

The train back home quickly passes through the seemingly endless German landscape. I left Dresden this morning after two rich months, in which I had the feeling I really lived there. I occupied a nice, sunny apartment in the middle of Neustadt. The neighbourhood was lively, especially on warm summer nights, when the corner of my street became the local hang out for youngsters drinking beer. It seemed there was always some kind of celebration going on, with the absolute climax during the three day festival Bunte Republic Neustadt. My neighbours across the street had moved their sound system to their balcony, and while the techno beats blasted, they were serving the masses on the street below cold beers through a system of garden hoses. Fortunately the atelier I rented in the charming artists collective Geh8 came with a couch, so when Neustadt became too loud, I could always take refuge there.

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Next to my train seat stands my big suitcase - my life for 60 days - heavy with all the books I carry around. One of these books, a collection of Rosa Luxemburg's letters translated in English, became an important companion during this residency. I came to Dresden to research Rosa Luxemburg's rich legacy, her political writing as well as the many personal documents she left behind. This revolutionary thinker, who fought hundred years ago for an international socialist society, lived and worked in the region between Poland and Germany. In Dresden she wrote polemic articles for the Sächsische Arbeiter Zeitung. I knew that, next to her political work, she was interested in botany and collected wild plants in her herbarium. Most of these plants were picked and categorised during the years she spent as a political prisoner in different, German penal institutions, both in Berlin and in the area that now belongs to Poland. The contradiction between being a prisoner and collecting wild plants fascinated me, and I wanted to know more.

Although I had read some parts of her writings before, reading her letters in Dresden was an enchanting experience full of new discoveries. Rosa Luxemburg's writings on the world around her, on botany, clouds and birds, is far richer and more poetic than I had ever imagined. Moreover, the way she fluently connects these descriptions with her sharp political observations and fierce polemics is thought-provoking. The first week of my stay in Dresden I bought a second hand bike and cycled to an other part of town to visit the university library. I quickly got a member card and I could even take books home. To my surprise they had, next to many German books, also a large collection in English. Some of the bookcases coloured completely red with all the publications on Marx, Engels, the German socialist party SPD and other related topics. Slowly I got a better understanding of the socialist movement in Germany. But Luxemburg's letters and her herbarium connected also to a different narrative: the history of romanticism. Rosa Luxemburg was a fervent reader of Goethe and in one of her letters to a friend she describes how she regards him as a guiding figure:

*See, for example, how Goethe stood above things with cool composure. [...] I don't ask that you be a poet like Goethe, but everyone can adopt for themselves his outlook on life - the universalism of interests, the inner harmony - or at least strive toward that. And if you say something like: but Goethe was not a political fighter, my opinion is this: a fighter is precisely a person who must strive to rise above things, otherwise one's nose will get stuck in every bit of nonsense.*

This quote explains very well why Rosa Luxemburg studied the natural world feverishly while she was in prison - she tried to stand above the daunting developments of her time. She was incarcerated because of her strong opposition against the First World War - the outbreak of this war shattered her dream of an international socialist society. In stead of fighting capitalism collectively, the workers of the European nations were now killing each other. Although she was devastated by these developments, she tried to focus on the bigger picture. She concentrated on the processes of nature to understand the political developments as trivial compared to the history

of the world. She used her privileges as a political prisoner to take walks as often as she could in the prison yards. During these confined walks she observed all the vegetational and biological life taking place. When she was transferred from the prison in Wronke to one in Breslau she wrote the following lines to her friend Sonya Liebknecht:

*I said farewell to my little garden this morning. The weather is grey and stormy; rain threatens, and clouds are racing through the sky; but still I was able to enjoy my customary morning walk.*

*I took leave of the narrow, paved path along the wall, where I have paced to and fro for nearly nine months now, so that I know every stone and all the weeds that grow in the crevices of the paving. I like the motley colouring of these stones, reddish and bluish, grey and green.*

