

For Review

579 WORDS RTO **3-4** min /RA **5-6** min

If they found on Mars a single blade of grass there would be ecstasy at mission control center, releasing visions of humanity spreading out across the cosmos. But does the obsession with finding life on other, potentially inhabitable planets somehow
5 excuse and blind us to the trashing of this one?

News of the discovery of yet another Earth-like planet fuels the fantasy that if we damage our own, we can always relocate. There is a strong fascination with the possibility of escape which somehow relieves the pressure to look after our own, extraordinary
10 planetary home.

As we tremble with anticipation at the prospect of finding a single microorganism on another planet, under our feet we're wilfully executing a mass extinction event. Once a fashionable cause, threats to our forests, which are cradles to the diversity of
15 life, have been largely forgotten. But this century we've been losing them at the astonishing rate of 50 football pitches per minute. That's an area the size of Greenland since the turn of the millennium.

All attempts to reconcile the industrial-scale exploitation of
20 the biosphere by staying the right side of key environmental thresholds are failing. Forest-certification schemes*, for example, have done nothing to slow their degradation. Why do we treat the abundance of life on our doorstep with such disrespect, when it throws up glories like the Namibian fog-basking beetle, which

25 taught us how to build green houses in the desert? Or the bark
beetle, which can detect a forest fire 10 km away and is showing
how to make better fire extinguishers? Even worse, the very people
who put their lives on the line to protect land and the environment
are being killed at an accelerating pace.

30 I was an infant when the Apollo program was happening and
understand the obsession with exploring outer space. But sending
a single person to the hostile, dry environment of a planet just next
door like Mars would require years of training for a fabulously
expensive trip. The question of whether or not there is life “out
35 there” is often asked. But, from a different view of the cosmos,
aren’t we ourselves also and already “out there?”

Perhaps the greatest gift of space exploration is that it
enabled us to see ourselves as an island planet, where the greatest
wonder is to be found in the world around us — the relationships
40 between living things — and even within ourselves. A single
tablespoon of soil contains more micro-organisms than there are
people on the planet.

We sense we’re living through hard times, and that makes the
idea of fleeing to other worlds attractive. But times have been
45 harder. On a cold dark night in prison during the upheaval of
Europe of 1917, the revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg*
found her spirits lifted, despite her perilous situation, by an
awareness of the strangeness and beauty of the force of life. Her
heart “beats with an inconceivable, unknown inner joy.” The secret,
50 she decides, is “nothing but life itself,” and even in the sound of

guards' heels grinding in gravel outside, "there is the small, lovely song of life — if one knows how to hear it."

A couple of years ago I saw for the first time at dusk a field of fireflies. They were all around me, pulsing, drifting, lighting-up
55 the darkening landscape. I thought of Luxemburg's song of life, and of the millions of people around the world who, rather than dreaming of escape, don't accept the world as it is, but use their life's energy to protect and improve it.

注 forest-certification schemes 森林認証制度。環境に負荷の少ない方法で管理された森林から産出する木材を認証する国際的プログラム。

Rosa Luxemburg ローザ・ルクセンブルク(1871–1919)。ドイツの革命家，政治理論家。