

The paradigmatic shift of what has been identified as the *Spatial Turn* has spawned a reconsideration of different visual and textual representations of space, more specifically but not limited to urban space and the metropolis. As language acts as a conduit for the experience and interpretation of space, fictional and factual accounts of cities provide an opportunity to map a web of peripatetic, phenomenological and optical experiences — varying in their historical, social, material and geopolitical conditions. Within a multidimensional framework, space is viewed as a dynamic, flexible actor playing a crucial role in the creation of social life.

In *Habiter le jour*, Nadim Asfar develops a visual language to capture the textures, lines and bodies of contemporary Beirut from his home and studio overlooking a dynamic crossing in the city. In a series of photographs taken over several years by the French-Lebanese artist, parked cars, neighbourhood balconies and passersby are framed and fixed from three stories up. As a photographer and filmmaker, Asfar's mastery of both still and moving image come across through the way the photographs seem to be suspended between the two, akin to the cinematic still — there is an arresting sense of dynamism, of a part of a greater whole. The subtlety with which quotidian details of these minimal street scenes are captured allow the project to resist the sterile aesthetics of surveillance or typology. Despite the fact that the bird's eye view of anonymous pedestrians do not allow for the default practice facial recognition, they come to serve as intimate portraits through a different kind of presence: through the most minute of gestures or the shifting of their weight and gait; the relationship they have with their own shadow.

In Michel de Certeau's considerations of the city in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he positions the walker as an agent who is constantly transforming spatial signifiers or manipulating the very foundations of spatial organization, an idea founded on the conception of space as a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties. Pedestrian movement, rather than merely producing a graphic trail, has the ability to occupy a space of enunciation, it is an activity which structures determining conditions of the city and of its social life. Asfar's photographs serve as an evocative manifestation of this principle, as we image the paths each pedestrian carves through the city over time continually make and unmake the space around them.

In 2018, the photographs were published in an eponymous book by Kaph books with text by Hisham Awad and the artist himself, which allow the viewer to situate Asfar within the constellation of stolen glances that *Habiter le jour* offers. Through writing, we come to understand the ritual of his sustained engagement with the street below and his dance with the blistering mid-day sun. We become privy to his consideration of photography as an embodied practice, as a constant negotiation between body, tool and place. He claims:

Writing and photographing are acts of disappearing, and preserving oneself in the strength of words or images. Perhaps I was not only looking to inhabit, but also to become a place, like the trees are a place. As opposed to contemplation, here one deals with pure action: the trees that grow, the clouds that pass by, the rivers, which move in a profound and powerful unconsciousness.

In the photographs themselves, there are limited visual cues to give a sense of place aside from the architectural signifiers of surrounding apartments -- figures move towards and away from undisclosed locations. Instead, these images ask us to tune our senses to the other more latent or subdued layers that come to form public space in all its fluctuations. In looking at the body of work as a whole, a rhythm emerges through the artist's intuitive choice of framing and composition that create new poetic possibilities in imagining urban space and its inhabitants.