at least in terms of those of us at ground level, the schisms perpetrated through the advance of civilisation and its manifestation in Newtonian-Cartesian thinking have for some time been engaged in a process of reunion. Biophysics. Psychohistory. Ecological biology. Holistic medicine. Interculturalism. Ecopsychology. Worldwide Buddhism. The teaching of shamanistic practices. Body-based psychotherapy. Even the Pope is welcoming gays back into the church! Such arising is cracking those rigid vaults of dysfunctional thinking – and so onward, please, as if survival matters.

## **TS**

But suppose the debate has already been lost? Particularly when the intensity and collectivity which appeared to characterise the neo-Luddites has fizzled out, been drained by the internet age, or gone quietly away.

## **CG**

When I saw the film *Reds* for the second time, I mused 'What if they had won? How would our lives and struggles be different today?'

I am brought back to the wisdom of Andrew Schmookler in his *Parable of the Tribes*. He points out that whenever a dominating force exists – whether it's a violent father within the secrecy of a family or a world power with genocidal weapons at its fingertips –

everyone within reach is changed; everyone in some way must address that dynamic. Perhaps by shutting up. Perhaps by open revolt. Maybe by telling the truth about what is going on. Or by pretending acquiescence. Edward Said echoed that insight when he wrote that everyone on the planet has been injured by imperialism. We could amplify his words by saying that every one of us has been changed by weapons of mass destruction, by corporate globalisation, by electromagnetic-run communications...you and me... everyone.

Some say that these dominating behaviours go back to the industrial revolution, others that they date to the Neolithic, others the beginning of active hunting in the Paleolithic. Some challenge the belief that they are organic to the human species; whatever, they are what has been going on for a lively chunk of our history. I think by finishing up my own personal healing process from childhood violence, as well as by entering this rich state of elderhood, I have questioned my burning requirement demanding utopia and come to better terms with the tragedy of the Here and Now. Whether you believe the problem is ingrained in 'human nature' or is an unfortunate and grotesque wounding we have endured, the horrific condition that currently infuses and impacts us, shapes and textures our every breath, has in some way been faced by our fellow beings for a very long time. We can find strength in that realisation: for all the suffering, all the knowing that the world has gone mad and we are now assembled at the brink of collective death, *we are not alone*. Our task becomes no different from that of an Egyptian slave whose life is hauling rocks to build a pyramid, a Native dodging bullets in the 1890s, an African chained to the hull of a ship in 1750 or a U.S. soldier forced to kill Vietnamese civilians. Our task is to heal. It is to teach beauty and preserve what is archetypal to our species, to tell the truth, to fight against what is wrong, wrong, wrong; to live in praise of life's very existence.

## TS

An inspiration for this healing from South America which has always stayed vividly in my mind is recounted by Daniel Everett in *Don't Sleep There Are Snakes*. The Pirahã tribe he lives with are remarkably resistant to the wonders of technology, right to the level of agricultural techniques. If they are given a piece of advanced technology, they might use it. But when it breaks, they'll never look at it again. They are so confident in their way of life that they deem everything else inferior, unnecessary. If their house blows down, they laugh at their misfortune and build another one. You've written a lot more than others on the psychological implications of technological civilisation and I think the pace of unreflective adoption of technologies often comes from a perceived (and often intentionally cultivated) sense of lack, dependency, insecurity and

inferiority. Returning to the idea of Progress, and specifically with your experiences living in Bolivia, is there anything you've learned from the relations of people there to the *technê* they engage with on a daily basis? Is there intelligent resistance happening or, as 'ecomodernists' and others would assert, are they just desperately waiting for access to the wonders of modern life?

**CG**

That slippery notion of 'Progress' – whether conceived as a psychological, evolutionary, social or technological event – is so engrained in the modernist mind-set that it's assumed. I mean, given the precarious disorientation and terrifying alienation we experience in a life removed from our given habitat, the natural world, wouldn't you rather think that you're on the verge of getting a more magnificent pill to cure your ailments, a more glamorous apartment, an unimaginable new lover or a more clever telephone? What could be better than Virtual Reality when the reality of this world is so forbidding? Or the assurance that any day now scientists will announce a mechanical-miracle solution to global climate change? Even Marx himself presented a view of social change based on a notion of Progress.

