

Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Space Preliminary Reflection on an Archaeology of Primordial Spatiality

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Abstract

The fundamental significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space in his early masterpiece, *Phenomenology of Perception* (hereafter referred as *PhP*), has been largely underestimated, if not completely ignored, in the literature of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. This underestimation can be traced back to the received view that space problem is not the primary theme of *PhP*, but only a touchstone for the general theses Merleau-Ponty wants to defend. This paper tries to argue that even space problem is not the chief concern of *PhP* in the thematic sense, it has fundamental importance in the argumentative sense. We will show that the chief concern of *PhP* is to establish the primitive openness of human consciousness towards the world through the intermediary of body by characterizing the existential structure of human being as "being-in-the-world". We will argue in this paper that the primitive structure of being-in-the-world is ultimately revealed through an integrated spatial archaeology which is nothing but Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space. The spatial archaeology of the lived body establishes the rootedness of consciousness in its body, while the spatial archaeology of the perceived world further reveals the primordial hold of the body on its world. Only by this integrated spatial archaeology can the general thesis of "being-in-the-world" be finally established. Towards the end of the paper, we will explicate the argumentative significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space by clarifying the fact that space is one of the primordial expressions of our being-in-the-world.

Merleau-Ponty's prime objective in his early masterpiece, *Phenomenology of Perception* (hereafter abbreviated as *PhP*)¹, is to characterize the existential structure of human being as "being-in-the-

¹ In this paper, the French text of Merleau-Ponty will be referred to the following version: Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945. English translation will be borrowed from the following version: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002. Hereafter quotation of this text will be followed by parenthesis, in which we will give the paginations in the format of "(*PhP*, French pagination/English pagination)". Modification of translation will be acknowledged in the parenthesis.

world” (être-au-monde)². In order to facilitate this characterization, he stresses the fundamental significance of our lived body, the body as consciousness or the perceiving subject, rather than our body as the perceived object, as the vehicle of our being-in-the-world. However, in such a phenomenological investigation about perception, body and being-in-the-world, it is remarkable that Merleau-Ponty gives a substantial amount of attention to the phenomenological analysis of spatiality³, although the problem of space as such, strictly speaking, is not the chief concern of *PhP*. If it is justifiable for us to reconstruct a “phenomenology of space”⁴ based on his phenomenological descriptions, if we want to discern his contribution to the philosophy of space, we have no choice but to understand first the *systematic role* that his phenomenology of space plays in the argumentative structure of his overall phenomenological project in *PhP*. In other words, we have to understand why the concept of space is important to Merleau-Ponty, albeit not so important as the concepts of consciousness, body and world, and why he repeatedly chooses space perception as the concrete example of his phenomenological analysis.

In this paper, we will try to demonstrate the *argumentative significance* of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of space in four steps. To begin with, we will explicate the archaeological⁵ structure of the phenomenological project in *PhP* in relation to its primary concern of denouncing intellectualism and its methodological consideration of the phenomenological reduction. In the second and third steps, we will argue that an archaeology of primordial spatiality is merged with that of the lived body or the perceived world to form an integrated spatial archaeology, whose ultimate aim is to reveal the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. Finally, we will explicate and conclude the systematic role and the argumentative significance of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of space by clarifying the fact that space is one of the primordial expressions of our being-in-the-world.

1 The archaeological structure

Actually, Merleau-Ponty borrows the term “being-in-the-world” from Heidegger⁶ to articulate the

2 Cf. Eric Matthews: *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Chesham: Acumen, 2002, pp. 20, 39, especially chapter 3: “being-in-the-world”; Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène: Sur l’ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, p. 23; Gary Brent Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A search for the limits of consciousness*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. 19ff.

3 It is sufficient to consider the two long chapters (Cf. *PhP*, chapter 3 of Part I; chapter 2 of Part II) mainly devoted to the problem of spatiality, not to mention many other comments on and examples of space perception scattering elsewhere.

4 We borrow this expression from Stephen Priest. Cf. his work: *Merleau-Ponty*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 101.

5 We borrow the term “archaeology” or “archaeological” from Renaud Barbaras and G. B. Madison. Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, p. 59; G. B. Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. 18, 68, 198 and *passim*. That *PhP* can be characterized as an *archaeological* work is due to its aim of disclosing the *primordial* structure of human experience and revealing the perceived world as “the *foundation* of all rationality, all value and all existence”.

