



Landscape and its possible “new” relevance: ethics and some forgotten narratives on human mobility

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Abstract. This article aims to provide a reinterpretation of the concept of landscape and to investigate, in some respects, its possible “new” relevance. More specifically, the analysis of “new” theoretical resources of landscape – “new” as they are yet to be explored – is linked here to an alternative interpretation of some neglected pathways of its history. I argue that the possible “new” relevance of landscape also lies in some forgotten ethical narratives on mobility that it has inherited from its chorographic roots, which I outline by re-reading some ancient and 16th-century sources. In fact, I try to show that, by virtue of this chorographic legacy, landscape may represent today a critical and destabilizing perspective, able to undermine the striated and hegemonic certainties of modern thought through the lens of human mobility and its association with an ethical conception of happiness. The final section of the article is dedicated to the theoretical contributions that the chorographic side of landscape can provide to some contemporary reflections on mobility and to geographical ideas of ethics. These theoretical contributions are regarded as an integral part of the possible “new” relevance of landscape.

1 Introduction

This article aims to provide a reinterpretation of the concept of landscape and to investigate, in some respects, its possible “new” relevance. Is landscape still fundamental to geographical thought? If it is, why? At the beginning of the 2000s, within international academic debates, Don Mitchell (2003:789) argued that “the vibrant theoretical ferment of landscape studies that marked the late 1980s and 1990s” had “begun to wane” while emphasizing the necessity of reorientating these studies. More recently, landscape has also been defined as “a concept some cultural geographers today might find worn out” (della Dora, 2021:404). Some reasons for this possible loss of interest lie in the fact that “landscape has of course historically been very much an areal and topographical term, and has long been affiliated with precisely the conceptions of space, measure, distance, surface, and perspective”; hence, “it seems difficult to accommodate landscape” within “current vitalist, relational, and topological geographies” (Rose and Wylie, 2006:476). Furthermore, due to its connection with perspective and cartographic space, this conception of landscape has been considered one of the privileged forms of the modern Western

gaze and its pretension of universalism, i.e. of epistemic – as well as political and economic – imperialism (Henderson, 2003; Mitchell, 2002). In some recent international debates, in fact, the modern idea of landscape has been regarded as an “aesthetic practice” that was part of “the colonial ways of seeing space, nature, and territory” (Davies, 2021:627–629), as a tool for colonial hegemonies (Brayshay and Cleary, 2002; Dang, 2021; Nelson, 2017; Wright, 2020).

On the other hand, over the last two decades landscape studies have been reorientated through the lens of post-phenomenological and non-representational approaches (Rose, 2002; Rose and Wylie, 2006; Waterton, 2013; Wylie, 2002, 2007), also reinterpreting the concept of landscape in the light of its relationship with those of movement and/or mobility (Cresswell, 2003; Fox et al., 2022; Loo and Bunnell, 2018; Lorimer, 2006; Merriman, 2006; Merriman et al., 2008; Nordström, 2023; Wylie, 2005)¹. Another of the most recent directions concerning the reorientation of landscape studies consists of the exploration of “(landscape’s) anti-

¹ See also della Dora (2009) on the conceptualization of “landscape as a text”, to the extent that it has been “increasingly challenged” by phenomenological and non-representational theories.

capitalist and anticolonial possibilities” Hawkins, 2023:7; compare Dang, 2021; Davies, 2021; Wright, 2020).

In this paper, I shall investigate, in some respects, the possible “new” relevance of landscape by emphasizing, once more, its connection with the concept of movement and human mobility, but from a historical perspective. More specifically, the analysis of “new” theoretical resources of landscape – “new” as they are yet to be explored – is linked here to an alternative interpretation of some neglected pathways of its history. In what follows I argue that, from a historical point of view, landscape can be associated with human mobility only by virtue of the ethical resources it involves and has inherited from its chorographic roots. In fact, these ethical resources date back to the ancient concept of *choralchoros* and its legacy to the early modern ideas and meanings of landscape.

I outline this legacy by reinterpreting some early modern sources – especially 16th-century sources – as well as some ancient texts, both geographical and philosophical, concerning the idea of *chora* and chorography. The chorographic roots of landscape addressed in this paper are linked to the idea of *chora* and chorography that specifically arises from the sources here investigated. Such a connection is reconstructed through an alternative analysis of the two main meanings of landscape: “representation/image (of a tract of land)” and “region/tract of land” (its main meanings at least from a historical perspective). This analysis is alternative to the extent that it aims to underline the destabilizing, though neglected or forgotten, role which landscape – rather, its chorographic side – has played in the history of modern geographical thought by virtue of the ethical legacy of *chora*, as this legacy may be regarded as an integral part of both meanings of landscape (Sect. 2).

The present article seeks to show that the possible “new” relevance of landscape – “new” also to the extent that it derives from a new interpretation of some moments of its history – lies, in some respects, in the ancient ethical narratives that landscape has inherited from its chorographic roots – regarded here as narratives on migration. This chorographic legacy can give landscape “new” relevance since it allows one to consider landscape a critical and destabilizing perspective, able to undermine the “striated” and hegemonic certainties of modern thought through the lens of human mobility and its association with an ancient conception of happiness (Sect. 3). I argue that this chorographic side, by virtue of its destabilizing role, can contribute today, in some way and from a historical perspective, to exploring the counter-hegemonic potential of landscape (Sect. 4).

The final section of the paper is also dedicated to the theoretical contributions that the chorographic root of landscape can provide to some contemporary reflections on mobility and provide to geographical ideas of ethics. These theoretical contributions, i.e. suggestions, are regarded as an integral part of the possible “new” relevance of landscape.

My methodological choices concerning the historical-geographical investigations have been the following: (a) the reinterpretation of the ancient sources taken into consideration, such as Strabo, has been grounded on a preliminary re-translation – from ancient Greek to English – of the cited passages; (b) I have provided my interpretation of 16th-century chorography and its link to landscape by opening some unknown archives including the manuscripts of early modern Italian chorographers (see, for instance, notes 4 and 5); (c) my historical investigations have also taken into consideration ethics in geographic research. In Sect. 4, in fact, I also try to explain why exploring the chorographic roots of landscape may represent an ethical option in doing research in the field of histories and philosophies of geography.

