

Remarks on the Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science Book Award 2020



Pawel Frelík

The Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science Book Award (previously the Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies Book Prize) honors an outstanding scholarly monograph that explores the intersections between popular culture, particularly science fiction, and the discourses and cultures of technoscience. The award is designed to recognize groundbreaking and exceptional contributions to the field. Books published in English between 1 January and 31 December 2020 were eligible for the award. The jury for the prize were Aimee Bahng (Pomona College), Elizabeth Swanstrom (University of Utah), Sherryl Vint (University of California, Riverside), and Pawel Frelík (University of Warsaw), who served as jury chair.

After intense deliberations the jury announce that the ninth annual SFCS book award has been won by Melody Jue, Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater* (Duke UP 2020). *Wild Blue Media* treats the global ocean itself as both a speculative, science fictional medium and an entity that provokes speculation. In that, the study expands the principal focus of the “ecological” turn by engaging with a wide variety of artistic and cultural objects and practices.

One of the judges saw the monograph as “a beautifully rendered, deeply situated study of underwater mediations from coral mapping to deep-sea photography,” while another described it as helping the readers “think beyond conventional Western epistemologies as it repositions cognitive estrangement and ‘diving as method’ as modes of humanistic enquiry that are embodied, ethically attention to their interactions with their objects of enquiry, and reflexively open to making knowledge anew.” By theorizing the ocean as “a science fictional medium of estrangement,” *Wild Blue Media* provides affordances for new ways to understand kinship and connectivity.

The judges also decided to recognize, as particularly strong runners-up, William O. Gardner’s *The Metabolist Imagination: Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction* (Minnesota University Press 2020) and Christopher B. Paterson’s *Open World Empire: Race, Erotics, and the Global Rise of Video Games* (New York University Press 2020). One of the judges praised the former for “a powerful example of how science fiction imaginaries shape collective cultural ways of understanding and inhabiting urban space,” as it approaches speculative architecture with intertwined questions of technology, media, and environment, while another spoke of the latter as ‘taking seriously the pleasures afforded by gaming, even as it demonstrates gaming’s uncomfortable connections to global exploitation and racism’ and “not only calls attention to the limitations of the “freedom” gaming promises but also interrogates the play that eludes game design imperatives.”