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To: Jeffrey Epstein
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How does this sound?

Almost all of the important problems that science faces are complex and interdisciplinary, yet the majority of traditional research labs still focus on a single discipline or problem. To tackle difficult challenges, such as curing or augmenting the human body; developing, deploying and regulating artificial intelligence; or understanding, designing and managing the future of genomics—we need interdisciplinary—and perhaps more importantly, antidisciplinary—groups of the best researchers in any number of disparate fields. Working together, bound tightly in an operating group, these scientists are unencumbered by the “walls” of disciplines and federal funding silos. Unlike established fields, which have an established paradigm, these are “pre-paradigmatic sciences”—the principles are not yet clear, the textbook is incomplete, and there are no hard and fast rules—the disciplinary source of a given revolution is highly unpredictable.

At the MIT Media Lab, we have established a unique environment where master’s and PhD candidates conduct research in more than 25 research groups each led by a professor or senior research scientist. This academic program is complemented by a robust research agenda that often involves collaborations with top researchers across MIT and beyond to tackle mission-oriented projects that cut across multiple disciplines. The Media Lab is also strongly focused on deploying research results into practice and the real world.

While academia can attract the brightest researchers whose thinking is not yet encumbered by traditional disciplinary biases, it does not necessarily provide the best model for attracting funding for “unproven” research initiatives, or for scaling. The Media Lab’s “secret sauce” is its ability to bring together a constantly evolving community of hundreds of faculty members, researcher staff, and graduate students with an incredible breadth of scientific expertise, and then providing them with the freedom—and funding—to make their ideas into uncharted scientific waters. We believe this can serve as a new paradigm for advancing the understanding, invention, and deployment of science.

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