As regards my reflections on the contemporary relevance of landscape, I have engaged with some recent geographical debates, mainly in English, which have focused on landscape, on human mobility/mobilities, on the relationship between geography and ethics, or rather, with the pathways of these debates that, in my view, are closely associated with the issues addressed here.

2 The forgotten historical connection between landscape, mobility, and ethics

2.1 Action as movement

In order to shed light on the ethical resources which landscape involves, arising from some neglected moments of its history, it is sufficient to start from one of the most disputed definitions of landscape: the definition provided by the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 20 October 2000) (Olwig and Mitchell, 2007; Jones and Stenseke, 2011). Twenty-three years have passed since the adoption of this convention, according to which “‘landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. This paper focuses just on one of the main concepts here included, i.e. “action”. I do not believe that everything has already been said about the relationship between land and human action. There is something more to say, connected with the ethical roots of the concept of action. In fact, this article seeks to show that one of the most ancient meanings of action can be at the base, in some respects, of the relevance of the landscape concept in some current geographical debates, and that one of the most ancient links between action and land also represents an original perspective on human mobility.

It is necessary to go back to the relationship which the geographer Strabo outlined, in the very first years of the common era, between human action and his idea of *oecumene*² (the inhabited earth). According to Strabo, “the *chora* (ground) of our actions is the land and sea we dwell

²Compare Berque (1996, 2009) on the idea of *oecumene* as an ethical relationship between humans and the earth. Compare

in” and “what we properly call oecumene” is “the totality of this *chora*” (Strabo, *Geography* I, 1, 16, my translation). Hence, the nature of *chora* defines the nature of the inhabited earth. In this case I chose to render *chora* as ground – as it is the ground of human actions – but any translation cannot embrace the plurality and richness of its meanings. Anyhow, Strabo’s text provides at least one certainty: that geographical *chora* can be conceived only in association with human actions. Exactly the notion of action leads straight to the core of his conception of geography. Strabo argues that geography is philosophical thought, precisely practical thought, consisting of both ethics and politics. As such, geography is addressed to a human being “of action”, “who cares about happiness” (*Geography* I, 1, 1/23). It is not difficult to grasp what Strabo intends by action (*praxis*) and happiness, because these two concepts are at the base of an idea of ethics that goes back exactly to his first source concerning practical thought, which is Aristotle. For the Stagirite, happiness – i.e. the end of practical science – is the highest human good and has to be reached through action. Hence, practical science, including both ethics and politics, is a science focused on action. Aristotle provides a fundamental definition of action which has been neglected or forgotten: action is motion (*Eudemian Ethics* 1220b). By arguing that, the Stagirite reveals the fundamental connection between his *Ethics* and the theory of motion he outlines in his *Physics*. In the *Physics*, motion is change; furthermore, Aristotle adds that “motion in its most general and proper sense is change of place” (*Phys.* 208a), what we call “movement”. Hence, coming back to ethics, human action is motion in its most general sense, i.e. movement as change of place. This means that, according to the interpretation proposed here, practical science is focused on human movement, and, consequently, Strabo’s *chora* is land and sea of human movement (Bonfiglioli, 2016a)³.

Two main questions have primarily to be answered at this point: why should just this concept of action as movement deal with landscape and why should the possible “new” relevance of landscape be founded, in some respects, on this idea of human action as movement?

My answer to the first question is the following: action as movement deals with landscape because the latter has inherited its theoretical and ethical roots from Strabo’s *chora*. In order to understand this chorographic legacy, it is necessary to explore the origins of the twofold meaning of landscape. As is well known, landscape is both a representation of a tract of land and the tract of land (or region) itself, the representation of a thing and the thing itself (Berque, 1995; Besse, 2018; dell’Agnese, 2015; Farinelli, 1992:201–210; Jakob, 2008; Mathewson et al., 2019; Olwig, 1996, 2019; Tosco,

2007). As I try to show in what follows, the ethical roots of *chora* are closely linked to both meanings of landscape; rather, such ethical roots are key to the dialogue and interconnection between the two meanings.

2.2 Landscape as representation

I shall start from the meaning “representation”, going back to the origins of landscape as a painting in the early modern period, i.e. to the birth of landscape as a pictorial genre. The connection between pre-modern *chora* and modern landscape as scenery has already been highlighted by Olwig (2011, 2019):

it was primarily Ptolemy’s concepts of chorography that was key to the genesis of the modern understanding of landscape as spatial scenery, and the displacement of the original concept of landscape as place and region. This is because the understanding of *choros/chora* as a place [...] developed through history was replaced by Ptolemy with a visual definition of *choros/chora* as a space encircled within the timeless geometry of a map (Olwig, 2019:78).

I agree with Olwig on the essentially visual interpretation offered by Ptolemy of both geography and chorography as well as the crucial influence that Ptolemy exerted on the modern idea of geography and geographical models. However, in my view, Olwig’s interpretation of Ptolemy’s *Geography* does not pay enough attention to the following issue. The first chapter of Ptolemy’s text is dedicated to the difference between geography and chorography: whereas the former deals with the quantities more than the qualities, the latter, by contrast, deals with the qualities rather than the quantities. This is why chorography requires skills in drawing but has no need for mathematical method (Ptolemy, *Geography* 1, 1, 4–5; compare Berggren and Jones, 2000:57–58). By “quantities” Ptolemy meant the geometrical–mathematical language of maps, i.e. the language chosen by him as well as the most of modern geographers with him. Apart from the link to skills in drawing and likeness, Ptolemy did not deepen the connection between chorography and the field of the qualitative. By contrast, one may infer the nature of such a connection by virtue of Strabo’s work. Drawing on Strabo’s legacy, any idea of quality, if related to *chora*, should essentially concern human experience of the world. It is important to remember that also Strabo’s work was one of the main sources of Renaissance geography (compare Diller, 1975). Even though Ptolemy chose the quantitative language of maps, while leaving aside the qualitative language of chorography, the acknowledgement of *chora* as an alternative pathway, as well as its link to Strabo’s legacy, was not immediately forgotten in the early modern period.

In fact, if one takes into consideration 16th-century chorographic images, they were but the final outcome of an idea

Besse’s (2018) perspective, different from that proposed here, on the relationship between landscape and action.

