THE ECOLOGY OF TRUTH

by Samuel Schneider

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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The Ecology of Truth

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The Ecology of Truth

BY SAMUEL RAPHAEL SCHNEIDER

**SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
ON MAY 24, 2018 IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE**

ABSTRACT

The spaces we inhabit influence the way we experience our surroundings, but this causal relationship is much weaker than designers and architects like to imagine. *The Ecology of Truth* investigates these weak effects as a mesoscope; a device designed to interrogate the spaces and relationships between the microscopic—the lab, and the macroscopic—the Institute.

The work draws on the aesthetic of the laboratory at MIT—both transparent and reflective—visible, yet inaccessible. In addition to its aforementioned aesthetic influences, *The Ecology of Truth* derives its esthetic influence from the solipsistic world of architectural language, blending it with scopic histories that run throughout the development of modern science. If the project has a single inspiration it is the *Wunderkammer*—also known as cabinet of curiosities—the idea that a unified curation of its contained objects re-assembles their spatial lives, turning 'real' objects into a mythic, often singular narratives of the world—a miniature ecological prism, with various competing truths.

The life of the work is dynamic—moving around the institute, it captures scientific curios bound for the trash, repurposing them as a narrative gallery of failed *objets-types*—modern tools transformed into contingent objects of contemporary space. While on the move, the cabinet turns eyes, and hopefully some of the minds behind those puzzled and curious glances. If not, the artist hopes the viewers enjoyed seeing a reflective box, punctuated by apertures, filled with shiny things! Who doesn't like shiny things?

Advisor: Azra Akšamija, MArch, PhD

Title: Associate Professor of Art, Culture and Technology, MIT

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Mom, Dad, Isaac, Clare, Ruth "Roof" Bader Ginsburg (not the Judge, but good on her as well)

To the socioeconomic luck I've had, and the unconditional love and economic support my parents gave me—both undeserved—thank you, cosmos.

Special Resentment For:
David Koch, The Military-Academic Complex, Architectural Parochialism

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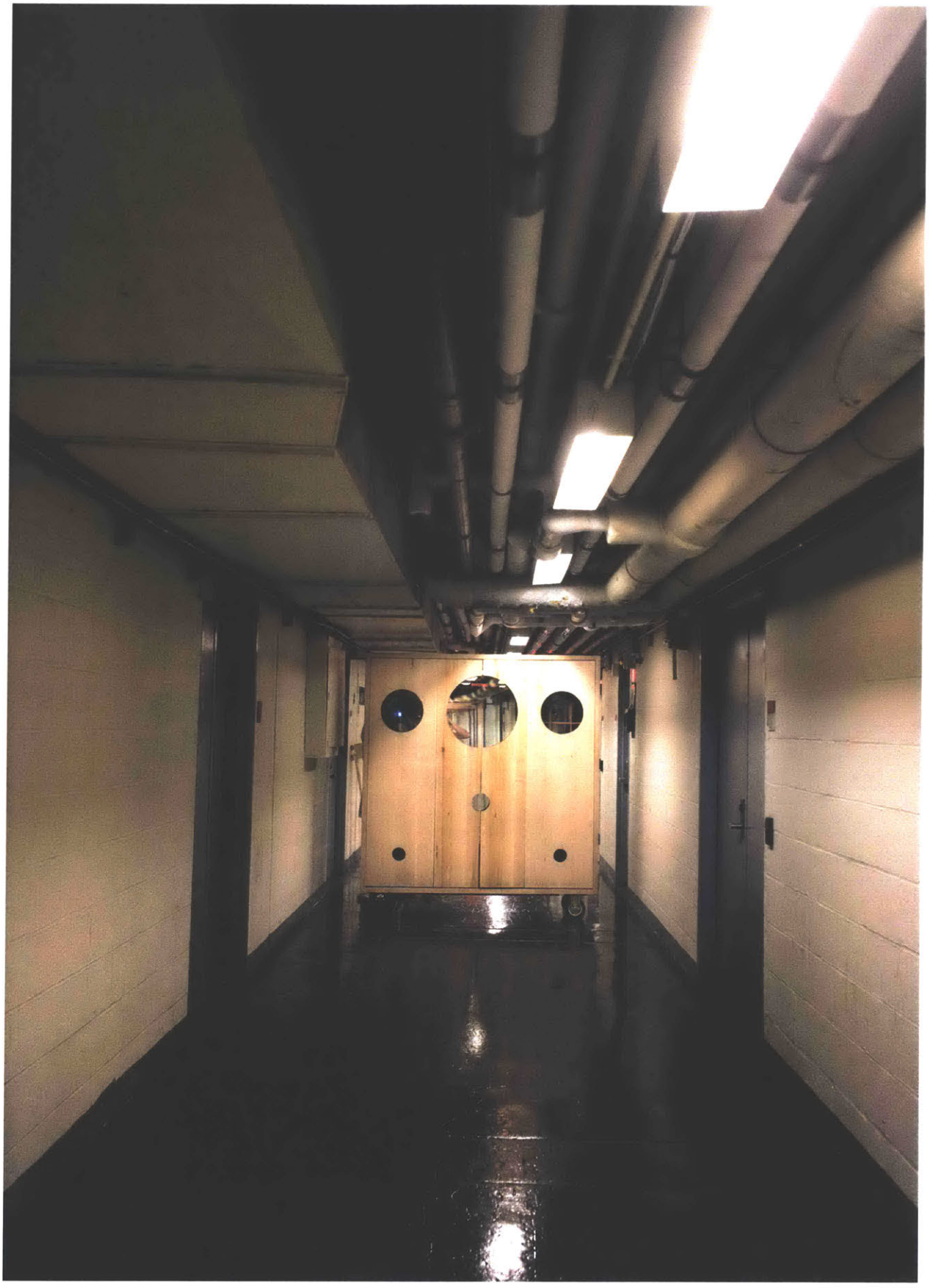
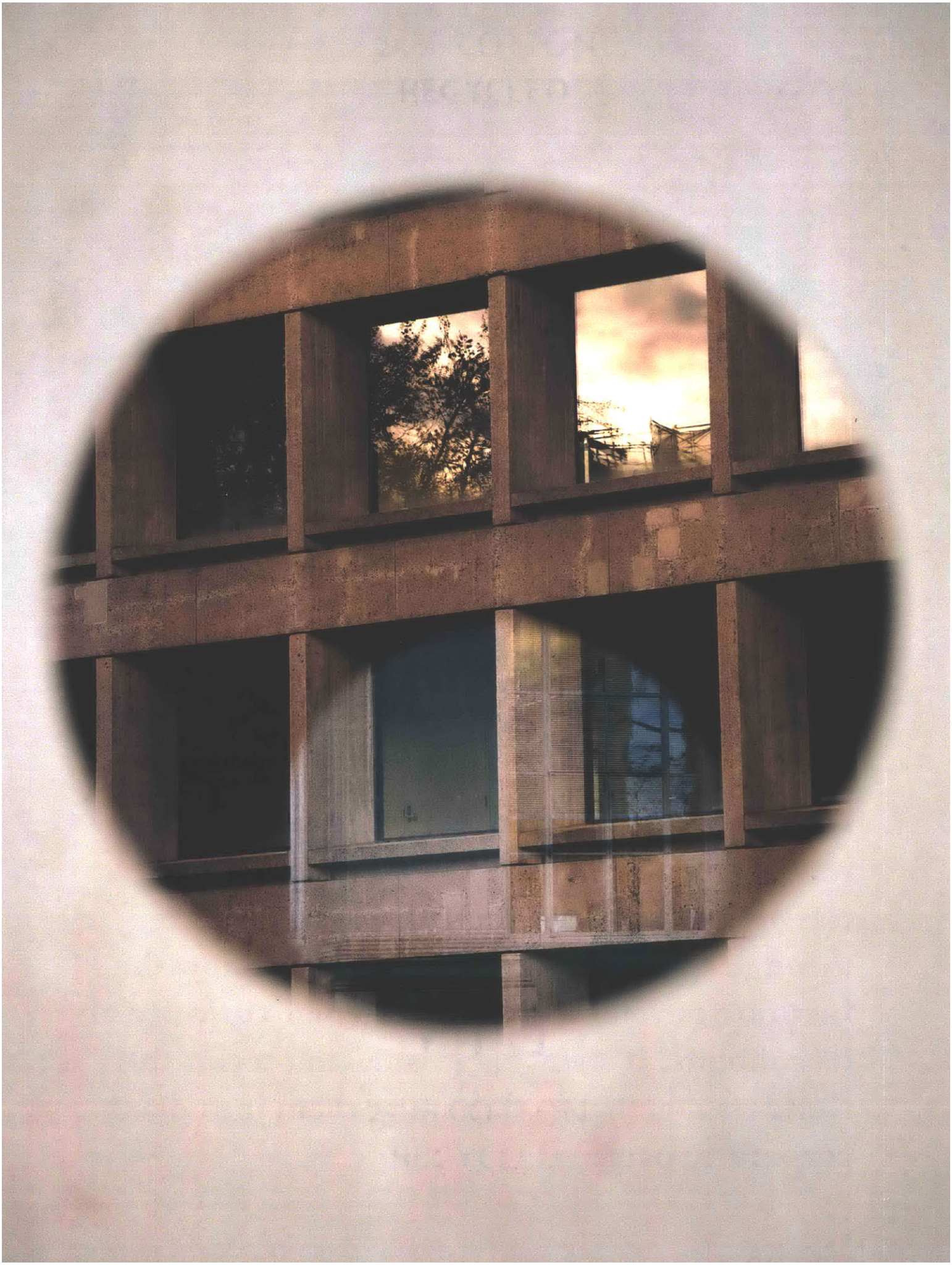
The Ecology of Truth:

