• Paper / Proposal Title:
The transition between the formal and the informal. Discussing architecture as a political activity.

• Format:
Written paper

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• Abstract (300 words):
Since the 2008 global crisis, after finally overcoming decades of obsession with its formal and material aspects, we have witnessed an apparently fundamental change in the hegemonic discourse of architecture. A renewed interest in the social and political aspects of the built environment has shifted the discipline towards contents traditionally considered part of the social sciences. In this paper I will analyze how, echoing the progressive culture of the late sixties and early seventies, the expressions of this new paradigm have mostly concentrated on two complementary approaches. On one hand, on designing alternative urban practices characterized by the informal, low-cost, and usually temporary occupation of public space, or what has been commonly labeled as DIY urbanism. On the other hand, on studying and validating the architectural techniques used by the working classes on the construction of slums in the metropolis of the third world.
Both of these approaches have received considerable attention, becoming part of the mainstream discourse on architecture during recent years. From being culturally closer to anti-establishment activism, DIY urbanism has turned into a primarily realistic strategy praised by developers and planning authorities for its economic efficiency. From being a political provocation and a symbol of economic inequality, the image of third world slums has become ubiquitous in design biennales and exhibitions.

In both of these parallel approaches, the need to face the complexities of the present requires a fundamental reorganization of the kind of knowledge needed to practice architecture. In order to work towards social justice and align his activity in a political way, the architect needs to become an activist and an anthropologist. Can these new skills with the understanding of space as a spectacle, and the continuous need to surprise? Has the transition from the informal to the informal been really beneficial?

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

David Franco is an architect who has performed both as practitioner and academic achieving international recognition in both fields. He holds a PhD and a MArch from the Universidad Politecnica de Madrid. He was appointed Associate Professor on Architectural Design at the Escuela Politecnica Superior USPCEU of Madrid in 2006, becoming in 2010 Director of the Architecture Thesis Program of the same University. In 2013 he moves to the US after being appointed as tenure-track Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Idaho. In 2014 he becomes tenure-track Assistant Professor of Design, History and Theory of Architecture at Clemson University.

His work has been awarded more than 16 prizes on International Architecture competitions such as Europan 6 and 7. He has been nominated for the prestigious Iakov Chernikov prize of contemporary architecture from the ICIF Foundation in Moscow. Recognized international magazines, books and peer-reviewed journals, such as A10 A+T VLC Arquitectos Europan Generations, Arkitektur or Bauwelt, among others, have published his projects and articles. His work has been displayed on exhibitions, such as the 10th Venice Biennale, or the 2nd Architecture, Art & Landscape Biennial of the Canary Islands.