In the 1970s and '80s the Hopi people of Hotevilla had a raging debate: whether to accept the electricity the state insisted on installing. Those traditionalists against the incursion argued that it would destroy their ancient culture, while the 'Friendlies' in cahoots with the outsiders craved electric heaters, night lighting and TV. When Australian aborigines were confronted by a mining company intent on drilling into their sacred mountain, they freaked; to them the mountain was a sleeping lizard whose job was to dream their existence – and the drilling would wake the beast up. And remember the U'wa of Colombia that threatened suicide if multinational Occidental Petroleum dared to abuse their land?

When I first traveled to Bolivia in 2006, I was drawn to its clear skies, cobblestone streets, antiquated automobiles, absence of cell phones and nuclear plants, dazzling intellectual life and strength of friendship. I fell in with people who cooked on woodstoves, celebrated the traditional holidays, marched for justice – and read Kropotkin, Sachs and Klein.

All that has changed. The jump from countryside peasantry and early modernism in the cities to globalised spectacle is causing disorientation of the kind that leaves its citizenry in a stunned state. The government is centralised and authoritative: whatever Evo wants, Evo gets. He wants satellites, freeways, nuclear, 4G, big industry and smart buildings. I wouldn't say that the majority of Bolivians were champing at the bit for internet and iron mines, but then as these became the chosen conduit to trickle-down cash, many have fallen in step. The strongest resistance comes from the gatherer-hunter peoples protesting a high-tech highway through

their constitutionally-protected nature reserve, and they have truly captured the hearts of Bolivians.

**TS**

So you want to save what's left?

**CG**

Since moving here in 2010, I have slept in a *campesino* community, a windowless room boasting three metal beds in a residential hotel of a hyper-urban district, an eco-spiritual encampment, a child's bed full of fleas and lice, and a past president's historic hacienda on a river. I finally bought a house: an antique job boasting two-foot thick adobe walls and an internal courtyard – and some history.

I came to Bolivia to be part of history. Tom Hayden had invited me to travel here in 2006 for the inauguration of the country's first indigenous president. After all the dictatorships and US-sponsored military governments, the people were literally dancing in the streets. Everyone was talking politics. And hope. At the time we in the United States were saddled with George W. Bush, and let me tell you: it was grim. How refreshing to see and feel excitement about the future!

I also decided to move here because of the level of technology. I mean, one has to feel some techno-envy for van Gogh or the poets of the 1930s in Paris, yes? Bolivia had the occasional donkey on the avenue, campesinos in from the campo in their traditional hand-woven ponchos, adobe *hornos*/ovens in the yard for baking bread, and home-made corn liquor *chicha*. Café life was highlighted by vibrant political discussion and artistic creativity. I wanted this in my life! And rightly speaking, I could see that one visit a year was not going to cut it; I had to live in Bolivia.

Indeed, in my five and a half years here, I have witnessed and participated in history. I could never have imagined the sequence of events that was to come. Bolivia is a country engaged in the making and remaking of anti-imperialist socialism in the global context of power-over politics. For all the impressive talk about the rights of *Pachamama/Madre Tierra*, the lunge toward fast and furious industrialisation dominates. There are humongous new mining excavations. Oil and gas pipelines. Deforestation at a clip. Nuclear power plants in the works. Telecommunications towers spreading 4G radiation contamination. A telecommunications/surveillance satellite. A cell phone in every hand. State-of-the-art tanks and planes for the army. High-speed freeways linking Latin American countries for participation in the global economy. Blame and violence against any who appear to oppose what's being done. Diminishment of freedom of the press. It has all happened so fast, infiltrating in the inevitable silence of 'Progress.' And in the topdown claim to power of authoritarian government.

A bizarre historical theatre is unfolding here in the *altiplano*, and Bolivia is not apart from what is happening in every corner of this *pobrecito planeta*. At the same time, it's a place of lavish surrealism. Of feral traditional celebrations and crashing military marching bands. Of scandalous poverty and epic national pride. Of explosive rebellion and tightening social control. Of deep intelligence and ludicrous errors.

I'm a fan of spontaneous creative expression, and here in Bolivia you never know what's going to happen next. All the world's a stage, you know. I deem that, in these precarious times that are so underscored by conspicuous insanity, we might consider cultivating such an outlook.