A Scopic Device for Reflecting on the Institute

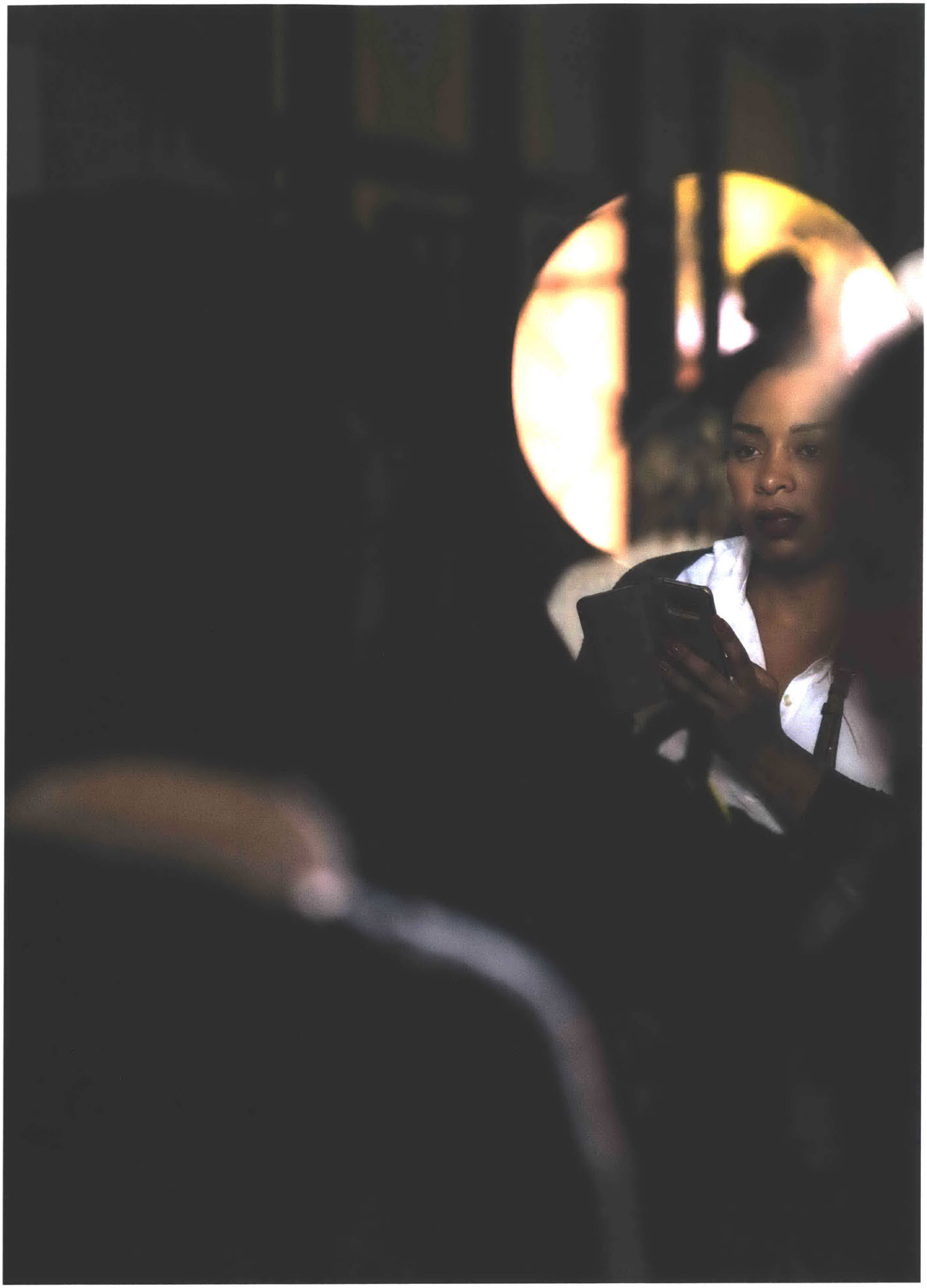
I've asked you to meet me here, in this not-insignificant, yet somewhat innocuous space along the infinite corridor.

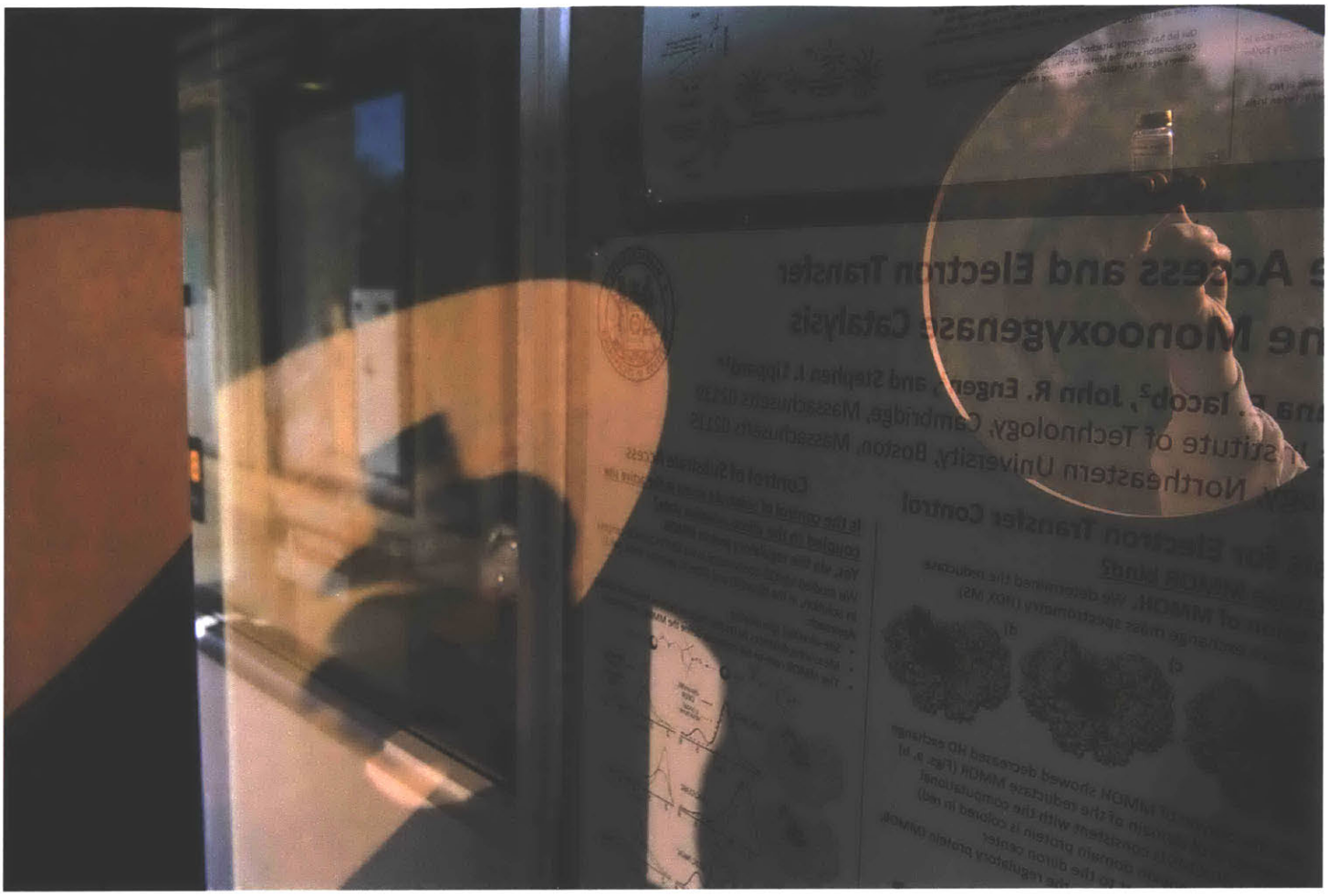


For four years I've wandered this tangled web of hallways and atria—passing by labs, classrooms, and mechanical spaces—and through this journey I've experienced how the Institute normalizes the spectacular curiosity of its contents. It strings its visual and technical wonders together— flattening them into demi-corporate space.

