



## Current Debates on Biotechnology and the Role of the Visual

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**M**y research explores the mechanism through which visual media intervenes in contemporary public debates and controversies around biotechnology. These debates are complex sites of hegemony shifts and contestations of knowledge regimes, and visual media's role is more complex than illustration or instruction.

My 3 case studies are all based in my native Hungary: the GMO debate (or rather constitutional GMO ban), the porn industry's image and VR, and some events of the local pink ribbon movement. Through visual rhetorics and framing analysis I investigate how and to what extent such visual material have a broader political impact: both a broader ideological function and social effects more directly on the intersubjective level. Such materials often draw on the already existing popular cultural imaginary to generate and channel anxiety, relying on the affective energies of essentialisms such as nature-culture, purity-contamination. Either generating fear, or appealing to suffering or hope, visual material circumvents scientific, rational arguments.

Visual material also aids in understanding complex concepts or phenomena, and the visual depiction of these technologies (or so-

metimes their imagined versions) bridges the gap between scientific innovation and reality. On the other hand, a reductionist approach relying on visuals and grounded in the modernist notion of teleological progress creates unrealistic expectations. The general public is then drawn into political debates or interaction with technology based on such distorted ideas, which then undermines democratic participation and negatively impacts research. The status of discourse also affects the status of knowledge, privileging one discursive domain over others means contesting knowledge regimes and policy.

Besides determining ontological status, e.g. whether GMO is food or not, or whether stem cells are human or research materials, representations also situate political actors and aid in either gaining or contesting their legitimacy. They also fulfil a general disciplinary function, staking out normativity, mobilizing against perceived, real, or even fabricated treats. I also investigate the role of a broader anti-elitist, anti-progressivist sentiment in such debates, and its connection to the visual register.

## **KEYWORDS**

**Biotechnology,  
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