Science and Politics and the Media

Things that make me mad

* Faked “Science” is often more popular/talked about than actual scientific studies
  + Dangers of vaccines
  + Climate change isn’t real
  + Earth is flat
  + Polygraphs
* The media misrepresents science/scientific studies
  + TV shows portraying scientists/their work
  + “New study finds/suggests”...
    - “A glass of red wine is just as good as spending an hour at the gym”
    - “Smelling farts might prevent cancer”
  + Small studies blown out of proportion
    - “Eating chocolate when pregnant could help the baby”
    - Small study sizes
  + Science in progress
    - Cherry-picking parts that sound good
      * Tobacco companies claimed that no one could say that smoking causes cancer because “the science isn’t in”
  + Funding can cause bias
  + “Find the study that sounds best to you and go with that” - Al Roker
  + “Boring” details of papers not newsworthy
* Success of scientists depends on publishing constantly, making eye-catching titles
  + Tenure and funding
  + P-hacking - statistical significant correlation, but not causation by any means
* Replication studies not funded, under-appreciated
  + Exploratory studies taken as fact, no confirmation
* Funding required for studies. Funding sometimes determined/provided by non-scientific organizations or people who don’t understand the importance of studies
* Government-sponsored scientific studies are political
  + Illegal for the CDC to study gun violence/for government money to study gun violence
  + CDC grant wording

Your response brings Marcuse to bear on the issue of government-mandated suggestions on the language of scientific grants. While you were hesitant in class to talk about your plans for a zine, I think what you’ve outlined in your response would serve as an important step towards developing a very generative topic. I could see your zine exploring the politics surrounding the representation of science in popular media. How do our political and cultural agendas drive scientific research? But also how does scientific research work to justify certain political and cultural realities? While these are simply my first thoughts, I think your background in STEM could lead you to a really interesting project. I could even see you use your piece about the language of grant funding as part of the zine. The task then becomes developing a theme that could incorporate this writing while leaving room for variation. The themes I proposed are probably a bit too vague at this point, but I would love to talk to you more about your thoughts on refining them. Finally, I think you turn to a great passage from Marcuse to diagnose the contemporary crisis. Great work all around.