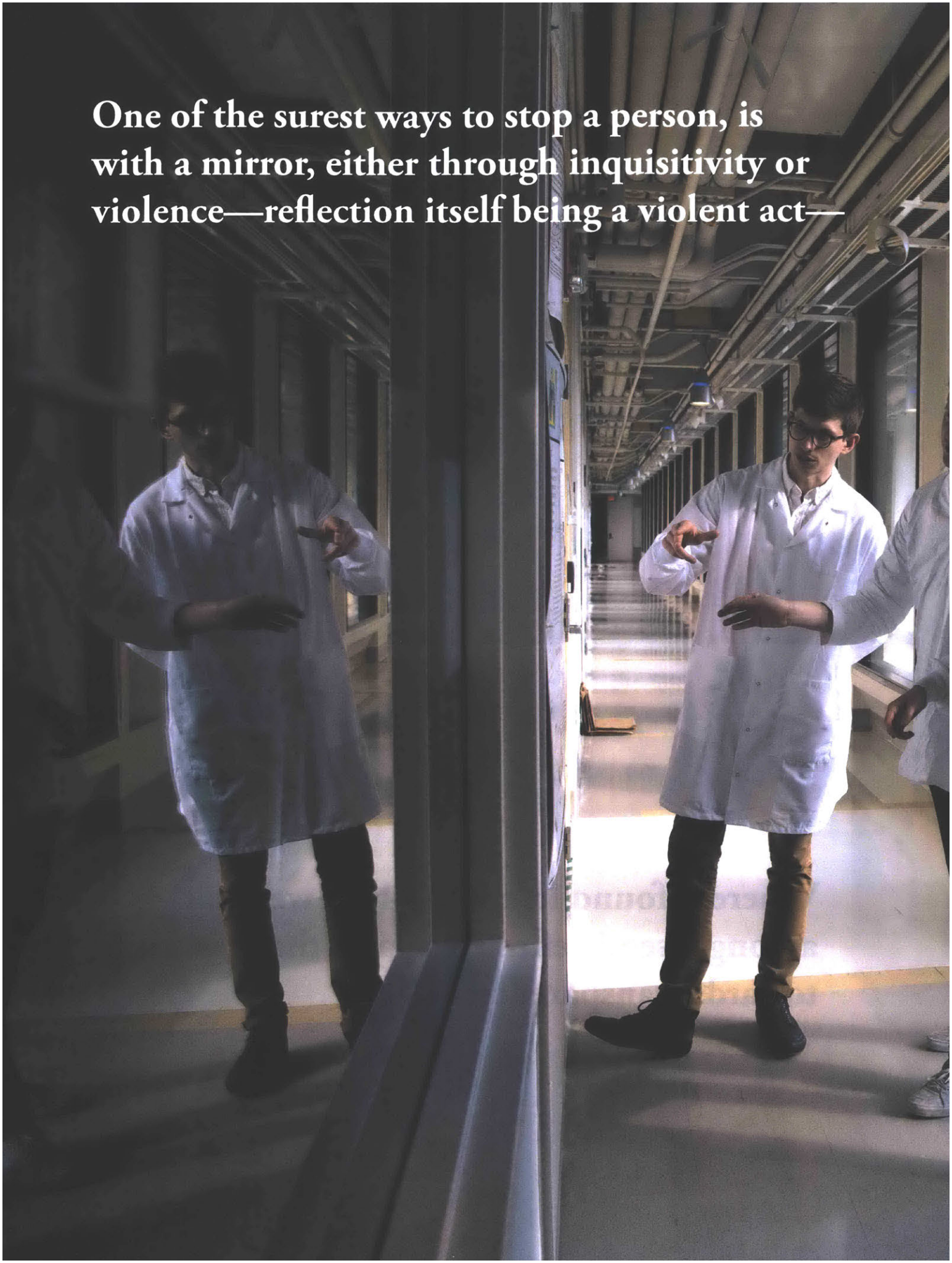


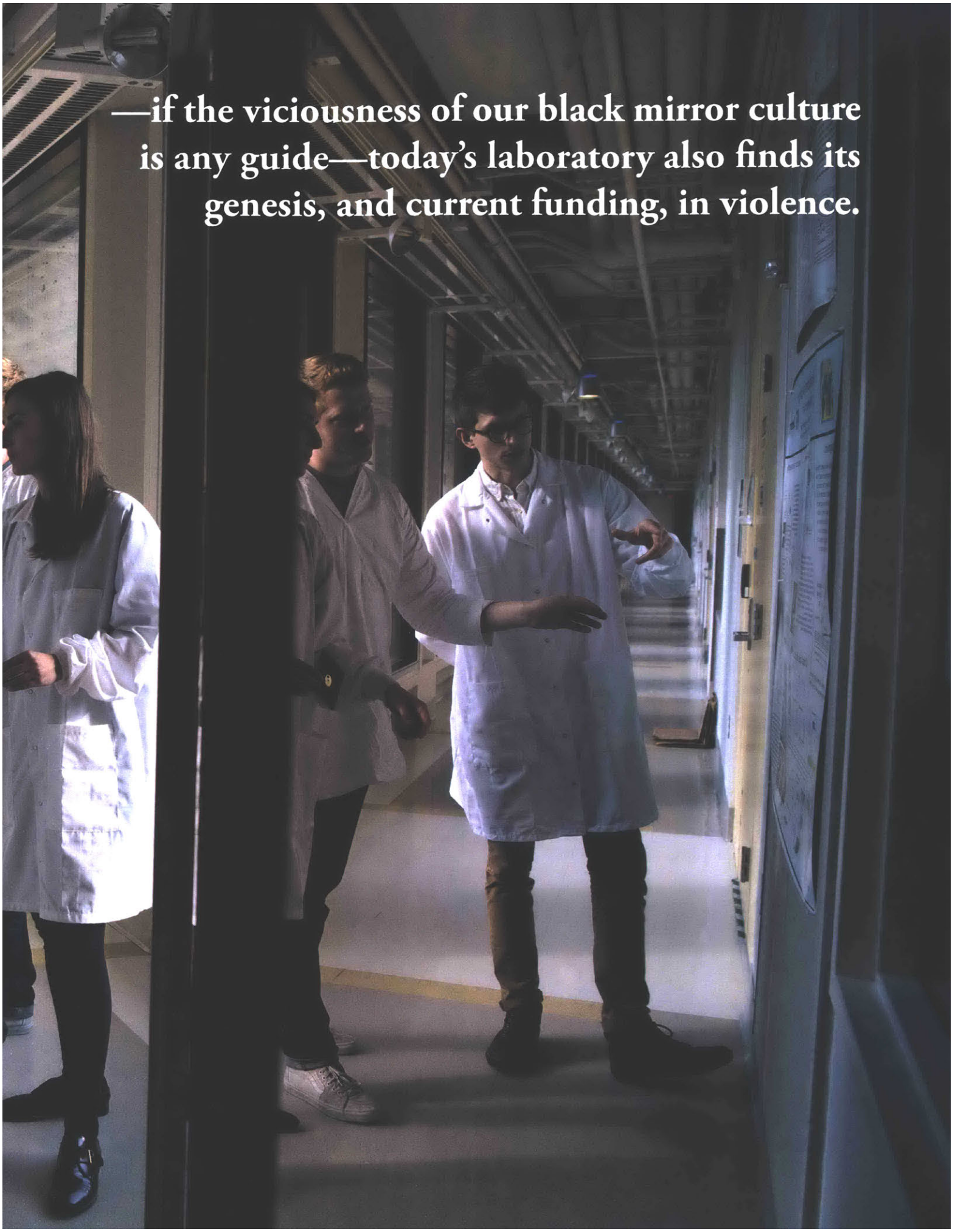
This flattening piqued my interest in the lab aesthetic—





Where it found its roots—how we walk amongst semi-reflective spaces that gesture towards transparency.

