

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant	Mgr. Eva Šlesingerová, Ph.D.
Habilitation thesis	We, Other Utopians Recombinant DNA, Genome Editing, and Artificial Life
Reviewer	Eben Kirksey, M.Phil. (Oxon), Ph.D., Associate Professor of Anthropology
Reviewer's home unit, institution	School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford

As an expert in the field—who has written about gene editing, life in the age of biotechnology, and bioart—I deem this thesis a true tour de force. The candidate has a broad and deep command of the literature and has introduced me to a diversity of sources and ideas that I have not encountered before. The ways that the theory comes together with the ethnography is masterful. Ideas are taken off the shelf, inspected, reconfigured and then offered back to the reader. Artful juxtapositions and intimate ethnographic portraits make the concepts and ideas come alive. I am teaching a course on Posthuman Bodies at the University of Oxford in winter 2023 and this text would be an ideal companion to readings by Braidotti, Haraway, Thacker, Rabinow, and other contemporary theorists. As a book, I could see this fitting within the Posthumanities series edited by Cary Wolfe at the University of Minnesota Press or as a good fit with the list at MIT Press.

Thus said, there are some relatively minor things that should be fixed. At times the narrative felt uneven. The Introduction was outstanding, but some of the subsequent chapters could benefit from more careful editorial revision before the manuscript is submitted for publication. Also, some technical issues should be fixed. CRISPR does not enable people to “cut and paste” (p. 55), but instead can make targeted deletions. Other tools, like lentiviruses, can insert synthetic gene sequences into a cell—but this is not cutting and pasting either. The DNA is synthesised (elsewhere), then the transgene is loaded into a vector. When using metaphors and figural realism, specificity is important.

The chapter about bioart is solid, but it's not clear how this fits into the Czech context. Perhaps this would work better as a stand alone article—specifically on CRISPR bioart—that is separate from the book project? Also, at some point in the book it would be helpful to provide readers with a primer on science, technology, history, and politics in Czechoslovakia. Some of this work is already in the manuscript (around p. 153), but for readers who are totally unfamiliar with Eastern Europe this should come sooner. This part of the text could go slower and really dwell in the specificity of Czech technoscientific histories and future imaginaries.

Alison Kafer's book, *Feminist, Queer, and Crip*, offers an important antidote to thinking about immortality as a possibility for future humans. We are all becoming crippled, Kafer insists, as we get older. Her situated knowledge and critical analysis could be useful alongside the visions of “utopian bodies” conjured by Kristin and other members of the lab. Abou Farman's

book, *On Not Dying: Secular Immortality in the Age of Technoscience*, also has important critical perspectives on the transhumanist quest for immortality.

One bigger point: I found the title “We, Other Utopians” to be a little opaque. Before the manuscript is submitted to a publisher perhaps it is worth thinking about other possibilities for the title.

Overall, this is an excellent scholarly work. The below questions are meant to stimulate further thoughts about how to bring together different components of the manuscript into conversation, to produce a sharper conceptual frame.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

- 1) How does the idea of symbiogenesis help us understand biotechnology ventures with CRISPR-Cas9?
- 2) If the aims of the laboratory were to study the “cause” of diseases like cancer, infertility, and ageing (p. 34), how should we understand their experimental visions and claims in the context of knowledge about culture, power, and history? Is ageing a “disease”?
- 3) How should we balance dreams about personalised therapy and utopian visions of medical equity and social justice?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *We, Other Utopians Recombinant DNA, Genome Editing, and Artificial Life* by Mgr. Eva Šlesingerová, Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Sociology.

Date: 13 August 2022

Signature:

