

WEDNESDAY 14 APRIL 2021, 09:30 - 10:30

Theory Stream Plenary

TOWARDS A FUTURE POLITICS: FABULATION, MATERIALITY AND MEDIATION

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Imagining and attempting to create different and better futures are central to sociological theories. This paper focuses on how glitter is involved in creating and organising futures. Glitter may seem an odd, niche or frivolous case to concentrate on; however, its ubiquity in contemporary socio-cultural worlds – from fashion and film to fish, from arts and crafts to LGBTQ* activism – demands that it is taken seriously. The paper develops the concept of fabulation, which refers to a process through which futures are created through mediators, which may be people, works of art or things. Putting the concept of fabulation in dialogue with theories drawn from the new materialisms and sociological research on media, and understanding glitter as a thing that is both material and media, the paper examines how glitter fabulates futures. It considers a plethora of futures that glitter is involved in fabulating. These include, most obviously, environmental politics generated by fears for the future of the natural environment and the alternative futures that LGBTQ* activism seeks to create, but they also include the more prosaic ways in which glitter indicates differently classed, raced and gendered futures. The paper proposes a conception of future politics in order to attend to the differentiated futures glitter may fabulate. While the concept of future politics is developed here in relation to a specific material/media, the paper concludes by sketching out its potential relevance for broader sociological theorisation of how time and futures are involved in the making and re-making of differences and inequalities.

Rebecca Coleman is Reader in the Sociology Department, Goldsmiths, University of London where she teaches and researches on time and temporality (especially presents and futures), visual and sensory sociology, bodies, inventive methodologies and feminist theory. Recent publications include *Glitterworlds: The Future Politics of a Ubiquitous Thing* (2020, Goldsmiths Press), 'Mediating Presents', a special issue of *Media Theory* (edited with Susanna Paasonen, 2020), 'Feminist New Materialist Practice', a special issue of *MAI* (edited with Tara Page and Helen Palmer, 2019) and 'Futures in Question: Theories, Methods, Practices', a special issue of *Sociological Review* (edited with Richard Tutton, 2017). She is currently working on projects on the mediation and experience of temporality. These include research on digital mediation of the present or 'now' and a collaborative project on everyday temporal experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic in partnership with Mass Observation (funded by the Leverhulme Trust). A *Discover Society* blog on the latter research is here: <https://discoversociety.org/2020/09/15/a-day-at-a-time-a-research-agenda-to-grasp-the-everyday-experience-of-time-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>