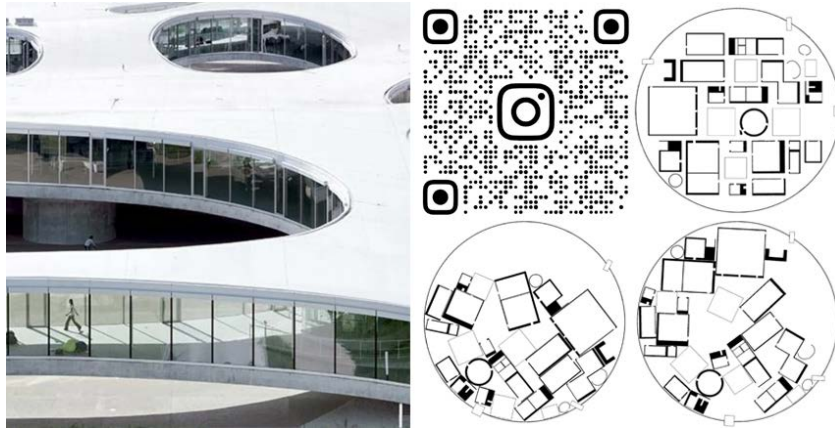


ARC2014: Design Studio 4 – Comprehensive Building Studio Project
Winter 2026

Instructor: Steven Fong
Title: The Program(ed) Mat



The planimetric derived mat or field is a recurring architectural speculation, appearing often as an interactive methodology and sometimes as a physical artifact. In her 1974 text “How to Recognise (sic) and Read Mat-Building”, Alison Smithson attempted to establish a genealogy, summarized by critic Tim Hyde as: “a horizontal weave of programmatic and circulatory elements, a play of solids and voids stabilized within a legible geometric order...”.

Smithson cited Candilis Josic Woods’ Free University Berlin as the penultimate achievement of her generation’s projection of these ideas. However, with its abrasive Corten cladding and nightmarish wayfinding, the publicly reviled building was more a denouement for 20th century mat-building than an exemplar.

Now decades later, several recent buildings suggest a resurgence of interest in aspects of the mat. Examples include SANAA’s Rolex Centre and Kanagawa Museum; OMA’s Milstein Hall at Cornell and McCormick Centre at IIT; HdM’s Museo Blau. Writing in 2001, Stan Allen identified a cultural zeitgeist manifested in several creative disciplines and seemingly foretelling these buildings. Allen said, “From non-objective painting to serial music, from structural linguistics to minimalist sculpture, **modernity has directed its gaze away from the thing itself and towards its constitutive relationships and its position in a contextual field.**”

This studio will engage these themes and explore the potential of this new generation of mat building, not as a prescription for physical form, but instead as a series of consciously manipulated processes in the service of an architectural exploration of a community centre.

