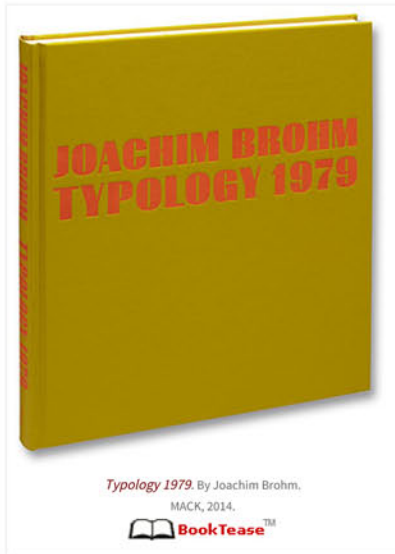


THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2014

## Book Review: Typology 1979



### Typology 1979 Reviewed by Colin Pantall

*Typology 1979*

Photographs by Joachim Brohm

MACK, 2014. 98 pp., 35 color illustrations, 9½x10¼".

I flicked open my English newspaper today and landed on a story about gardening. There was a picture of Taylor Swift and Karlie Kloss tending a window box, an example of how great and trendy gardening has become amongst the wealthy young. In the UK, gardening is listed fifth in a list of top activities for the 25-35 age group and is an extension of a food culture where the sourcing of produce adds mystique and value to what you eat.

Excuse me while I reach for my sick bag, but the marketing of gardening as a temporary add-on to a boho urban lifestyle is something that will only end

in the commodification of something that was once taken for granted. Go back a few decades and in Europe at least the story was different; the urban garden plot was part of the reforming movement to provide both exercise and fresh food for the urban poor. You found allotments in Austria, the Netherlands, Britain and Germany, especially in the most industrial corners such as the Ruhr Valley.



*Typology 1979*. By Joachim Brohm. MACK, 2014.

These allotments were not so much marginal land as politicised land, especially in places like the aforementioned Ruhr Valley of Germany, an area that in 1979 was an industrial wasteland of dying industries. The winding towers of the coal mines, the blast furnaces of the steel works and the cooling towers of the region's industrial plants were falling into disuse and being marked for demolition.

Joachim Brohm was a 24-year-old student in this environment, a world where heavy industry was in decay and the repurposing of the area's slagheaps into grass-covered parks and forested glades was still in its infancy.

Falling between the two extremes of the industrial landscape and the tamed park environment was another category of land use; the allotment. Allotments were introduced in Germany thanks to the efforts of Moritz Schreiber, a doctor who believed it was important for the urban poor to be able to benefit from fresh fruit and vegetables.



*Typology 1979*. By Joachim Brohm. MACK, 2014.

But in 1979, many of the allotments of the Ruhr Valley had gone beyond being simply producers of home grown vegetables. Instead they had become holiday homes, chicken runs and playgrounds. These allotments had brick houses and concrete paths. They had wooden verandas, TV aerials and lace curtains. The original reforming landscapes of the 19th century allotments had become something altogether different.

These allotments are the subject of Joachim Brohm's *Typology 1979*, a series of pictures of the plots shot in the grey of winter. They make for fascinating viewing with no two plots the same. The most picturesque have become miniaturised versions of suburban homes complete with a front lawn and separate wings, a model version of the home the allotment leaseholder would like to live in. Others have a holiday feel about them; these are the country cottages in the city, gingerbread houses with window boxes and wood panelling.



*Typology 1979*. By Joachim Brohm. MACK, 2014.

These are plots where the fruit and vegetables have become secondary. Here all the work has gone on creating a second home where the leaseholders can relax or escape to. The plots where the soil is the main focus tend to be more ramshackle affairs, a shed cobbled together out of spare boards of plywood, the dark soil of the allotment dark and clingy in the winter damp, or an allotment filled with scraps of wood and an old sofa, the bottom left corner of the shot showing newly dug turf, possibly signifying that the plot has just been taken over.

Unlike the Bechers (who photographed the more monumental structures of the Ruhr Valley), Brohm focusses on a human scale, picking up traces of narratives that dip in and out of his pictures. Shooting the pictures in Winter strips them of the floral aspects of the allotments; all we can see are the traces of a few onions and the stripped down branches of a rose bush or two. So the landscape and its

original purpose is further marginalised by the season (as well as by its location and use).



I'm looking for a big ending to summarise how *Typology 1979* does something splendid and grand that illustrates what it means to live in a city and go into an allotment and build a house and grow some food. But I'm not sure that *Typology 1979* can be summarised in that way; I'm not sure that it needs to be. *Typology 1979* is a simple series of pictures in which similarity and difference come to the fore through images that have gained currency with time and will continue to do so.—COLIN PANTALL

#### Purchase Book

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