6 Concerning the similarity and difference in their usage of this term, Cf. Eric Matthews: *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Chesham: Acumen, 2002, pp. 55–56; Joseph J. Kockelmans, “Merleau-Ponty on space

primitive openness of human subject or consciousness towards the world through the intermediary of body. By defining human subject as being-in-the-world, he tends to make a symmetrical critique of both realism and idealism⁷, or sometimes in Merleau-Ponty's idiosyncratic terminology, of both empiricism and intellectualism. They regard human subject either as a universal constructing consciousness (a being-for-itself)⁸ or as a mere object among others (a being-in-itself). In both cases, human being cannot be properly understood as a *subject* "in" or "towards" the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, the existential structure, or the mode of being, of human subject can only be characterized as being-in-the-world. In this structure, human subject exists not in an unilateral, detached or purely external relationship, but in a reciprocal, communicative relationship with his world, which calls for further clarification.

In fact, that Merleau-Ponty manages, in *PhP*, to denounce empiricism and intellectualism *simultaneously* is largely due to his successful thematization and rejection of their common epistemological presupposition, although they appear to be in opposition to each other. Actually, empiricism presupposes a determinate world which exists externally and independently of human consciousness. According to intellectualism, the world is merely the product of the conscious constructive act. In spite of the entirely different metaphysical status of the world, both theories share the same epistemological presupposition concerning "a fixed and determinate world" (*PhP*, 48/44). It is the absolute fixity and determinacy of an objective world that characterizes the dogmatic concepts of "objectivity", "truth" and "reality" of both empiricism and intellectualism. Merleau-Ponty thematizes this common epistemological presupposition in *PhP* as "objective thought" or "natural attitude" (*PhP*, 49/45). Due to this natural attitude, the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world is blurred and distorted by theoretical elaborations.

Despite the philosophical intention of symmetrical critique, the primary concern of *PhP* is undoubtedly to reject intellectualism or idealism⁹, or in Merleau-Ponty's own words, to "do away with any kind of idealism in revealing me [i.e. the human subject] as 'being-in-the-world'" (*PhP*, viii/xiv), or to "leave idealism without reverting to the naïveté of realism"¹⁰. In intellectualism, natural attitude causes a series of ascending idealizations from the primordial structure of being-in-the-world to an *objectivist* world picture. In order to reveal being-in-the-world, he has to suspend the natural attitude by the phenomenological reduction and remove these idealizations through a descending investigation. As he puts it, "Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' appears only against the

perception and space", in Joseph J. Kockelmans & Theodore J. Kisiel (ed.): *Phenomenology and the Natural Sciences*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 275–276; and also Cf. the famous foreword of Alphonse De Waelhens: "Une Philosophie de L'ambiguïté" in Merleau-Ponty's *La Structure du Comportement*.

7 Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l'être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, pp. 21–24.

8 We would like to introduce a distinction between "constructing" and "constituting", referring the former to an unilateral constructing relation, while saving the latter for a reciprocal constituting relation. We acknowledge that this terminological distinction has not been made by Colin Smith and Merleau-Ponty himself.

9 It seems to be a received view to attribute the aim of denouncing realism to Merleau-Ponty's first work, *La Structure du Comportement*. Cf. for example: Renaud Barbaras: *De l'être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, p. 24.

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Parcours: 1935–1951*, Paris: Verdier, 1997, p. 66.

background of the phenomenological reduction". (*PhP*, ix/xvi) Only by so doing can he return to the perceived world and disclose the primordial structure of being-in-the-world in the "direct and primitive contact with the world" (*PhP*, i/vii), i.e. in perception or primordial perceptual experience.

This methodological consideration of the phenomenological reduction largely determines the archaeological structure of *PhP*'s overall investigation¹¹. Actually, we can discern clearly in *PhP* an archaeological or descending movement from the intellectualist picture of the *detached* relation between body and world, whose elements are the universal constructing consciousness, the objective body, the objective world, the objective space and time, etc, to the existential picture of being-in-the-world, or the *communicative* relation between body and world, whose moments become the lived body as perceptual consciousness, the perceived world, the lived space and time, etc. We can thus characterize in Husserlian terms this communicative relation or the structure of being-in-the-world as an *intentional* structure,¹² where the lived body represents the *noetic* side and the perceived world the *noematic* side. Hence the archaeological investigation leading to discovery of being-in-the-world further bifurcates into two correlated inquiries: an archaeology of the lived body and that of the perceived world. We will come to see in the following that an archaeology of primordial spatiality proceeds hand-in-hand with, and hence plays an important role in, both the archaeologies of the lived body and the perceived world.

