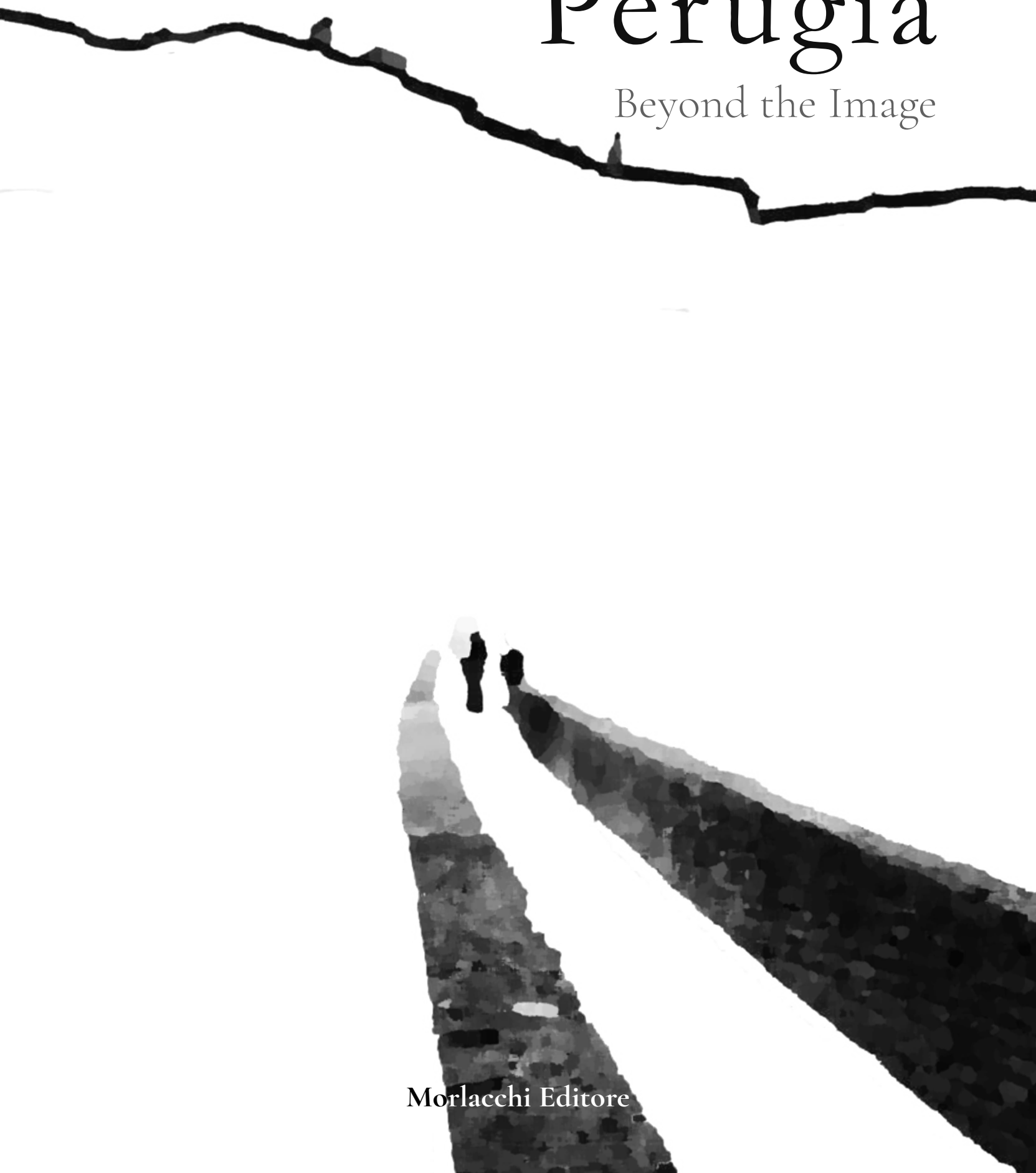


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Perugia

Beyond the Image

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*You don't make a photograph just with a camera.
You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen,
the books you have read,
the music you have heard,
the people you have loved.*

Ansel Adams

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BREATHING



It's early.
Everything
seems to be asleep.

Or perhaps it's late.

Footsteps echo on the sidewalk, worn by time and by countless steps seeking out monuments, streets and Jazz melodies in the air. Footsteps that speak the dialect of the city, of other cities, or foreign languages.

The man wanders, as if lost in the middle of a desert without any landmarks to guide him.