³For other interpretations of the concept of *chora* in current geographical debates, see Berque (2012), Besse (2000), Casey (1997), Grosz (1995), Kymäläinen and Lehtinen (2010), and Olwig (2008).

of representation founded on human experiences, practices, and mobility. Early modern chorographers were geographers on the move, engaged in travelling across the tracts of land that they had to represent. In other words, what one may define as 16th-century chorographic idea of representation was above all an embodied practice of movement, an embodied experience linked to some pieces of land. These claims draw upon the very notes and treatises written by some early modern chorographers, such as the Italian Egnazio Danti, author of one of the most famous cycles of painted maps, that of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican Palace (Rome) (Fiorani, 2005, 2007; Gambi and Pinelli, 1994). Furthermore, it is necessary to rediscover some forgotten or neglected archives, where one may also find some letters and manuscripts written by 16th-century chorographers. In Egnazio Danti’s notes and treatises, for instance, one may find the description of chorography as a praxis, as an activity on the move⁴. Furthermore, by reading his manuscripts one may infer – I believe – that chorographic praxis was made of his experiences on the move, including, for instance, forced stops, daily obstacles, and emotions associated with everyday problems (anger, doubts, etc.)⁵. This praxis was an integral part of the early modern chorographic idea of representation, regarded as a concrete experience of some tracts of land. As I repeat, chorographic maps were not but the final outcome of an embodied experience of the world, founded on movement. Hence, in this chorographic idea of representation we may recognize one of the most influential definitions of mobility in current debates: that provided by Cresswell, who regards mobility as an “entanglement of movement, representation and practice”, as “experienced and embodied practice of movement” (Cresswell, 2010:19–20; see also Cresswell, 2006:2–4).

Furthermore, should early modern chorographic maps be regarded as traditional maps? No, they should not. Let us take into consideration, for instance, the above-mentioned 16th-century cycle of painted maps in the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican Palace (Rome). Due to the liminality and hybridity of their chorographic language, most of these maps include some painted scenes – portraits of pieces of land – that are totally irrespective of the scale, i.e. totally irrespective of the quantitative reason of cartography (rather, of the idea of cartography that modern Western culture has constructed). In my view, this chorographic language of draw-

ing, consisting of portraits or paintings of pieces of land, is at the very base of the early modern invention of landscape as a pictorial genre. These portraits were but the final outcome of the experience of 16th-century chorographers, such as Egnazio Danti, who were geographers on the move. Hence, these portraits were bearers of a subjective experience of the represented tracts of land which challenged the order of measure and objectivation of cartographic images (Bonfiglioli, 2012). In other words, the portraits of pieces of land included in 16th-century chorographic maps – where we may find the original idea of landscape as scenery – were sources of disorder, of destabilization of the quantitative uniformity characterizing modern maps.

These portraits were bearers of a qualitative reason, grounded on a concrete experience on the move of some tracts of land, and, as such, were able to destabilize the quantitative and abstract reason of modern cartography. Therefore, from the 17th century onwards, such landscape scenes progressively disappeared from cartographic images, where quantitative reason became the only reason of maps. In parallel with that, between the 16th and the 17th century the very idea of landscape as a painting started to consist of an image “captured” within perspectival rules and framework. In other words, the landscape as portrait started to lose the destabilizing role it had played, in my view, in early modern chorographic maps⁶, and it became an image associated with distance and geometrical space. This was due to the fact that European “artists, many of whom were themselves also cartographers and scientists, essentially changed Ptolemy’s top-down projection from the vertical to the horizontal in order to create a three-dimensional perspectival illusion” (Olwig, 2008:1848; compare Farinelli, 1992:55–70, 2003:12–15). Following Cosgrove’s well-known interpretation,

it is in Italy that we can identify an *idea* of landscape, the notion of a particular artistic genre which could be allocated a determinate place within an artistic theory dominated by techniques for controlling visual space. [...] It [perspective] regulated the space of their pictures [...]. Reality was frozen at a specific moment, removed from the flux of time and change, and rendered the property of the observer (Cosgrove, 1985a:21–22; compare Cosgrove, 1985b; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988).

⁴See, for instance, the following treatise written by Egnazio Danti, one of the most important early modern Italian chorographers: *Le Scienze matematiche ridotte in tavole* (Bologna, 1577), Tavola 44; see also Danti’s notes on chorographic praxis collected in the following manuscript: *Quaderno di Disegni*, 1578, ms. Gozzadini 171, Biblioteca comunale dell’Archiginnasio di Bologna.

⁵See, for instance, the transcription and interpretation of some of Egnazio Danti’s manuscripts in Bonfiglioli (2012). Furthermore, compare Camporesi (1992) for many other 16th-century written sources (not merely geographical) on a concrete idea of landscape as tract of land where to live in, to travel, etc.

⁶As written immediately above, this destabilizing role consisted of the fact that, in 16th-century chorographic maps including portraits of pieces of land (such as those of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche), the language of drawing characterizing these painted scenes was totally irrespective of the scale, i.e. totally irrespective of the quantitative uniformity of cartography. This was due to the fact that these painted landscapes, to the extent that they were the final outcome of a concrete human experience on the move of some tracts of land, were bearers of a qualitative reason which thus challenged the quantitative and abstract reason of modern maps.

Captured within geometrical rules of perspective, the idea of landscape as representation started to coincide with a static image. As such, landscape, together with cartographic image, started to be one of the privileged forms of the modern Western gaze, “a way of seeing that relishes the gaze, that asserts power by privileging perspectival vision” (Henderson, 2003:192; compare Mitchell, 2002).

However, this did not prevent the chorographic origins of landscape as a pictorial genre from involving a different idea of representation – an idea related to mobility and concrete experience of some tracts of land. Prior to the construction of landscape as a perspectival image, the modern geographical invention of landscape had been founded on “embodied acts of landscaping” (Lorimer, 2005:85; compare Loo and Bunnell, 2018:148) to the extent that it relied upon an idea of representation as practice of movement. This practice of movement was that of early modern chorographers, and it was made of their experiences on the move of the pieces of land which they had to represent. The painted landscapes included in 16th-century chorographic maps were irrespective of quantitative rules inasmuch as they were the echo of embodied experiences of the world, grounded on mobility, i.e. of a wider idea of representation including praxis. In other words, these painted landscapes were but the outcome of original “practices of landscape” (Wylie, 2007:166), those of 16th-century chorographers. This is the reason why – I believe – the geographical invention of modern landscape, by virtue of its chorographic roots, is also an act of landscaping. As the outcome of such an idea of representation, the painted landscapes which were part of 16th-century chorographic maps were irrespective of any quantitative rule; consequently, they represented a critical means, able to challenge the imaginations of the world which modern Western thought was going to construct. It is not important if these landscape scenes disappeared very early from maps, due to their destabilizing role. Now that the sedentarism of modern models has been deconstructed (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006), these original landscape scenes and their chorographic roots are worth reconsidering and reinterpreting, i.e. regarded as alternative avenues and imaginations (see below).

The main source of the early modern idea of chorographic representation, which is at the base of the geographic invention of landscape as portrait of tracts of land, was Strabo’s conception of *chora*, as interpreted above. The idea of *chora*, especially in relation to the early modern reading of Strabo’s work, may be also described by quoting a passage from Wylie’s interpretation of Ingold’s (1993, 2000) phenomenological approach to landscape: “it is through our ongoing, lifelong practices of dwelling *in* and *with* the world – including practices of picturing, writing etc. – that our understanding *of* ourselves and the world are shaped. And the name given to such practices of dwelling is: landscape” (Wylie, 2013:60; see also Wylie, 2007:153 ff.). Strabo’s idea of *chora* was actually a practice of dwelling founded on the idea of

human action (*praxis*) as movement. As already argued, this idea is ethical; rather, it links movement to ethics – to an ancient idea of ethics. In what follows, I shall deepen one of the historical connections between landscape and ethics through the analysis of the other meaning of landscape: region, i.e. tract of land.

2.3 Landscape as region

Whenever we remember that one of the main meanings of landscape is “region” (compare for instance, Olwig, 2019:5 ff.), we are forced to explain a geographical concept by virtue of another one. Furthermore, the geographical concept of region is as complex and controversial as that of landscape is. However, exploring the idea of landscape as tract of land/region is crucial here, all the more so as region is one of the main meanings of the Greek term *chora* (or *choros*), and, consequently, allows us to understand something more about the chorographic roots of landscape.

Anyhow, a preliminary clarification must be made: the term “region” derives from the Latin *regio*, whose etymological root is not the same as that of the Greek *chora*. Regarding landscape as *regio* is not the same as regarding landscape as *chora*. Despite the fact that *regio* and *chora* share the meaning of region and, if one consults the Latin–Greek lexicons and vice versa, *chora* is defined as the ancient Greek word corresponding to the Latin *regio*, the two terms – I believe – represent two different perspectives on the very idea of region, two different sides of the same notion, due to their distinct semantic histories and uses in texts. I think, in particular, that the two words *regio* and *chora* represent two different spatial conceptions of ethics (Bonfiglioli, 2016b). Each of these two conceptions of ethics, in turn, is at the base of a different construction and interpretation of the idea of region as well as of the idea of landscape as region.

Let us start from the Latin *regio*, a term taken into consideration by several geographers (Brunet, 1984; Olwig, 2011; Raffestin, 1984; Vallega, 1995). For instance, in order to reflect upon the idea of region, Raffestin (1984) started from the reconstruction that the French linguist Benveniste had provided of the etymology of *regio*. Following Benveniste (1973), the Latin word *regio* has the same Indo-European root (**reg*) as the noun *regula* (rule), the adjective *rectus* (straight, right), and the noun *rex* (which means both “priest” and “king”: *rex* is one of the most ancient ideas of royalty and sovereignty). In fact, the word *regio* originally meant “the point reached by a straight line traced out on the ground or in the sky, and the space enclosed between such straight lines drawn in different directions”, as it was connected with the language of augury (Benveniste, 1973:442). This sense of *regio* is linked to the Latin expression *regere fines* (where also the verb *regere* derives from the root **reg*), which

means literally “trace out the limits by straight lines”. [...] What is involved is the delimitation of the interior and the exterior, the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane, the national territory and foreign territory. The tracing of these limits is carried out by the person invested with the highest powers, the *rex* (Benveniste, 1973:443).

Hence, region as *regio* is associated with a spatial reason of geometrical lines, regarded as clear-cut boundaries determining binary oppositions between inside and outside. In other words, the semantics of *regio* entails and anticipates the reason of modern maps and some of the main outcomes of this reason, beginning from the territorial nature of nation states (concerning territorial states, see, among many others, Agnew, 1994, Elden, 2013, and Farinelli, 2009; on the connection between the idea of region and cartographic logic, see della Dora and Minca, 2009).

In relation to the focus of the present paper, these debates on the idea of region allow one to reflect upon the very meanings of landscape. First, these debates underline that the static reason of modern cartography represents one of the semantic pathways able to connect the two meanings of landscape: landscape as *regio* corresponds to landscape as a perspectival image, insofar as both must be associated with the sedentarism of modern cartography and the nation state (compare Olwig’s, 2019:57 ff., analysis of “landscape as the scene of the state”).

Furthermore, this semantic pathway reveals one of the spatial ideas of ethics inherited from the concept of region – hence, from the idea of landscape if conceived as region/tract of land. The spatial sense of ethics at issue is founded on the etymological connection between *regio*, *regula* (rule), and *rectus* (both straight and right). The adjective *rectus* means “straight as this line which one draws”. This is a concept at once concrete and moral: the straight line represents the norm, while the *regula* is the instrument used to trace the straight line, which fixes the rule” (Benveniste, 1973:443). Drawing clear boundaries involves fixing rules and establishing what is right. This is the reason why *rectus* is both straight and right: these meanings, grounded on spatial division and demarcation, are part of an original idea of sovereignty. In other words, the common root of *regio*, *rectus*, and *regula* entails a connection between the order of a striated space and ethics. As underlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), a striated space is the sedentary space of the *polis*, that is, of the territorial nation state in the modern era. Hence, landscape as *regio* is bearer of a spatial sense of ethics which is essentially static. The kind of ethics that landscape as *regio* involves is what Shapiro (1994) has defined, though from another perspective and in relation to modernity, a “territorial moral geography”, i.e. a kind of ethical thought operating “within the dominant system of sovereignties”. I believe that *regio* entails and anticipates not only the “cartographic reason” (Farinelli, 2003, 2009) at the base of the territorial nature of modern

states, but also the static sense of ethics inherently associated with the idea of territory as striated space (see also Sect. 4).

By contrast, landscape as *chora* involves a very different conception of ethics, to the extent that the ancient geographical idea of *chora*, that outlined by Strabo, cannot be dissociated from human action. Human action, in turn, according to Aristotle and the legacy of his ethical thought to Strabo’s geography, is movement and movement is a kind of change (see above). Just this idea of *chora* – I believe – allows one to go one step further in the investigation of the idea of region from an etymological point of view. The etymology of *chora*, which remains uncertain, seems to be connected with the idea of part and separation, but not with a geometric reason of straight lines (compare Chantraine, 1984: *sub voce*). In Strabo’s *Geography*, the regional dimension of *chora* is linked to human actions to the same extent as it is linked to movement, process, transformation, re-negotiation. First, the very regional dimension of *chora* depends on human actions: “the *chora* is small when the actions are small, great when the actions are great; and the greatest is the totality of this *chora*, what we properly call oecumene (the inhabited earth). So, oecumene would be the *chora* of the greatest actions” (Strabo, I, 1, 16, my translation). Furthermore, more generally, in all books of Strabo’s *Geography* *chora* is described as a tract of land whose boundaries are movable. As part, portion, *chora* cannot deny striations, i.e. the clear-cut boundaries characterizing and defining the idea of *regio*⁷; however, its striations are signs of cultural identities which can be effaced, changed, and re-written by human actions – that is, by historical processes – or by other causes (for instance, when floods make spaces smooth: compare Strabo, XVII, 1, 3). *Chora* represents the internal questioning and destabilization of *regio*, to the extent that it is founded on a continuous dialogue with movement and relativization, with the renegotiation or cancellation of its boundaries. *Chora* is conceived in this way since it involves a spatial sense of ethics grounded on action as movement. In my view, the main difference between *regio* and *chora* just lies in the difference between an ethic of *regula* (static, sedentary) and an ethic of action (grounded on movement and change) (Bonfiglioli, 2016b).

The interweaving of ethics and human mobility is the second semantic pathway able to connect the two main meanings of landscape: landscape as region/*chora* corresponds to the painted landscapes which, in the early modern chorographic representations, were totally irrespective of any quantitative rule of maps. Both these conceptions of landscape derive from the idea of *chora* as land (and sea) of human praxis as movement; both represent the internal destabilization of the static striations characterizing hegemonic Western narratives. This second semantic pathway is what I call the chorographic side of landscape. Such a side involves a spatial sense of ethics whose critical potential can be

⁷See above the connection I propose between *regio* and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conception of “striated space”.

entirely understood only by reconstructing the most ancient narratives on human mobility of which landscape is bearer by virtue of its chorographic roots.

3 Landscape and some ethical narratives on migration

The connection between landscape and narratives has already been explored within geographical debates. For Daniels and Lorimer (2012:3–4), “the recuperation of narrative in human geography was upheld as a way of connecting, or reconnecting, conceptual polarities such as [...] agency/structure, and connecting other polarities which had seldom hitherto been recognized as a problem in what was understood as a broadly scientific domain, such as subjective/objective, imagination/experience, fact/fiction. This involved recovering, or reconstructing, some key geographical concepts”, such as landscape. Hence, the above-mentioned connection has been seen as “narrating landscape” (Daniels and Lorimer, 2012:4) or “narrating self and landscape” (Wylie, 2005), drawing upon the conception of narrative as “a creative method as well as subject of critical analysis” (Daniels and Lorimer, 2012:4). In this paper, instead, such a connection will be interpreted in the following terms: landscape is bearer of some forgotten narratives – ethical narratives – that are at the base of its relevance whilst being as ancient as they are contemporary.

In order to reconstruct these narratives, it is necessary to come back to *chora*’s legacy and its ethical basis focused on the notion of action as movement. As already said, this idea of action derives from Aristotelian ethics and cannot be dissociated – both in Aristotle’s philosophy and Strabo’s chorography – from the conception of happiness. According to Aristotle, happiness, which is the end of practical science, has to be conceived as the highest human good and an end to be reached through actions. For this reason, happiness is an activity in accordance with virtue (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1099b, 1102a). This also entails that, in order to aim at happiness, and understanding its nature, one must first aim at virtue. And virtue, such as vice, is a habit, that is a stable disposition (Aristotle, *Categories* 8b). Just the latter term, dis-position, reveals the spatial framework which lies at the roots, in my view, of ethical thought in what we call Western culture. There is a certain circularity between ethical dispositions and actions, because virtues and vices are dispositions produced by actions, but these same dispositions determine or produce, in their turn, nothing but actions⁸. In spatial terms, if actions are movements, ethical dispositions are thus nothing but the starting points or the endpoints of these movements.

⁸Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1114b27–28: virtues and vices are habits “producing by themselves the same actions from which they derive”.

These same spatial roots also influence the most famous statement of Aristotle’s ethics: virtue conceived as a happy medium. As is well known, in fact, every virtue is the mean between two contrary vices, which represent instead excess and deficiency (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1220b–1221a, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a). For instance, the virtue of courage is the mean between the vice of rashness (the excess) and the vice of cowardice (the deficiency). In the spatial roots of Aristotle’s logic – given that I am speaking now about logical oppositions – difference is directly proportional to distance. This means that contrariety, which is the greatest possible difference between two species inside the same genus (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1018a), has to be positionally regarded as the greatest distance along a straight line (Aristotle, *Categories* 6a; *Metaphysics* 1055a, 1058a): the two contrary vices represent the extremes of a line segment, whereas virtue is the midpoint.

