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**Seeing and Unseeing Concrete Utopias and Prefigurative Politics: A Critical Engagement with Dominant Theoretical Framings of Local Experiments in Socio-Ecological Change**

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In the environmental politics and movement literature, bottom-up local experiments in socio-ecological change, such as local food production and distribution networks, repair cafés, sharing platforms, eco-villages and transition towns, are widely regarded as promising ways of acting on, challenging, and going beyond the unsustainable status quo (e.g., Schlosberg und Coles 2015; Kallis & March 2014; Muraca 2013). Instead of waiting for political institutions to change tack in light of the multiple socio-ecological crises (climate change, biodiversity loss, resource exhaustion, environmental injustice) and instead of waiting for the collapse of (neoliberal) capitalism, which is known to be unsustainable, local experiments in socio-ecological change are sites of “doing something about” and acting on some of today’s major challenges. In the academic literature, the hands-on, experimental character of these initiatives and their focus on the everyday, are often theorized as real or concrete utopias (Wright 2010; Bloch 1985; Lefebvre 1967) and as sites of prefiguration (Yates 2015; Epstein 1991; Boggs 1977). They are regarded as places that critically engage with the status quo, that serve as fields of practice for and that embody anticipations of a radically different future.

In this paper, conceptual in nature, we engage critically with the current dominance of the prefiguration- and real-utopia lenses. As any social practice, the practice of theorizing phenomena opens some vistas and forecloses others. Precisely if transformative change is supposed to be a goal, the authors argue, re-reading phenomena through established theoretical lenses may block the view rather than open new vistas on current conditions of and barriers to transformative change. While transformative politics can for sure not do without engaging the everyday and building narratives of hope, this paper argues, that transformative change may equally hinge on thorough assessments of the societal conditions of possibility of certain phenomena (assessments driven by the question of why do we act the way we act at a given point in history) and, relatedly, the readiness to go beyond established ways of seeing and theoretical framing.