But this is his city. It has been forever. He shouldn't be feeling this way. Yet he's overcome the sensation of being elsewhere. He's distracted by a sigh, a breath of life carried by the soft wind. "*What was that?*"

He turns around: the archway's dark outline seems to swallow him up. Looking through the gateway of *Porta Santa Susanna*, the man remains stock still, observing the uphill street. He still feels a breath coming from somewhere. A shiver runs down his spine, a warning.

Curiosity overcomes apprehension.

Squaring his shoulders he steps towards the archway and into *Via della Sposa*. The silence is deafening but ancient echoes evoke long-gone voices coming from artisan workshops in the splendid street.

He imagines merchants and artisans peering out of their storefronts dressed in their robes of days gone by, while on the upper floors women and men converse across the street from their windows.

The street is empty but for one other person strolling, who doesn't seem to notice the presence of the man.

He moves on.

"The sigh I just heard is coming from another direction..." he thinks as he reaches the summit of the street, panting.

From there he admires *Porta Trasimena*, a majestic gateway to the heart of the city.

The staircase at his feet climbs upward and passes under the city gate: it looks like a rolled-out carpet, inviting him across the

threshold. He climbs up the low stairs one by one, measuring his steps as if for the first time, carefully noticing all the details. Under the archway he stops, uncertain.

He wonders if he's dreaming it all.

He hears the breathing again, louder and closer than before.

His eyes focus on *Via del Poggio* in front of him: stones, steps, trees, as if a masterful painter has fused them all together.

"Perhaps the noise is coming from here..."

But among the ancient buildings all is deserted. Just one doorway has been left open and the man swiftly enters.

The staircase inside is narrow, a tight labyrinth leading upwards. A tiny window frames the façade of the *Oratorio di San Bernardino*, a small gem nestled on the edge of the *San Francesco al Prato* complex.

Abruptly the man turns around: there's the breathing again, sounding agitated. He's taken the wrong direction...

He goes back down the stairs and out again.

His upturned eyes follow the contours of the *Torre degli Sciri* towering above him...

A thought flashes in his mind, although it may not be the right time.

But the entryway to the tower is open and a white-haired man peers out; he's very old.

He narrows his tired eyes and sizes up the visitor, a smile breaking out on his face as he nods, understanding: there's a bond between them...

«Good day» says the bent-over old man.

«Good day. Are you the custodian?»

«No, but I try to make myself useful by taking care of things a bit. There's not much more to do, for someone like me who has almost finished their time here...»

The breathing sound comes back now very strongly, seemingly originating from inside. The old man doesn't notice anything but the visitor feels the urgency rising: «May I go up?»

A wrinkled hand pensively rubbing his chin, he nods with an enigmatic smile: «Alright. You're getting a unique opportunity. These are not visiting hours but I feel obliged to give you this chance...»

Walking on, the visitor finds himself alone, reflecting on the old man's strange words and the look on his face...

Immersed in silence he turns his eyes upwards and sees the stairs spiral up endlessly.

The stone walls are oppressive and seem to close in, as if waiting to crush and seal him in a tomb. Yet he feels as if this place is... alive!

Excitement urges him up the unending sets of stairs.

Until he stops abruptly, panting.

He feels something new and unsettling: not only the breathing but also a rhythmic sound, a... beating?

“*What's happening to me?*” he thinks as beads of sweat break out on his forehead.

The sweating is abundant because of the climb. But also because of his growing anxiety. He sets off again.

Finally he reaches the summit: the view is breathtaking.

He slowly turns around and takes in the landscape, mouth half-open, until something freezes him in his tracks.

It's a voice whispering: «*Finally. But now it's time to take a very good look...*»

The man is alone, so the voice can only be inside his head: it's frightening to think he's gone crazy but he can't think of any other reason for all of this.

Nonetheless he follows the advice. For seemingly endless minutes he looks out in every direction over rooftops, time-worn shutters, monuments and bell towers. Although there's nothing he's never seen before.

Ready to head back, his gaze freezes over the streetscape and he almost jumps: the streets seem to be slowly heaving up and down, as if the earth were breathing! The man looks out again

and this time he observes differently: the small intersecting streets look like veins in a human body, sprawled over the city. And, at the centre of it all is *Via dei Priori*, the main artery nourishing the heart of the city: it resolutely climbs straight up, hidden by the shadows of the buildings, preserving the innumerable voices and sounds of laughter that over the centuries have penetrated into the paving stones.

The breathing and beating sounds which had seemed unreal are now explainable, albeit incredible: the places where the man had previously walked so many times absent-mindedly, overwhelmed by his thoughts and by the troubles of daily life, are now "calling out" to him; this very city of his, which so often he had seen unmindfully, is now "speaking" to him.

A vague meaning is beginning to take shape in his mind...

He rushes down the stairs towards the tower exit: time is running out...