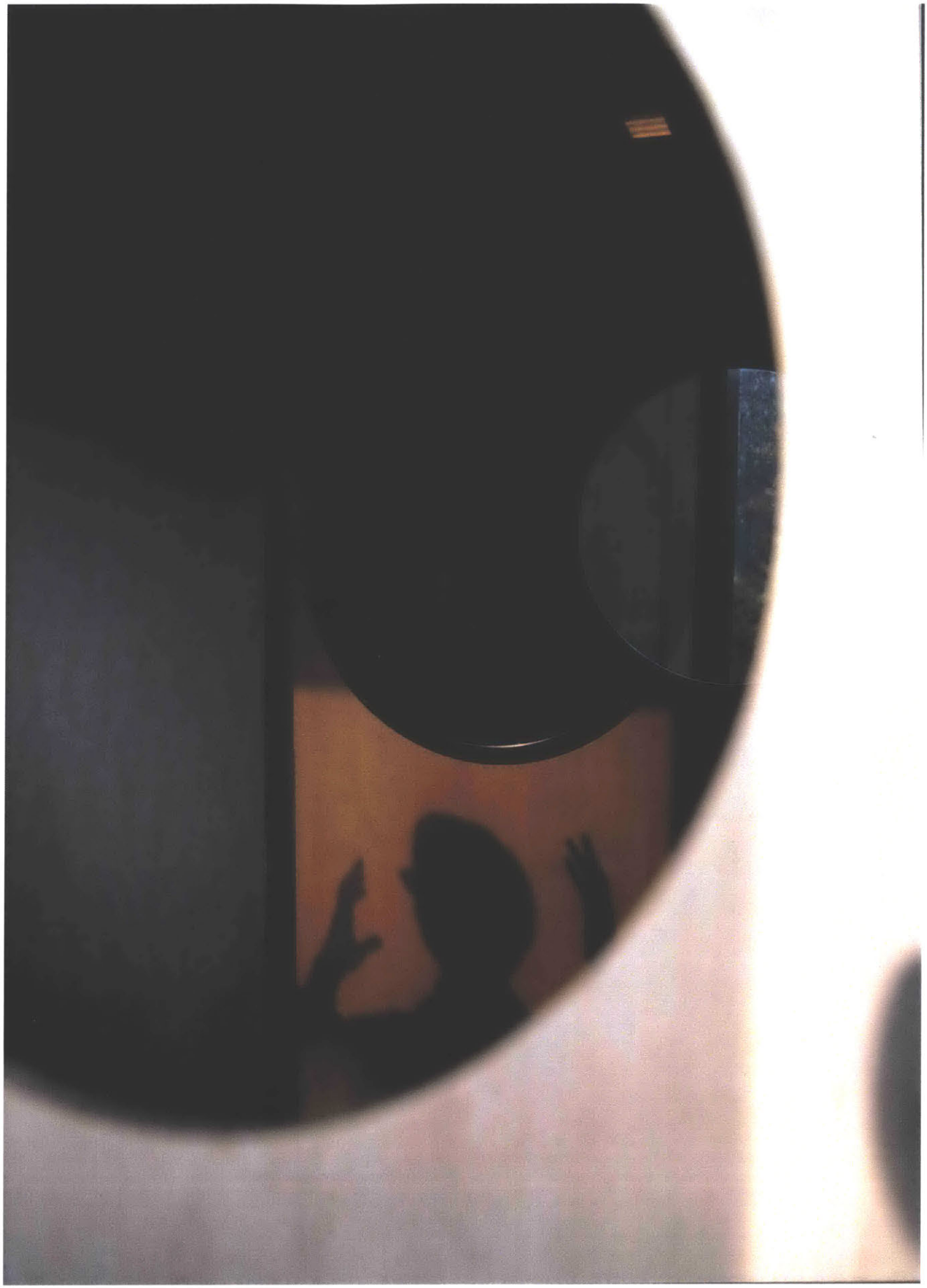

One of the surest ways to stop a person, is
with a mirror, either through inquisitivity or
violence—reflection itself being a violent act—



—if the viciousness of our black mirror culture is any guide—today's laboratory also finds its genesis, and current funding, in violence.

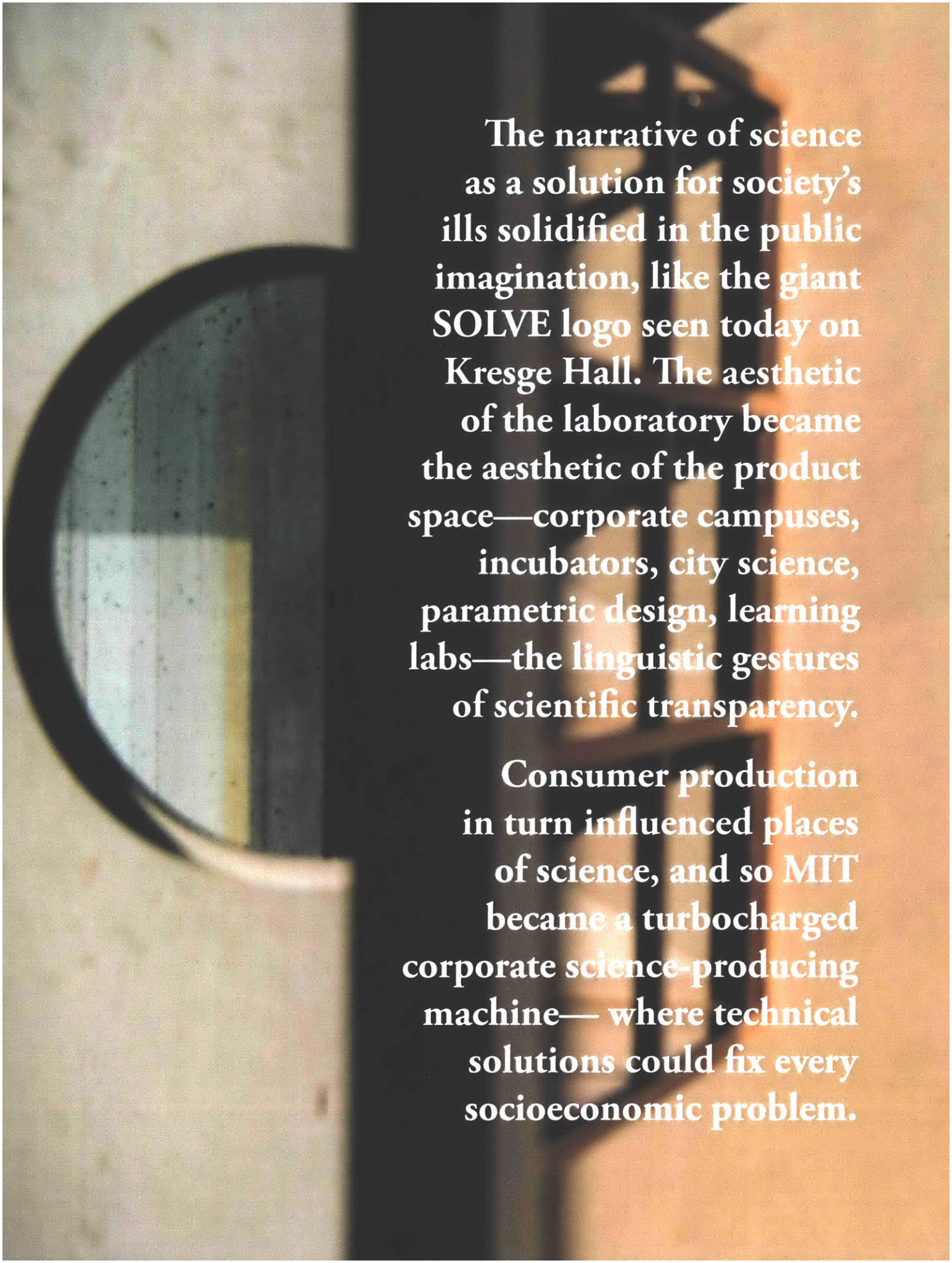
3-208
PRESIDENT
PROVOST

In 1945, as Allied victory seemed imminent, Vannevar Bush, our president, designed a blueprint for the expansion of the military industrial complex. Its title—*Science, the Endless Frontier*– indicated its grand aspirations. In the text Bush laid out an architecture for how research of the war effort could be applied for the economic benefit of mankind.



