

## BIRDS

On a warm fall day I climbed to a flat roof  
To see the gulls  
Which had nested there in spring,  
Protecting green speckled eggs  
In straw nests upon the gravel.

Loud hum of an air conditioner  
On the roof across the alley.  
Crab claws and bleached bones scattered about.  
A few white feathers quivered with the breeze.  
Two abandoned nests.  
No gulls.

Long grass swayed at the roof's edge.  
A white bird disappeared behind a building  
Reappeared at a distance over a large flat building as  
An airplane began its final approach on the horizon.

I turned away to see a seagull  
Perched upon a spattered parapet.  
Its eye was golden yellow  
One misplaced feather ruffled by the breeze.  
We exchanged a beady look  
Then it was gone,  
Sinking between the buildings.

## Joe Dahmen - Student Center

The brief in the fall of 2004  
was to design a new student  
center for MIT.

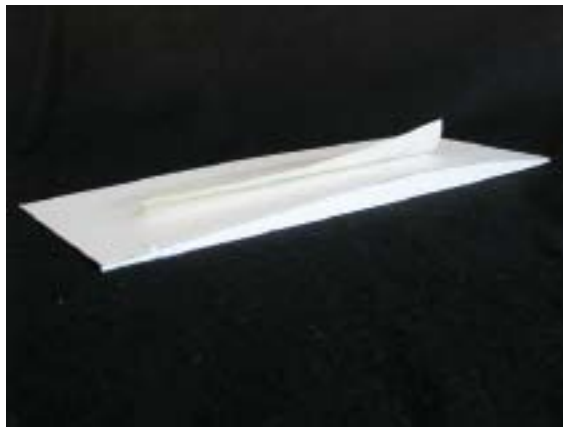
Students are like birds,  
coming from far away to stay  
awhile before leaving again.  
Thinking about the birds I  
wrote a poem.

The surprise of finding the  
seagulls had departed brought  
up issues of institutional  
memory. To be a student is  
to be in a state of constant  
transition, with nearly all  
evidence of one's presence  
wiped away at graduation.  
Against this unforgiving  
institutional backdrop, the  
clandestine activities of the  
students taking place late  
at night form a history which  
only appears to those who know  
where to look. What I hoped to  
investigate in the project is  
what the transient and elusive  
might mean in architectural  
terms.



Drawings thinking about a  
piece that would only appear  
if one were looking for  
it. The four lines might  
suggest a plane, or only  
four lines, depending on  
one's perspective. The space  
created is present or absent,  
depending on the state of the  
viewer.

The minimalist sculptor Fred Sandback uses yarn to create spaces of what he terms "no interiority." My installation consisted of string arranged in a stairwell. The impermanence of the string and the space it created by it, which only appears if one is looking from certain angles, was appealing.

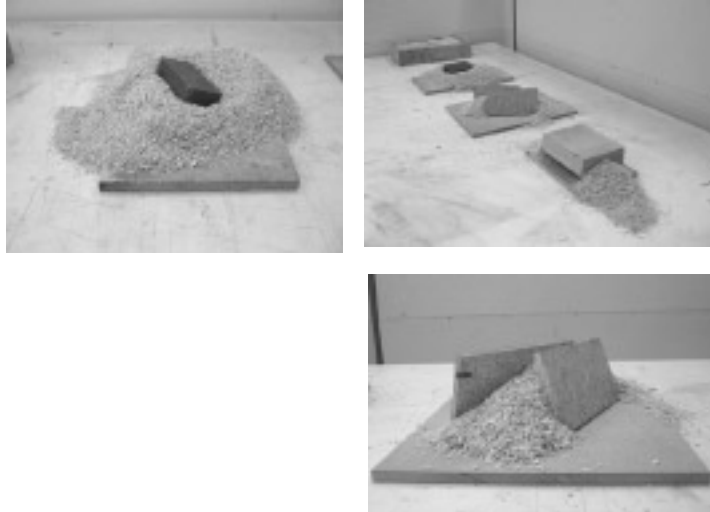


Working with thread to create space got me interested in the idea of minimalism in a structural sense. This model investigates the way shape develops stiffness in a material.



14 "Monitor" as Charles Evers, looking East toward "Main Street," Cambridge, about 1865.

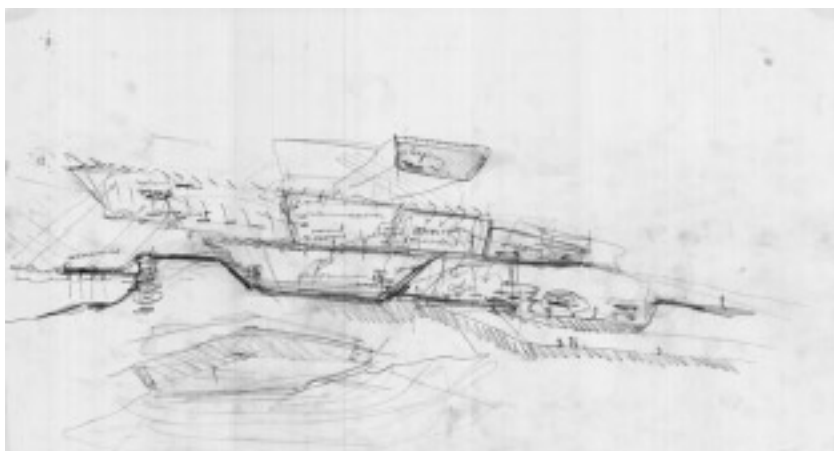
I turned to the site to try to relate these explorations to an actual building. I did some research on the history of MIT and discovered that the Institute is built on fill. Engineers recommended against building MIT in its present location because they were worried that it would sink before it reached achieved importance. The ground itself is impermanent, like the birds and the students.



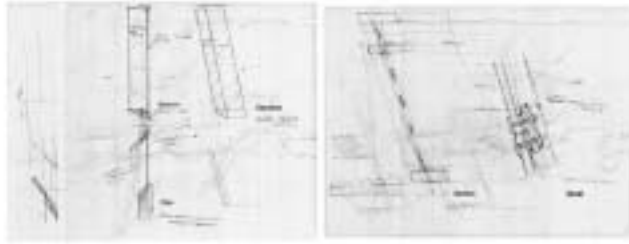
Models from sawdust investigate strategies to support a building on the loose soil characteristic of the site.



I became interested in the idea of balance. A building on shifting ground must be in one sense like a boat. These model explore balance.



Parallel to this exploration I was looking at other site conditions, the sun and the moon and the headlights from the traffic long memorial drive. I made some movies using these as the subject matter in order to think about how the building might interact with them.



Some sketches investigating the location of program relative to the various conditions found on the site, and construction details.



Scratch model of building



Scratch model of building



The final model of the student center, in which loosely programmed spaces are intended to change and be reconfigured in accordance with student's desires. The idea is to create a building which is receptive to student needs and like them, in a state of continual change.