So, aiming at virtue, in order to aim at happiness, means moving away from the vicious extremes (the worse) in order to move towards the midpoint (the better: the virtuous mean). Exactly at this point Aristotle’s philosophy becomes a narrative: the Stagirite speaks of this not only in spatial-geometrical terms, but also in narrative terms. The ethical woman/man of action becomes a sailor; the straight line of the ethical dispositions becomes a sea. By recalling Homer’s *Odyssey*, the poem of Odysseus’ journey, Aristotle suggests that we should hold our ship far from the vicious extremes, as dangerous as Scylla and Charybdis are, and steer it towards the virtuous mean. Hence, the abstract movement of logic starts becoming mobility, insofar as it is a movement in context. Of course, it is the case of a literary context, that of Homer’s *Odyssey*. But Odysseus’ literary journey is at the base of the shaping of Western cultural identity also because the Western localization of Odysseus’ wanderings cannot be dissociated from some precise historical experiences of mobility, which are the sea routes of the progressive exploration of the Mediterranean by the ancient Greeks. A meaningful example of this is the recalled passage on Scylla and Charybdis, the two mythical sea monsters which a post-Homeric tradition localized on the opposite sides of the Strait of Messina, in southern Italy. Coming back to ethics, to be between Scylla and Charybdis means to be between two evils; the journey of the ethical (wo)man involves holding her/his ship far from the extremes and steering it towards the middle, whether the two extremes are those of a line segment or two opposite coasts of a strait in the central Mediterranean Sea.

Hence, aiming at happiness is a movement from the worse towards the better or at least towards what is hoped to be the better. Moving from the worse to the better is one of the most common, though not the only possible (see below), description of migration as a form of human mobility. Consequently, I think that at the roots of the thought we call Western, the ethical identity of human beings was conceived as a migrant identity. According to the Western roots of ethics, we are all migrants, at least on the basis of Aristotle’s ethics as inter-

preted by me by virtue of a geographical imagination. This geographical imagination also involves an alternative way, one of the possible ways, of conceiving ethics. According to this geographical imagination, ethics can be considered a science of human movement/mobility as well as an alternative narrative on migration (Bonfiglioli, 2018, 2019, 2020). And we must not forget that, for Aristotle, ethics and politics are part of the same practical wisdom, focused on action, i.e. movement. Furthermore, the happiness of each individual human being is the same as that of the *polis*, because the good of the *polis* includes that of each individual human being in the same way that the whole comprises the parts (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169b; *Politics* 1253a, 1324a).

According to this both ethical and political narrative, we are all migrants. When I realized this, I remembered the possible direction which Giorgio Agamben indicated in order to go beyond the trinity state–nation–territory: Agamben (2000:24) argued that we could conceive “the status of European” as meaning “the being-in-exodus of the citizen (a condition that obviously could also be one of immobility)”. In my view, the ethical identity of humans emerging from this ancient narrative, as reinterpreted here, entails that everybody has to regard her/himself as migrant, even without moving.

The narratives on migration I have proposed are clearly alternative, although they emerge from the interstices between the striations of the so-called Western thought. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argued, the *polis*, the state, has been one of the major sources of striations. But I think that, a priori, these striations, whether points on a line or lines on a surface, belong to the logical space inherited from Aristotle. One of the major legacies of Aristotle’s logic consists of binary oppositions: an example is the contrariety between species, thought of as two well-defined extremes in the linear order of a genus. This is but an example concerning species: the Aristotelian system of genera and species, in its entirety, is founded on clear classifications and definitions, i.e. on the shaping of homogeneous spaces within clearly demarcated boundaries, which entail binary oppositions between what is included and what is excluded. From this perspective, there is no difference between the major logical–spatial foundations of Aristotle’s system and those of modern territorial states. Rather, there is no difference between Aristotle’s system, with its binary logic, and “that way of thinking in terms of space-divided-up” which “is a product of modernity’s own project (and a source of its subsequent anxieties)” (Massey, 2005:66). As is well known, the static and territorial nature of nation states is one of the major outcomes of modernity’s project and way of thinking. This way of thinking, in turn, consists of that cartographic imagination of the world which is associated with the hegemonic narratives of modernity (Farinelli, 2003, 2009; Gregory, 1994; Minca and Bialasiewicz, 2004).

However, the narratives of migration emerging from Aristotle’s ethical texts – from the interstices of their logical stri-

ations – reveal themselves to be different and alternative, especially if we focus our attention on the mean, the ethical intermediate, which is virtue as a step of migrant movement. Let us come back to the spatial foundations of Aristotle’s logic. Such as any intermediate between two contraries, virtue is conceived as a position, more specifically as the midpoint in a line segment (see above). Furthermore, for Aristotle any intermediate is also a composition, since it is composed, in some way, of the contraries – the extremes of the line segment – from which it derives (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1057b). For instance, the virtue of courage is the mean between the vice of rashness (the excess) and the vice of cowardice (the deficiency) inasmuch as it is less than one of the contraries and more than the other. Consequently, any intermediate should belong to the same genus – the same linear order – as the contraries/extremes. However, it is not the case of the ethical intermediate, which is composed of two vicious extremes, but, due to the fact that it is a virtue, it is also contrary to any vice; therefore it is also contrary to these two extremes. Which is, thus, the exact position of the ethical intermediate? As a mean and a composition, it is a midpoint, is in the middle of the line segment whose extremes are two vices; however, as a virtue, it goes beyond and outside this linear order, because it belongs also to the contrary genus of virtues. Instead of reinforcing the boundaries of the logical system, the ethical intermediate destabilizes them; it oscillates since it is, at the same time, inside and outside the boundaries of the genus.

The ethical intermediate has the same rhizomatic nature as Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987:25) notion of *intermezzo*: what “is always in the middle, between things, interbeing”. The *intermezzo* – “to be between” – is “the only way to get outside the dualisms” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:277), i.e., to go beyond the clear-cut boundaries which determine dual oppositions such as inside/outside, and, more generally, the striated certainties at the base of both Aristotle’s logic and the territorial nature of modern states. Due to the destabilizing oscillation of the ethical intermediate as midpoint, the migrant journey narrated here reveals itself to be something more than a mere movement from one point to another; in fact, it becomes a much more complex and uncertain kind of human mobility to the same extent that the position of the ethical intermediate – i.e. virtue conceived as a step of this migrant movement – is uncertain. After all, also the aim of most current geographies of migration is “to complicate simple assumptions of migration being just a move from here to there” (Ehrkamp, 2020:1207⁹).