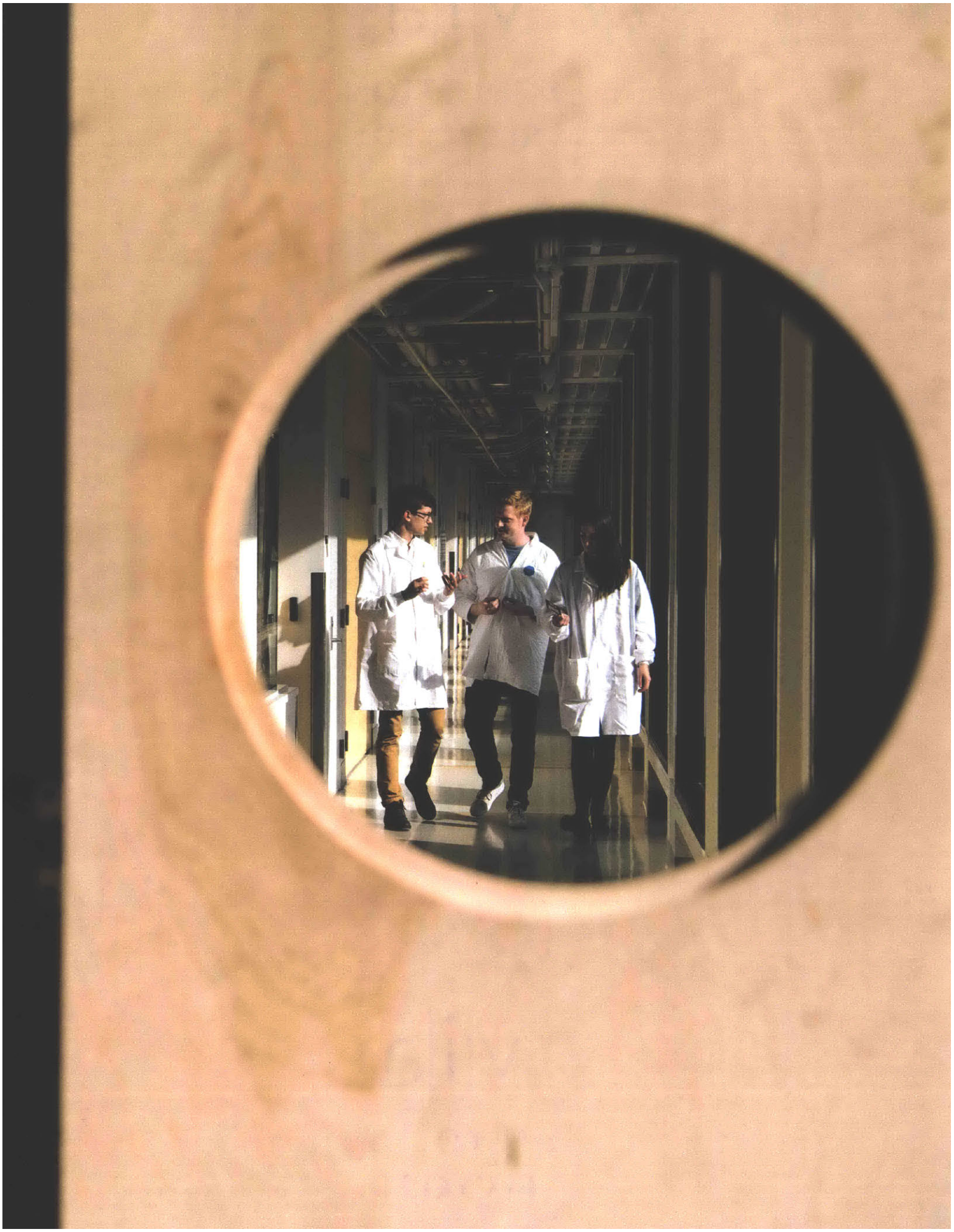
To find an endless frontier, a viewer must look beyond their present scale—usually down, through microscopes, satellites, and into our cell phones. The lab windows at MIT gesture at this by inviting us to look in—to ensure the work going on is safe, to advertise the benefits of science—to posture towards the aesthetic of a democratic and horizontal access to knowledge—though this posturing is just that—a produced aesthetic, courtesy of the institute.

What ensued from the blueprint of *Science, The Endless Frontier* was the rise of the world's first consumer-based empire—where innovation—rocks becoming atomic bombs—stemmed from MIT, or places like it.



The narrative of science as a solution for society's ills solidified in the public imagination, like the giant SOLVE logo seen today on Kresge Hall. The aesthetic of the laboratory became the aesthetic of the product space—corporate campuses, incubators, city science, parametric design, learning labs—the linguistic gestures of scientific transparency.

Consumer production in turn influenced places of science, and so MIT became a turbocharged corporate science-producing machine— where technical solutions could fix every socioeconomic problem.

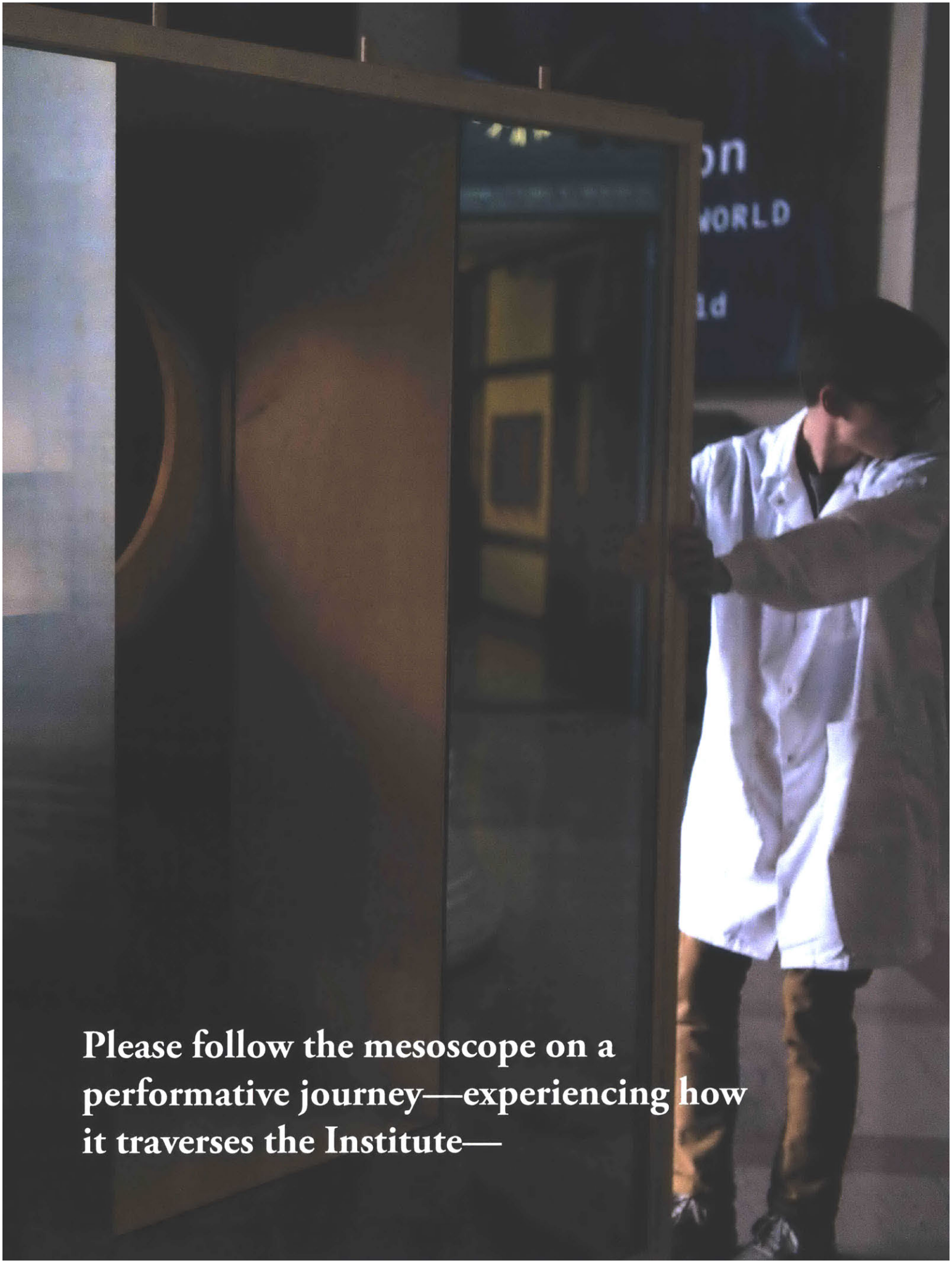


we find ourselves standing between the design
of narrative—and the designed spaces that
produce fact.

It is here, in front of David Koch, and his reflective, protective chamber which has seemingly been left unchallenged, that we find ourselves standing—between the design of narrative—the heritage foundation and propaganda vehicles like it—and the designed spaces that produce fact. Right here, the self-reflection of one merges with the other.

David has spent somewhere north of two hundred million dollars to aid the production of scientific fact and its narrative of truth at MIT— and for this, he has received a lab building, and a protective refractive chamber for his face.

Concurrently, he has spent over ten billion dollars fighting the same production of facts that don't meet his aesthetic standard of truth—using the same spaces he has financed as both fodder and weapons for his narrative. What has emerged is an Ecological system that poses different "truth" generating organizations—Scientific publications, research institutes, heritage foundations, for-profit media, the open source and democratic internet. This is a postmodern dream—a physicist's nightmare—a biologist's reality—an Ecology of Truth.


