In 1926, Walter Gropius presented a diagram of housing densities that calculated the distance between buildings based on a ratio of their height, so that each block of houses received an appropriate amount of light. Shortly after, in 1931, Adams, Lewis and Orton argued that the beauty of Manhattan’s skyline was due to the ‘mass effect’: a set of buildings with different heights, shapes and facades, placed close to each other (Koolhaas, 1994). While the first image insists on the value of rationality, the second argues in favor of a lack of rules. One stands in favor of order while the other in favor of anarchy. Both express the debate between planning and freedom. Architecture has usually been closer to the first, since both its tools (design and preview) and its goal (the definition of an order) make it hard for its products to encompass the unpredictability of the second. In fact, if spontaneity has come to be discussed in architecture, it has been because someone has found it outside of it, like when Rudofsky surveyed vernacular constructions or when Turner offered the Peruvian slums as a model. However, freedom is much more than a debate represented through architectural images. Freedom is not an aesthetic choice. It is a political issue.

In such terms, speaking of freedom would force us to position ourselves between ends: between a laissez-faire where, in the name of individual freedom, everyone does whatever they want, and a totalitarianism where individual freedom is lost in favor of a greater cause. Both ends have dark areas. The laissez-faire that allowed Manhattan’s skyline has also enabled a suburban process that has collapsed metropolises and economies. But also, when it has been brought to reality in large housing complexes, the rationality of Gropius’ diagram has generated alienation at an urban scale. Given the unfeasibility of both extremes, the obvious solution would be the ‘right balance.’ That politically correct standpoint – clear, for example, in the arguments of the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale called “Freespace” – is precisely what this issue of ARQ intends to avoid.

Thus, in this edition, we review three national pavilions that examined the naive tone with which the 2018 Venice Biennale addressed the topic of freedom: “Work, Body, Leisure” (Netherlands), “Prison to Prison” (Uruguay), and “Stadium” (Chile). But we do not stop there. We also review other sides of the problem. In the interview, Felicity D. Scott warns about the ambivalence of the concept of freedom. Forensic Architecture uses architectural tools to uncover the truth in cases where freedoms are breached. Borja Ganzabal argues that current corporate interiors capitalize on the illusion of their employees’ freedom. Torrent, Faúndez and Ruiz introduce a case where architecture allowed degrees of freedom at different scales. Brittany Utting examines the alleged freedom of choice offered by the real estate...
catalog. Errázuriz, Sepúlveda and Bravo observe how users freely intervene a house. Urrutia and Cáceres study degrees of freedom in examples of cohousing. Rodrigo Valenzuela presents a house where users have the freedom to define the program. Mendes da Rocha and MMBB show how to modify an existing structure to achieve maximum programmatic freedom. Finally, the debate analyzes the basis of current discussion on liberalism, in a context that increasingly bounds people’s freedoms while promoting absolute freedom for capital. Here, Squella describes liberalism as a tree with three trunks (political, ethical and economic) while Sierra seeks to present the coordinates that synthesize its diversity.

In the lectures that Michel Foucault gave at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1979, however, the validity of this diversity is questioned. Analyzing the origins of neoliberalism in Germany after the Second World War and seeking to differentiate it from Milton Friedman’s ‘anarchic-liberalism’ (the neoliberal variant that arrived in Chile), Foucault observes that there is no direct connection between classical liberalism and 20th-century neoliberalism. In the latter, freedom is neither the guiding principle nor the ideal to be achieved through a political, economic or ethical system; rather, it is the argument used to transform an economic agenda into a form of governmentality – that is, to exercise power from the State. Thus, since this model seeks to establish an economic principle – competition – as the core of social life, the French philosopher indicates that: “Neoliberalism should not, therefore, be identified with laissez-faire, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention” (Foucault, 2010:132). This not only explains the Chilean paradox – where a dictatorship established a model aiming at economic ‘freedom’ – but also leads to a better understanding that laissez-faire and totalitarianism are not two opposite ends. Hence, there is no ‘right balance’ between both, because between the two sides of the same coin there is no possible space.

Freedom, then, would not be a space between anarchy and planning, nor an ideal that defines society’s direction. Rather it seems to be a practice of resistance against conventions that, like any practice, must be permanently redefining its meaning. It is to this redefinition that this issue of ARQ aims to contribute, even if it comes from architecture – a discipline so fond of cherishing restrictions. ARQ

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