⁹Among the many contemporary studies on migrants’ mobility, compare De Genova et al. (2015), Jordan and Minca (2023), Menjívar et al. (2019), Minca (2020), Minca et al. (2022), Mitchell et al. (2019), and Tazzioli (2020). Furthermore, compare Sager (2018, 2019) and Paradiso (2020), for other perspectives – different from that proposed here – on the relationship between ethics and mobility/migration.

Coming back to ancient narratives, Aristotle left aside the logical problem of the ethical intermediate, considering it a rare case (Aristotle, *Categories* 14a1–6) – an exception, I would say. He just did it so as not to bring into question the striated certainties of his logical system. Today, by contrast, the importance of ethics just lies in being a reservoir of what can no longer be left aside. The ethical story I have proposed is a story about migration inasmuch it is a story about the pursuit of happiness. Hence, it is a story necessarily focused on what is in the middle, because happiness in itself has the same nature as the ethical intermediate. Not by chance the word for happiness in ancient Greek is *eudaimonia*, which means “good daemon”. A daemon is exactly an intermediate nature which crosses boundaries and undermines any striated space, any political striated space, founded on binary oppositions, given that the logic of the daemonic, of happiness, is that of the included middle (Bonfiglioli, 2016a).

From Plato’s *Symposium* to Deleuze’s (1994) texts, the nature of the daemonic consists of going beyond clearly demarcated boundaries as well as binary oppositions. Furthermore, the nature of the daemonic involves transition, oscillation, fluidity, and movement, and it may be put at the core of liminal geographies as liminality has come to be spatially “associated with interstices, gaps and voids, with passages and thresholds, with borders and questions of permeability, and with vagueness” (March, 2021:456). For this reason, in my view, the logical tension between the unstable included middle and the well-defined extremes – between the informal spaces of transition and the *mise en forme* of striations – is also the story of contemporary migration flows, which continuously bring into question the binary oppositions grounded on sharp boundaries (i.e. territorial borders in the case of contemporary migration).

More generally, these ancient ethical narratives are a reservoir of a spatial logic which undermines and destabilizes the striated certainties of modern thought to the extent that it is founded on action as movement as well as on the informal spaces of transition and oscillation proper to the “daemonic”. At the same time, these very narratives are at the base of the idea of *chora*, of its ethical and theoretical foundations. These narratives are as ancient as they are contemporary to the extent that they emphasize that the chorographic legacy to landscape consists of a spatial sense of ethics which goes beyond the sedentarism of the modern *ratio*, since it cannot be dissociated from human mobility. Such a chorographic legacy provides both an ethical perspective on human mobility and an alternative spatial sense of ethics. In the final section of this paper, I will try to show why just this legacy is an integral part of the possible “new” relevance of landscape.

4 Conclusion: landscape and contemporary reflections on mobility and ethics

Let us come back to the question concerning the reason why the contemporary relevance of landscape should be founded, in some respects, on the ancient idea of human action as movement. The answer to the question is the following: by virtue of its chorographic roots, landscape is bearer of a critical thought on mobility – on human action as movement – which dates back to the ancient ethical narratives reconstructed above; such a thought is critical as well as relevant today to the extent that it consists of a destabilization of the striated logical certainties characterizing modern thought. The oscillation of the ethical intermediate and the informal spaces of transition characterizing the daemonic (Sect. 3) – as well as the painted landscapes which, in early modern chorographic representations, were totally irrespective of the quantitative reason of maps to the extent that they were the outcome of embodied experiences on the move of some tracts of land (Sect. 2) – are the most meaningful examples of such a destabilization.

As is well known, one of the main aims of the recent mobility turn and “new mobilities paradigm” is to undermine the “sedentarism” characterizing modern geography and also those “forms of territorial nationalism” that are associated with “technologies of mapping and visualisation which emerged out of the Enlightenment” (Sheller and Urry, 2006:208–209; see also Hannam et al., 2006; Cresswell, 2010). The thought of which landscape as *chora* is bearer, to be conceived as an ethical perspective on human mobility, is able to destabilize the sedentarism of modern imaginations and suggests new inchoative avenues, new “liminal” imaginations, for contemporary thought. These ethical–chorographic resources of landscape are part of its possible “new” relevance: “new” to the extent that it is yet to be explored, as it comes from some neglected pathways of the history of landscape.

Landscape is not a solution; rather, it is a means of inchoative re-imaginings of the world. As such, by virtue of the ethical narratives it inherited from ancient chorography, landscape is a critical concept, above all, because the term “critical” has the same etymology as “crisis”. Today, the concept of landscape as *chora* is critical as it involves an alternative narrative that shows the crisis of the hegemonic narratives of modernity – those founded on a striated and sedentary logic – through the lens of human mobility and its association with an ancient conception of happiness.

Moving toward the ethical intermediate (or mean), this is what makes the ethical narratives reconstructed here as ancient as they are contemporary, from many points of view. Also from a theoretical point of view, I believe. In fact, exactly the idea of going toward the middle can be the description of one of the possible pathways, of the avenues, for contemporary thought, including geographical thought. Moving toward what is in the middle means conceiving happiness as

inseparable from mobility, i.e. putting mobility at the centre of the spatial organization of politics. This also means that mobility is, or should be, an integral part of our ethical, therefore political, identity. In other words, one of the avenues suggested by the ethical thought linked to landscape as *chora* consists of starting to reimagine the spatial logic at the base of our present and future political identities through the lens of the neglected daemonic nature of happiness and its association with human mobility.