Please follow the mesoscope on a performative journey—experiencing how it traverses the Institute—

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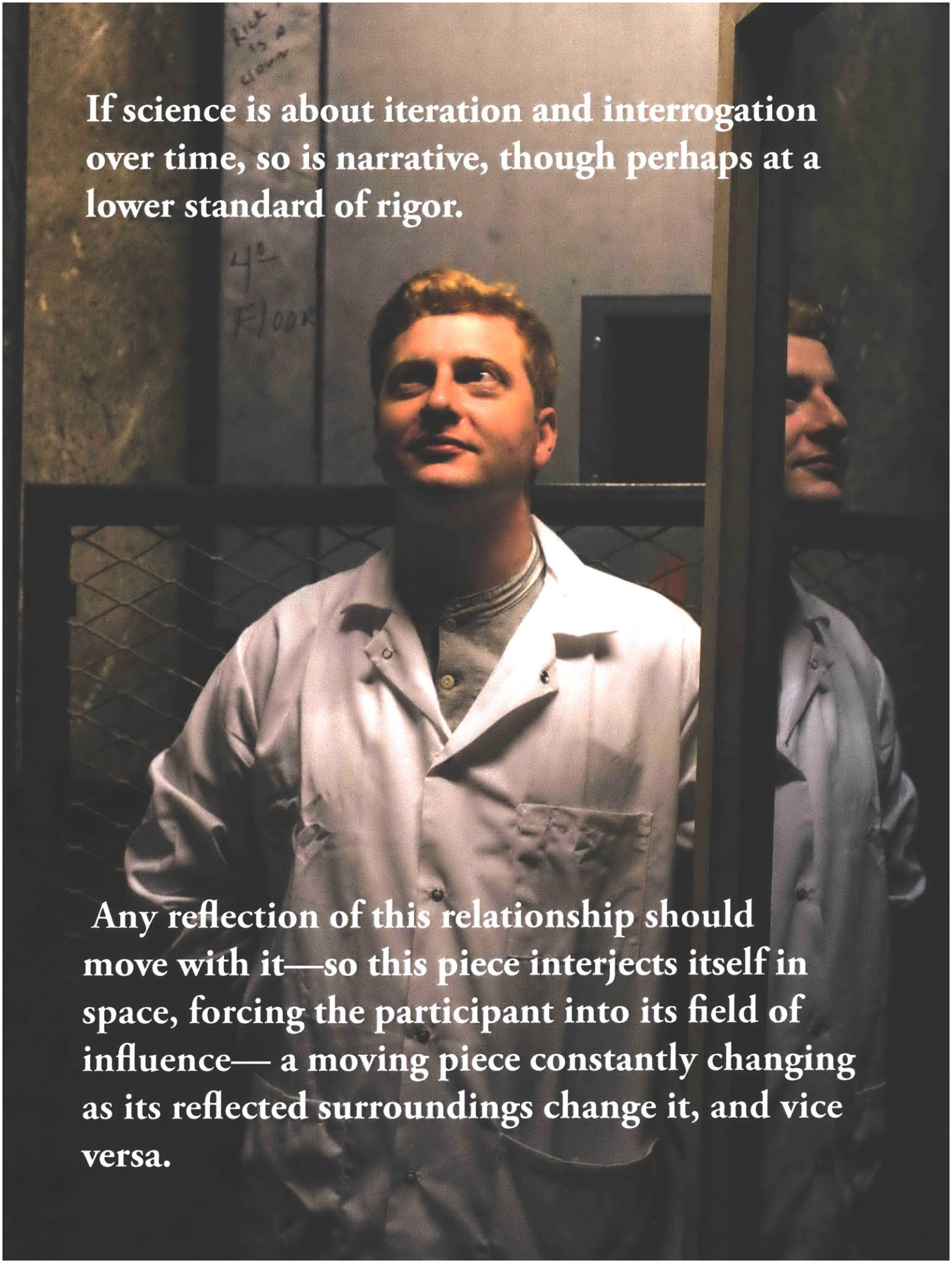
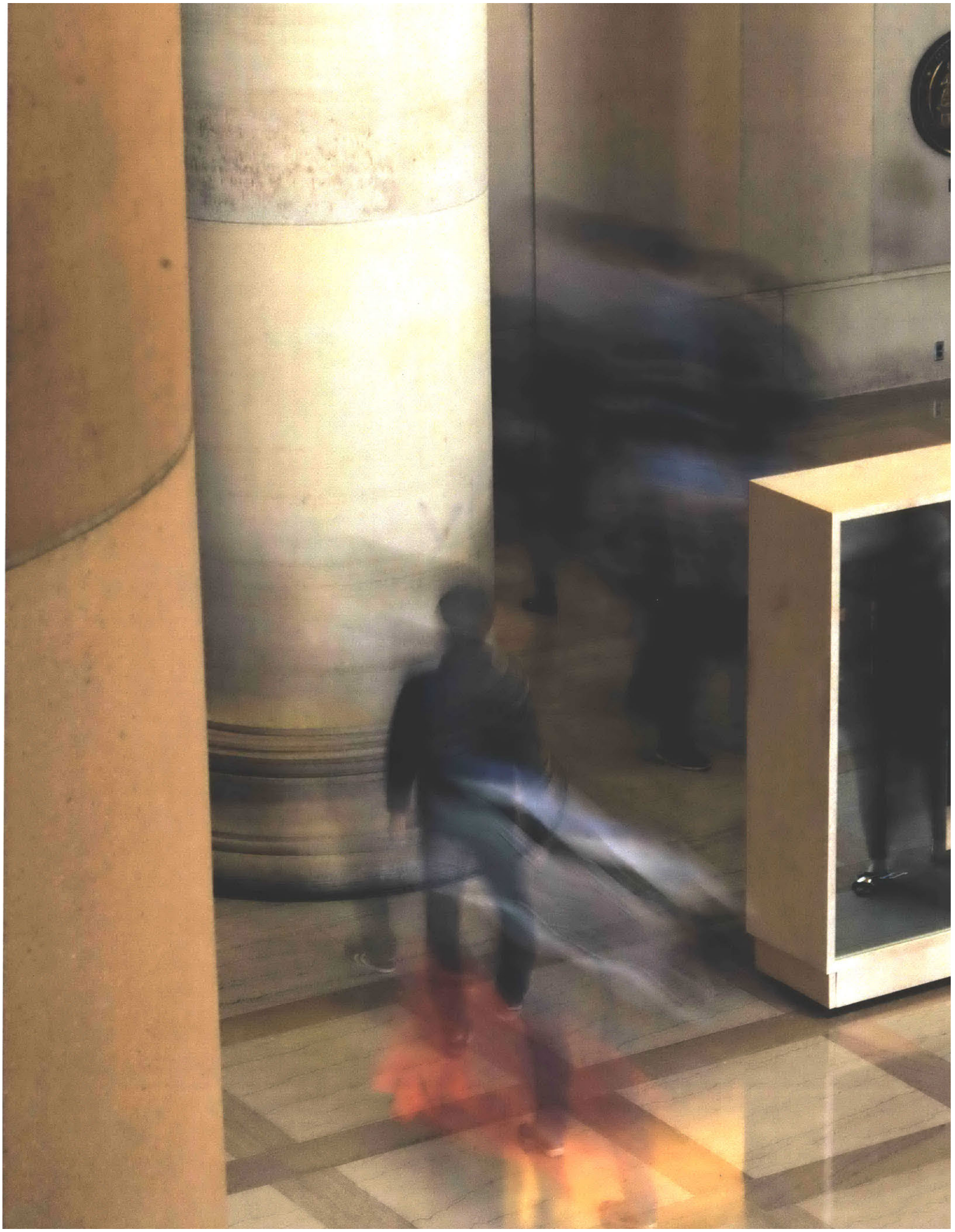


If science is about iteration and interrogation over time, so is narrative, though perhaps at a lower standard of rigor.

Any reflection of this relationship should move with it—so this piece interjects itself in space, forcing the participant into its field of influence— a moving piece constantly changing as its reflected surroundings change it, and vice versa.



The spaces we inhabit influence the way we experience our surroundings, but this causal relationship is much weaker than designers, artists, and architects imagine.
I argue that the built environment's strongest effect on affect is its program—the spatial ability to reify narratives into histories.

Since the power of design intent is slipping, if it ever existed to begin with, in fields as powerless as architecture, or as powerful as the laboratory— while narrative powers— bad acting in an architecture presentation exempted, grow— a Mcluhanesque flattening of power projection.

As a parting interrogation of this process I created this object, designed to fit into the scopic tradition. I intended it to act as a mesoscope; mediating, magnifying and reflecting certain moments around the institute, and playing with the performative aspects of laboratory life, in the mesoscopic space as described by Latour and defined by Gallison.

The mesoscopic scale—defined by Galison as the scale that, when combined with the microscopic—describes the action of science—it is the liminal space between the "inner laboratory" and "outer laboratory." It is essential to understanding the production of science as microscopic perspective is too specific, and misses critical aspects of the sociological production of science, while macroscopic summaries lack descriptive availability.

Coincidentally, it is the space that most of the MIT community occupies every day.

And so this mesoscope—a miniature reflective chamber—becomes a spatial laboratory. It pulls the viewer into its space, and acts as a lens, container and image capturing object—the essential aspects of a laboratory as interpreted through aesthetic media.

