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HEINRICH TESSENOW

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Tessenow was a German architect born in 1876, belonging to the same generation as Adolf Loos.

His 19th century urban context was one of a rapidly growing proletariat due to the industrial revolution. This influx of workers created typologies of extremely market driven architecture, formed by an urban-plan driven by maximizing density while staying within precise fire-safety constraints. The housing type that was widely produced in Berlin at the time, the “mitskaserne”, or rental barracks, was a courtyard typology based on fire vehicles’ turning circles. The substandard living conditions of the working class in Berlin, the largest tenement city in the world, was the context for which Tessenow sought to design an alternative.

Tessenow’s proposals for worker’s housing and his ideas for alternatives were rooted in the rural German cottage houses. With Schinkel’s work and Goethe’s garden house as precedents, he sought ways of connecting architecture with landscape, proposing working class housing in more rural environments. His work has a clean aesthetic, one purged of ornament or decoration but was rather focused on materiality, drawing on the discourse of John Ruskin. He was particularly interested in construction methods, actually patenting his own process of erecting walls. This sensibility to the construction process is evident in the way that he rendered his projects.

It is said that Tessenow often started his projects from the interior. He made very precise vignettes of interior spaces in thin pen lines. With consistent line weights, he rendered elements important in a different way than his contemporaries. He drew particular importance on objects that conveyed the domesticity of the workers. His drawings convey, coziness, familiarity, framing a habitable space. The materiality of his projects became the ornament as well as the device which gives depth in his interiors renderings. For example, a wallpaper is rendered as a hatch of geometrical crosses which gives spatiality to the room, defining the ceiling height. This method often erased hard lines. The wallpaper does not make the corners of the room, but they are implied through the perspective of the hatch. His use of a consistent line weight across the same drawing requires that the density of lines, and therefore detail of the material itself, is the device that gives focal attention. He even rendered trees with such specificity as to convey the actual type of tree he intended. His attention to the interior and his emphasis on the particularities of everyday life emphasized by his method of representation taking a reduced interior and giving it qualities.

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Lecture by Atelier Kempe Thill, accessed November 3rd 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obxV0JGh\_RQ&index=1&list=PLqiB0PaPzAvmXMNBZqPr3bA1wxWn972KJ

“Heinrich Tessenow, Study of a House over a Lake, 1903”, Arquitectura en Dibuixos Exemplars, Francisco Martínez Mindeguía, accessed November 3rd, 2017, <http://etsavega.net/dibex/Tessenow-lago-e.htm>.