In my view, just this avenue represents one of the ways in which we might restart “valuing mobility in a post Covid-19 world” (Cresswell, 2021). For Cresswell, “there is space for reimagining mobilities in ways that are not all negative”, if the idea of mobility starts to consist of “a new constellation of movements meanings and practices where the collective good, and lived equity are the new priorities” (Cresswell, 2021:61–62). I think that these new priorities might be found (rediscovered) in the ancient link between human mobility and the daemonic nature of happiness, exactly conceived as the highest good for the *polis*. For Aristotle (see above), happiness is an end to be reached through virtuous actions. In other words, happiness consists of acting well. Action, in turn, is movement – migrant movement, in my interpretation. Reconstructing and reinterpreting the ancient narratives of which landscape as *chora* is bearer means starting to reimagine human mobility – especially migration – as closely associated with the highest collective good, which just consists of happiness. Thinking of landscape – of the chorographic ideas of landscape – means thinking of human mobility from an ethical perspective, focused on happiness as a collective good. Furthermore, the daemonic nature of happiness undermines all striated certainties and allows “liminal” imaginations linked to spaces of transitions. Of course, these are but inchoative suggestions to spatially rethink mobility through an ethical lens. However, just regarding mobility as associated with the ancient conception of happiness may reinforce new ethical priorities in valuing mobility and inchoatively underline that an ethical approach to human movement is also crucial for re-imagining the spatial logic at the base of our political identities.

Concerning this, for Shapiro modernity has been characterized by a “dominant territorial moral geography” to the extent that “the state-oriented map continues to supply the moral geography that dominates what is ethically relevant” (Shapiro, 1994). As argued above, this idea of “territorial moral geography” is very close to the sense of ethics that landscape as *regio* involves. This spatial sense of ethics is essentially static as it relates to the sedentarism of modern cartography, thus also to landscape as a perspectival image. Landscape as perspectival image and *regio*, as well as the static sense of ethics it involves, cannot be dissociated from the striated certainties of modern thought and their cartographic root. By contrast, this paper aims to reconstruct and explore the chorographic side of the meanings of landscape. In my view, just this chorographic side might be a resource

for inchoatively conceiving “an ethics of post-sovereignty”, the only ethics that Shapiro considers appropriate for today’s world, as “it must be achieved by relaxing the state system’s spatial and linguistic hegemony” (Shapiro, 1994:49). This idea of “an ethics of post-sovereignty” is still relevant today to the extent that its potential has remained largely unexplored in geographical debates till now¹⁰. The chorographic side of landscape, as conceived here, represents a way to start deepening such potential from a geographical point of view.

If historically conceived as perspectival image and *regio*, landscape can also be regarded as an integral part of the modern Western gaze and the epistemological – as well as political and economic – imperialism it involves, that is, “as a form of spatial discipline” able “to exert control” (Nelson, 2017:51). This is the reason why some recent international debates have underlined “the centrality of landscapes to global projects of power (e.g. slavery, capitalism, and colonialism)” (Wright, 2020:1135), i.e. the fact that “historically, landscape has been used as a disciplinary tool to facilitate the control of land and to naturalise colonial hegemonies” (Dang, 2021). This is also the reason why the same recent debates stress the need to reconceptualize landscape in counter-hegemonic ways, which “can challenge colonial perspective and multiply our histories of landscape thought” (Davies, 2021:638). In my view, reconstructing and reinterpreting the chorographic side of landscape – i.e. what I have proposed in the present paper – represents one of the ways to multiply, in some respects, the historical pathways of landscape thought as well as to explore some of its counter-hegemonic possibilities. I have chosen to write “historical pathways” instead of “histories”, and I have specified “in some respects”, to the extent that the chorographic side of landscape has been conceived within Western tradition, whereas current decolonial debates usually associate the expression “to multiply histories” (of a concept, for instance) with the inclusion of cultural perspectives other than the Western one. However, though conceived within Western tradition, landscape as *chora* challenges the hegemonic epistemology of modern *ratio*, and hence – I believe – this chorographic legacy can contribute today to investigating the counter-hegemonic potential of landscape for the following reasons.

The chorographic side of landscape has been marginalized, sometimes forgotten, by modern thought due to the destabilizing role it can play by virtue of its ethical contents, whenever grounded on human action as movement. The possible “new” relevance of landscape also lies in the several ideas of ethics it provides to the extent that these ideas, if connected with landscape as *chora*, are a form of critical thought able to question the static striations of Western epistemol-

¹⁰Compare Bulley (2017) for a recent reinterpretation, different from that proposed here, of Shapiro’s “ethics of post-sovereignty”. Bulley’s research in the field of international relations focuses on the concept of hospitality and addresses the connection between migration, power, and ethics.

ogy. The forgotten ethical narratives of which landscape is bearer (Sect. 3) show that the hegemonic epistemology of modern Western thought – founded on sedentarism, striations, and binary logic – might have been overturned since its ancient roots, that other epistemologies – daemonic, for instance – might have informed the tradition we call Western. The ethical resources of the chorographic side of landscape are a reservoir of what has been left aside. Prior to modern thought, Aristotle himself left aside the logical problem of the intermediate – with its daemonic oscillation – which had arisen from his ethical texts in order to avoid the possible overturning of his sedentary logical system.

Today, by contrast, the geography and epistemology of liminality which landscape has inherited from ancient ethics makes room for imagining spaces of transition and oscillation. Furthermore, landscape as *chora* strengthens the awareness, once more, that those narratives which Western tradition imposed as universal in the modern era are nothing but a possible interpretation, the outcome of conventional choices, a cultural construction among many others¹¹. Hence, the chorographic side of landscape demolishes any cultural pretension of universalism: for this reason, exploring the chorographic roots of landscape also represents both an epistemological and ethical option in doing research in the field of histories and philosophies of geography¹².

Finally, at least two other spatial ideas of ethics – I believe – do emerge from the forgotten ancient narratives of which landscape is bearer: ethics as thought on human mobility and ethics as an alternative narrative on migration. In my view, these geographical ideas of ethics, such as the previous ones, may offer an important contribution to contemporary theoretical debates on the relationship between geography and ethics. In fact, such ideas of ethics contribute to deepening the nature of this relationship and, consequently, to providing a further interpretation of the sense and importance of recent moral turns in geography (Barnett, 2005, 2012, 2014; Bonfiglioli, 2016a; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Olson, 2015, 2016, 2018; Proctor, 1998; Proctor and Smith, 1999; Schmidt, 2022; Smith, 1997, 1999, 2000; Valentine, 2005).

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¹¹On criticism of the pretension of universalism proper to modern Western thought – criticism coming from, for instance, post-colonial studies and decolonial option – compare, among many others, Chakrabarty (2000), Quijano (2007), and Mignolo and Walsh (2018).

¹²On the state of the art in the field of history and philosophy of geography, see Ferretti (2020, 2021, 2022).

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