The project, in addition to a lens of scale, owes itself to an architectural and scopic piece—the *Wunderkammer*. It emerged following the waning of the renaissance scientific awakening, and preceded the enlightenment, gathering up fine art, eastern relics, and animal remains for the delight of royals and their guests; they were as much shows of rank and status as they were earnest attempts to contain and order the world's multitudes." The *Wunderkammer* was regarded as a microcosm or theater of the world, and memory. It symbolically conveyed its patron's control of the world through its indoor, microscopic reproduction.

I was inspired by the *Wunderkammer* because of its position between a declining renaissance and into the pre-enlightenment, a way to understand the world between different modalities of truth. If the *Wunderkammer* was a static object to collect the truth narratives of a world with a single power source, then I felt the Institute, trapped in a world too complex to singularly represent through curio, needed something dynamic and interrogative to reflect the speed of our era, so the rolling mesoscope followed.

Gold is added to signify the failure of modernism at a modern Institute, as the objects neither talk like perfect relational pieces, nor are they technically useful. Like a sort of mourning of the modern message, MIT is throwing away its equivalent of first edition books, because it does not recognize the original value of the production or its material truth — the gilding—a craft approach in a scientific Institute— provides a death

mask for the scientific object, marking it as a postmodern curio.

So, we are left with a interrogative reflective chamber, that reflects space, occupies space, and configures its narrative with its component objects. It is both a scopic object, a lens, a mirror, a selfie booth, a reflective piece, and hopefully more critical of the space around it than flattering. It is a Microscope with curio in it, and it is performance, its has investigated and occupied the ecology of truth production at the Institute.

ENTERING 66

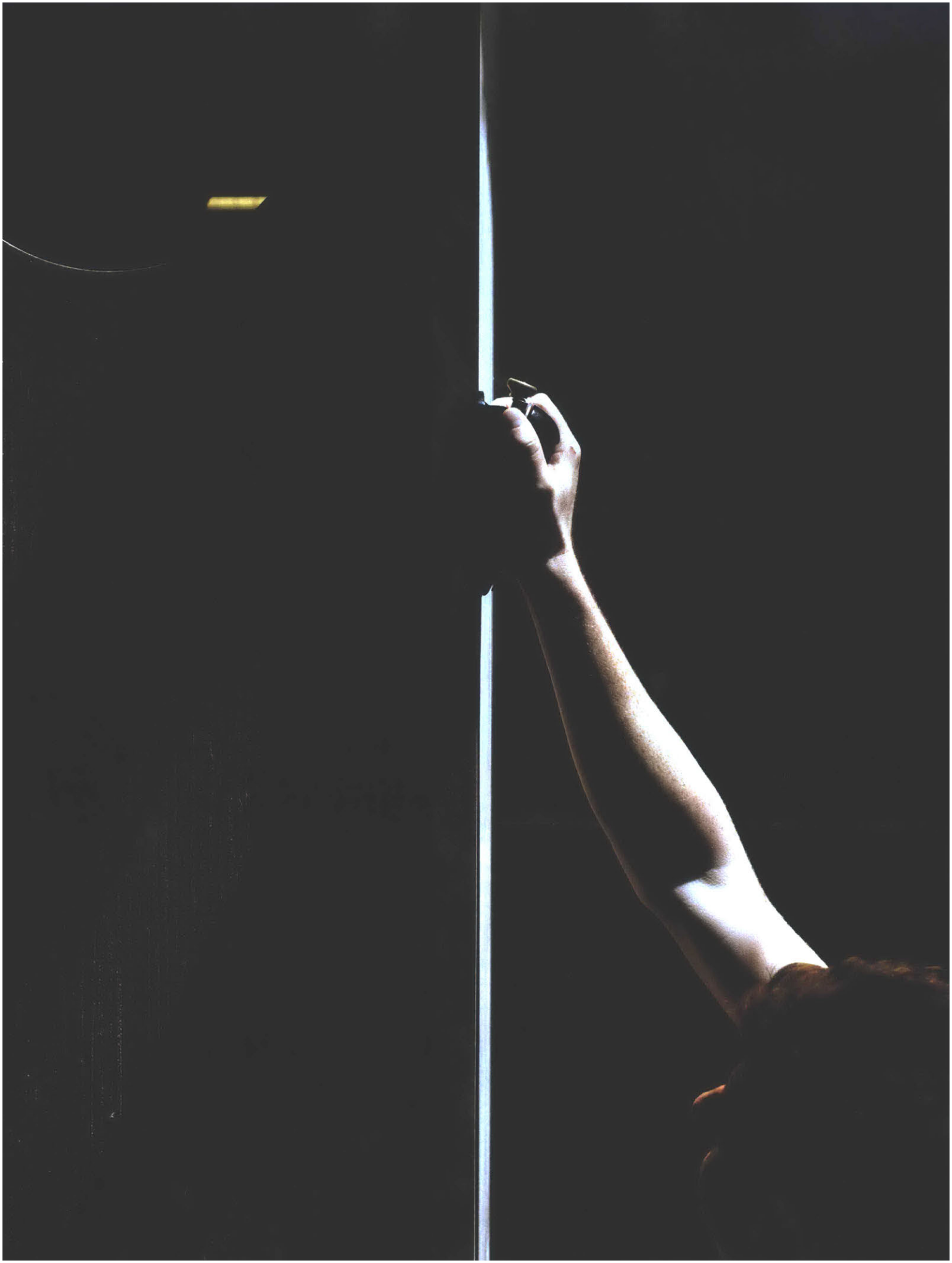
"One loves to find there a lie which, however, cannot impose too much; it is an error to which one yields voluntarily, because it lasts only as long as one wishes, and it is always possible to disabuse oneself. Man fears as much the truth as the lie: he wishes to he seduced but not deceived. It is on this understanding of his soul that the arts, those amiable and veracious liars, founded all their empire."

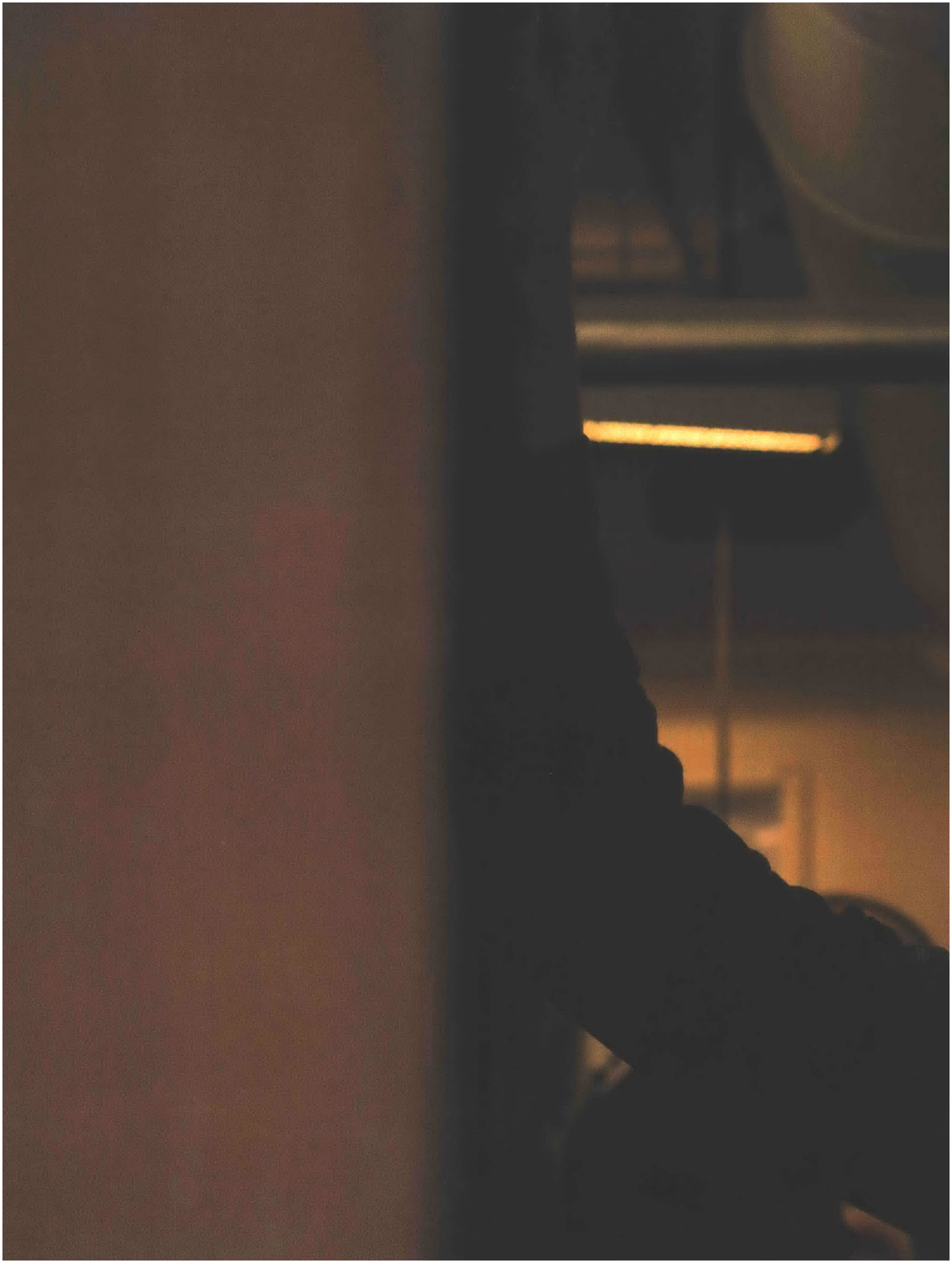
—Quatremère de Quincy

The Encyclopedia (Historical Dictionary) of Architecture (1832-33) trans(1985)