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When I went for a stroll and walked out of my street in Neustadt into Alaun Park and then a bit further down, I would reach a small stream that flows through the Dresdener Heide. Although Dresden has a city feeling, nature is never far away. The Elbe valley, with its green hills and forests, has inspired many romantic painters. One of its early travelers was the German painter Casper David Friedrich. In the Galerie Neue Meister I looked at his dramatic paintings and wondered how this romantic vision of the landscape, with dead trees and thunder storms, connected with Rosa Luxemburg's socialist ideas. During another expedition I got a possible answer; on the flea market, held every Saturday on the embankment of the Elbe, I found several photographic postcards from the beginning of the 20th century. One of the featured landscapes on these postcards is the Bastei bridge in the Sächsische Schweiz, an image I immediately recognised from Friedrich's paintings.

These postcards are early remnants of the growing number of tourists walking this area between Dresden and Czech Republic. Walking was discovered as a good way to escape the oppressive atmosphere of the industrialised cities and connected to the desire of the people to enjoy the landscape, just as they had learned to enjoy the beauty of landscape painting. Moreover walking was a democratic pastime in which people from all classes could partake and which connected with the growing interest for nature. The socialist struggle for the eight hour work day and better working conditions, enabled the labourers to go out and walk. While walking the body is in motion, but also the mind is allowed to wander - it is no longer occupied by the demands of capitalist production. The walker is viewing the world around him or her in an always changing perspective and thus able to connect ideas with observations. Although Rosa Luxemburg was mostly a solitary walker, both in and outside of prison, her walks connect to these romantic walkers. Her walking mirrored her vivid thinking and allowed her to connect urgent political themes with natural phenomena's. In 1917 she writes:

*Yesterday I was reading about the reasons for the disappearance of song birds in Germany. The spread of scientific forestry, horticulture, and agriculture, have cut them off from their nesting places and their food supply. More and more, with modern methods, we are doing away with hollow trees, waste lands, brushwood, fallen leaves. I felt sore at heart. I was not thinking so much about the loss of pleasure for human beings, but I was so much distressed at the idea of the stealthy and inexorable destruction of these defenceless little creatures, that the tears came into my eyes. I was reminded of a book I read in Zurich, in which Professor Sieber describes the dying-out of the Redskins in North America. Just like the birds, they have been gradually driven from their hunting grounds by civilised men.*

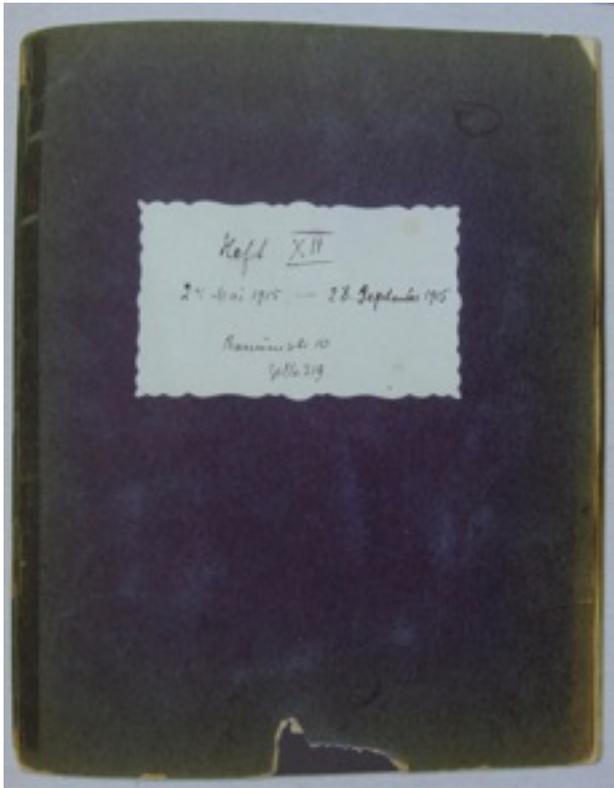
The relation between socialist class struggle and the romantic practice of walking is very interesting and can form a new entry to revisit Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary ideas for an international socialist movement. What does it mean to walk in our contemporary society? The strive for efficiency and productivity seems only to have increased since the beginning of the industrial revolution. And although the circumstances for labour generally improved, there is also a