2 The spatial archaeology of the lived body

In *PhP*, Merleau-Ponty begins his spatial archaeology of the lived body in the chapter captioned as "The spatiality of the proper body and motility"¹³, whose aim is to re-discover, beneath objective spatiality and objective body, a primordial spatiality and a lived body with its original intentionality, hence to disclose "the fundamental relations between the body and space." (*PhP*, 119/117)

We have first the conception of the spatiality of the body as an external object, an objective spatiality or "spatiality of position", related to what Merleau-Ponty freely calls "external space", "objective space" and "intelligible space". (*PhP*, 116ff/115ff) We may take the intellectualist conception of Cartesian space as an example. The Cartesian space can be understood as an objective extension, an absolutely determinate being-in-itself, properly defined by its pure exteriority and entirely unfolded by a universal constructing consciousness, a Cogito or "I think" as a being-for-

11 Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l'être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, p. 59; G. B. Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. xvii, 18, and *passim*.

12 Despite this convenient characterization, we should always bear in mind that for Husserl, the intentional relation is an ideal, epistemological relation, but for Merleau-Ponty, it is a real, ontological relation. As Merleau-Ponty himself says in *Sens et non-sens*, it involves a distinction between "relationship of knowing" and "relationship of being". Cf. G. B. Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. 30, 66.

13 I prefer to translate "le corps propre" directly into "the proper body", rather than "one's own body" or "the body itself". "The body itself" seems to be the least suitable translation, since it may imply a third-person perspective.

itself. In this objective space, our body becomes nothing but a mere object among others, an objective body. Thus defined, the relation between the body and space can only be termed as “a body *in* space”, i.e. a ready-made, objective body located in determinate positions and occupying a fragment of the objective space.

However, the perceptual experience of the proper body, or our lived body, brings a different archaeological picture about spatiality. We discern in our bodily experience, not an objective spatiality or a “spatiality of position”, but a “spatiality of situation” in relation to the so-called “bodily space”, “orientated space” and “lived space”. (*PhP*, 116ff/115ff) The evidence is that the spatiality of the lived body cannot be defined by pure homogeneity and exteriority. When the lived body is engaged in a certain situation in face of its tasks, it displays various orientated distinctions, such as top and down, right and left, etc, and its parts are inter-related or enveloped in each other to fulfill its tasks. Thus bodily space can be distinguished from objective space by its necessary orientation and its ambiguity between interiority and exteriority.

If bodily space and objective space form a practical system, one may be justified in questioning which is the founding spatiality in human actions. As always in *PhP*, Merleau-Ponty uses pathological cases, functioning as something like the phenomenological reduction, to reveal the primordial experience on which the normal cases are based. With his eyes shut, the patient Schneider fails to perform abstract movements, i.e. those irrelevant to any actual situation, but manages concrete movements related to an actual situation very smoothly, even with his eyes closed. Due to his illness, although the patient fully understands an instruction with its spatial relations between different positions in an objective space, he is still unable to perform an abstract movement. If he is allowed to watch his body and make some preparatory movements so that his body can be introduced into a certain situation, and the objective spatial relations can be integrated into his bodily space, some abstract movements become possible. (*PhP*, 119ff/118ff) Thus the privileged position of concrete movements without reference to objective spatiality demonstrates the primacy of the spatiality of the lived body. The relationships between the two spatialities, according to Merleau-Ponty, comes to a “dialectic”¹⁴ of two dimensions: one is the relationship of founding and founded, the spatiality of the lived body is the founding and the objective spatiality the founded; the other is the relationship of expression and expressed, the objective spatiality is the “explicit expression” of the bodily spatiality as the expressed. (*PhP*, 118/117)

Further analyses of the spatiality of concrete movements furnish us with more archaeological achievements which prove the philosophical fecundity of the spatial archaeology of the lived body. It is sufficient here for us to numerate these achievements as follows, and leave their *argumentative reconstructions* for the future consideration:

- 1) In concrete movements, it is never our objective body, or body as object, that we move in an

