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"The *Xenopus* Pregnancy Test: A Performative Experiment"

Kirksey, Eben, Dehlia Hannah, Charlie Lotterman, and Lisa Jean Moore

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There is an appreciable distance between the biochemistry of being pregnant and the experience of recognizing oneself as pregnant—a speculative gap that technology can serve to narrow or widen depending on how one chooses to choreograph an ontological state. Conducting an outmoded pregnancy test with live *Xenopus* frogs, we probed the contours of this gap. As we took an antiquated bioassay out of medical archives, we conducted a performative experiment—an intervention that blurred the boundaries between performance art, science, and ethnography. Like queer enactments of gender, performative experiments exhibit the performativity of conventional science and thereby make scientific modes of knowledge production and claims available for critical inspection. Moving beyond the domain of human self-fashioning and debates about the ethics of animal experimentation, our experiment also considered speculation linking the *Xenopus* pregnancy test to the extinction of other frogs. Amphibian biologists once hypothesized that *Xenopus* frogs brought a pathogenic fungus out of Africa. We found that this outbreak narrative projected colonial and racial stereotypes into the domain of animals and limited the scope of the scientific imagination. DNA test kits enabled us to determine that the frogs used in our study were not carrying the pathogenic chytrid fungus. Getting past stigma attached to particular species and locales, we found that parasites are nonetheless emerging within the biotechnology marketplace. Global commerce is generating hypervirulent strains of disease that threaten to disrupt human dreams and schemes. (Text from authors' abstract)

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