contradictory development - flex contracts and temporary jobs make our working conditions more and more precarious and therefore the fought for eight hour work day is slowly disappearing. Especially in times of crisis people have to take on several jobs or work long hours to be able to survive. Maybe walking - walking without a clear aim - becomes jeopardised again by the current economic conditions.

Lets zoom in on one specific example that has been in the news in Germany lately. The multinational bookseller Amazon, which has large distribution centers in Leipzig and Berlin employs labourers to pick the different orders from endless shelves. These people, the so called pickers, have to walk kilometers a day back and forth through the storage space. Amazon, like many more successful multinationals, is notoriously anti-union. In America employees are prohibited to join any union, while in Germany this membership is a legal right - a remnant of the strong workers movement of the past. Still, a harsh battle is going on between the corporation and the unions - the latter try to put pressure on Amazon to improve the working conditions and the wages through strikes. Amazon reacts by building new distribution centers in Poland and is unwilling to change its policy. In the mean time the pickers in the distribution center walk back and forth collecting books by Rosa Luxemburg, Goethe, Rousseau and many more romantic and revolutionary thinkers, while their own thoughts and body movements are completely occupied by the work. In order to prevent "time theft" Amazon uses hand-held computers to direct the pickers from order to order and, next to that, to record their performance. If they fail to reach their targets in a certain time, they risk to loose their jobs. This completely surveilled, programmed and low-paid walking clashes with the walking that stands on the basis of Rosa Luxemburg's thinking. Even when here freedom to move was very limited, she could pace back and forth in the prison yard and let her thoughts wander far beyond the confining walls. Especially her relation to birds, wasps and butterflies allows her mind to travel far beyond the borders of the penal institution. But also the plants she collected and dried represented the larger story, the ongoing movement, the travel. As if these conserved, 'frozen' plants form still frames of the moving image.

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At this moment I am in the train back home, but my work is not finished. In the coming month I will work on a proposal for a show in Bautzner 69, a small gallery space on Bautzner Strasse. Next year they are planning a series of shows around nature and the experience of the natural world. I will propose to develop a new work, which follows from the research done during this residency. In this work I want to interweave the legacy of Rosa Luxemburg with the contemporary working conditions at Amazon. Luxemburg was very active in the socialist workers movement in Leipzig, one of the cities where Amazon has one of its distribution centers nowadays. In this anonymous hall a group of pickers is walking everyday. My plan is to relocate these walks from between the storage shelves into the direct environment of the Amazon building. One week I will walk every day, starting from the Amazon distribution center and stretching for the amount of kilometers these pickers walk in one shift. During these walks I will collect plants as a kind of snap shots, or still images, of my journey. In this way I will re-inhabit Rosa Luxemburg's practice of collecting plants, adding footnotes to them to record the place of picking and the thoughts that came up during walking. In Bautzner 69 I will present this new herbarium.



Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium nr. 12, created during her time in the prison on the Barninstrasse in Berlin.



One page out of her herbarium where she noted not only the species (Daucus carota - wild carrot) but also the place where she picked the plant - the courtyard of the prison.



"Bermuda Grass (Cynodon dactylon) 9-9-'18 Sowed by me on the edge of the vegetable garden."



"Family: Globularia"



Rosa Luxemburg walking.



Booklet of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers, a socialists walking group in Britain, early 20th century. Walking groups like these struggled for the "Right to Ramble" - free passage on private lands for walkers.

Three postcards from the beginning of the 20th century showing the Bastei Bridge in the Sächsische Schweiz. Because every card has slightly different viewpoint the images together form a sequence, the become frames in a moving image.