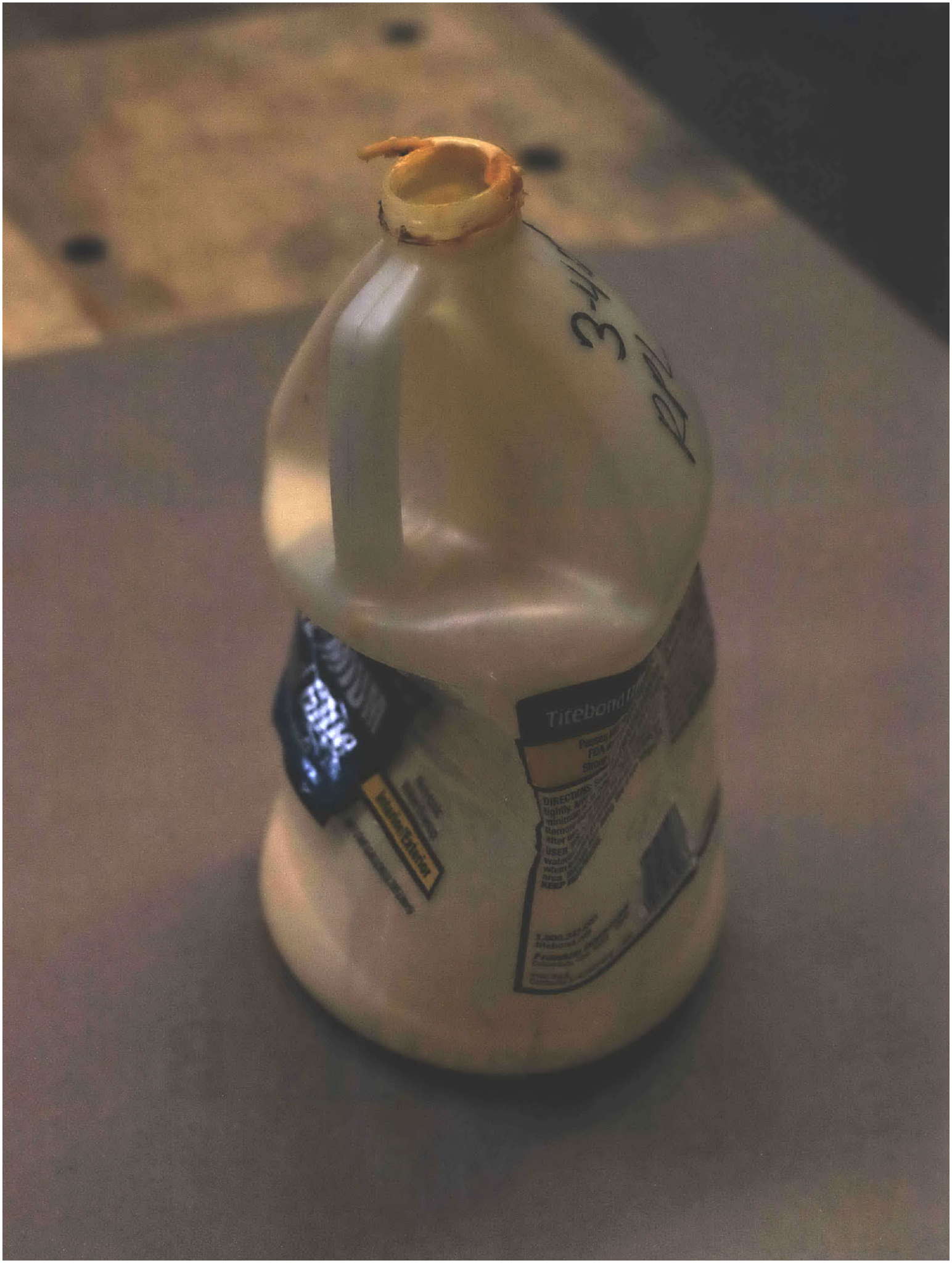
Appendix A

MAKING



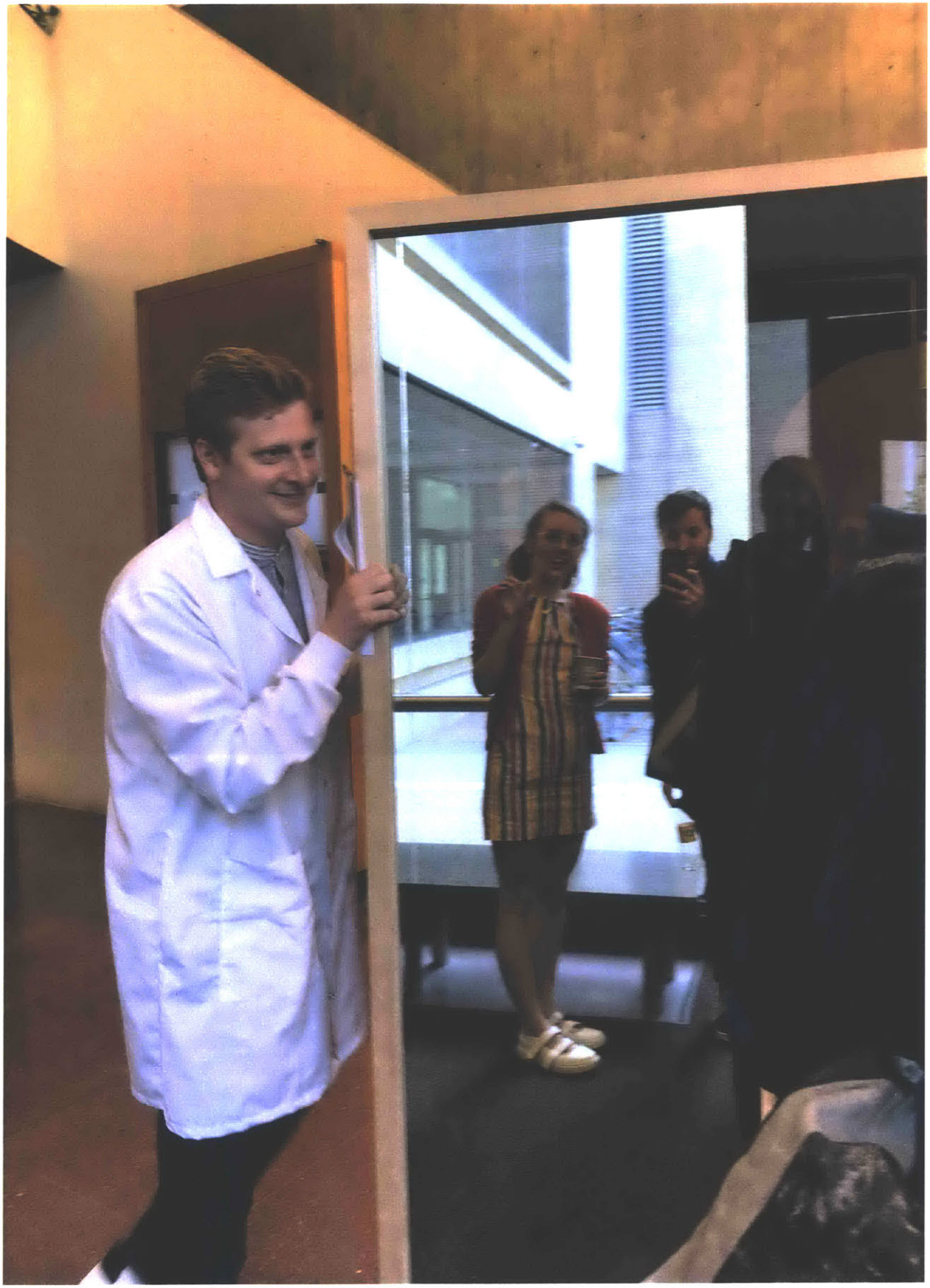


POWERMATIC



Appendix B

THESIS DEFENSE



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