In September 1974 Alison Smithson published in the British journal Architectural Design the article “How to recognise and read mat-building”. It was a first attempt to conceptualise the notion of mat-building, a low rise and high density building type that circumscribed the concerns and interests of the Team10 during the last decade. The article adopted the format of an unfinished chronology of examples. A selection that had the Free University of Berlin as the starting point and axis of discussion. Work of the architects Candilis, Jossic and Woods from which it descended in a timeline until reaching the architectures of ancient times. Projects from different origins, times and scales were traced down, describing a kind of atlas or visual catalogue where the concept was loaded with great conceptual indemnity and the article with an enormous ambiguity. But, in which way if not could we present the notion of mat-building?

The architecture of the mat-building responded to a highly intervenient structure that was supposed to be able to grow in space in a potentially unlimited way and to be modified in the course of time, adapting to the multiple contingencies that would take place. This constant transformation of its state conferred the Smithsons’ understanding of architectural history as one of shared problems as well as their interest in the construction of architectural lineages. The Smithsons presented a concept that deliberately sought to get away from any attempt of typological classification. In it, not everything was exposed or explained, nor did it present an objective definition to hold on to and in the opposite direction it opened a vast field for personal interpretation. With it, the Smithsons invited us to sum up our own definition of the concept, continuing with the genealogy of projects that they started, expressing complex thought and continuous inquiry, which was latent in the notion of mat-building and in their own writing.

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In Spanish, the word trama means both grid and plot, but also weft. The writing inhabits the ambiguity suggested by the title weaving together three ideas that spring up from Alison Smithson’s seminal article “How to recognise and read mat-building.” The first section also discusses the ambiguity of the word “building” if considered as either a gerund or as a noun. That is, as a process or as its outcome. The author stresses his understanding of the latter as the most interesting and productive given, the interest would not be focused on the works but more likely on the mechanisms used in their production. The second section presents the Smithsons’ understanding of architectural history as one of shared problems as well as their interest in the construction of architectural lineages. With the construction of a series of genealogical trees they become the natural heirs of Modern Architecture’s former generations. Finally, in the third section, the author questions Alison Smithson’s text not only about what it says but also for what it fails to say and observes some significant absences in the examples given to illustrate the article. Furthermore, the author suggests possible ways of extending the list of examples towards the present, to three-dimensional growth forms and also the possibility of making a mat-building specific Spanish version or lineage. Alison Smithson’s inspiring and enigmatic writing has not become, as its title might have suggested, a kind of field guide to help identify mat-building but, instead, a fertile seed for its generation. Perhaps these notes might encourage some readers to pull these threads and weave them together with the warp of time.