¹⁴ Actually, it is a dialectic of transcendence in the sense that the objective spatiality as the higher-level structurization transcends the bodily spatiality as lower-level one, but does so only by being “founded on” or “rooted in” the latter and by using the meaning of the latter as a means of passing beyond. However, this kind of transcendence should not be confused with that of the world to the consciousness. The transcendence of the objective spatiality is an epistemological, unilateral transcendence, a passing-beyond without return, while the transcendence of the world is an ontological, reciprocal one, a passing-beyond with return, or rather, a transcendence in immanence.

objective space; rather, it is our lived body, the body as subject or as consciousness, that we move in a bodily space.

2) In these movements, our lived body is a means of access to a familiar situation, to familiar objects in a world. This *familiarity* implies that the body “understands” its world and objects without having to represent or objectify them. It communicates with them through a “*praktognosia*”, a practical knowledge, and makes possible a direct reference to the world and its objects.

3) This direct reference to the world and its objects enables us to regard our lived body as an original consciousness, and the bodily motility an original intentionality, a “bodily intentionality” or “motor intentionality”, which implies the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. Hence “consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body” (*PhP*, 161/159 –160) Expressed in Husserlian terms, the original consciousness is not the objectifying consciousness of “I think that”, but the non-objective consciousness of “I can”.

4) In every moment of its movement, our body gives its dimensions and possibilities for action to the space¹⁵, and incorporates spatial relations of its situation to perform its synthesis anew¹⁶; the origin and the instantaneous restructure of the space is thus a *response* to the body’s action towards a world. The process of communication between body and world is *simultaneously* that of mutual constitution between body and space. Thus the fundamental relation between the body and space is not “a body *in* space”, but a body “*inhabits* space” (*PhP*, 162/161) or “*of* space” (*PhP*, 173/171), i.e. they act as the necessary condition of constitution for each other, and become correlated in this constitution.

On the basis of these archaeological results, Merleau-Ponty concludes that “experience discloses beneath objective space...a *primordial spatiality* of which objective space is merely its outer covering and which *merges with the body’s very being*.” (*PhP*, 173/171, translation modified, italics ours) This clearly illustrates why an archaeology of primordial spatiality ends *precisely* with that of the lived body.

3 The spatial archaeology of the perceived world

The spatial archaeology of the perceived world does not aim to give detailed phenomenological description of the perceived world¹⁷, but tries to descend from the objective space and world to a primordial level of space and world by examining the spatial experience of the world, so that the

¹⁵ This explains the origin of the necessary orientation of the bodily space. We will come to see this point again in the spatial archaeology of the perceived world.

¹⁶ That the lived body manages to restructure itself instantaneously also explains the ambiguity between interiority and exteriority of bodily space. For these phenomena of reflexivity reveal the ambiguous status of the lived body between subject and object, and according to Merleau-ponty, only an object or objective space can be defined by the pure exteriority between its parts.

¹⁷ Actually, the phenomenological description of the perceived world is the aim of the chapter captioned as “The thing and the Natural World”, which appears after the chapter devoted to space. The natural world is the world defined within, and revealed together with the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. It should be first located through a spatial archaeology before being described.

intentional structure of being-in-the-world can be disclosed “in a more direct way.” (*PhP*, 281/283) We will explicate this *more-directness* in the following, especially in the last part of this paper.

Again, intellectualism shows us the spatial conception of an objectivist world picture: a single objective or geometrical space, which is homogenous and isotropic with its interchangeable dimensions, related to an objective world and deployed completely by a universal constructing consciousness. In this geometrical space, movement is conceived as a pure change of positions so that the objective conceptions of the identical object in motion and the pure relativity of movement become inevitable. However, in our perceptual experience of spatiality, we have perception of necessary orientation, distinct depth, pre-objective movement, etc. i.e. “the knowledge that a *disinterested* subject might acquire of the spatial relationship between objects and the geometrical characteristics” (*PhP*, 324/327, italics ours) within a perceptual field; furthermore, in the whole of our spatial experience of the perceived world, we are led further to examine every possible experience of spatiality, especially that of various anthropological spaces, i.e. the spatial experience that an obviously *interested* subject might acquire of the world or the perceptual field *itself*. These experiences bring us an archaeological picture that is different than that of the intellectualism. It is from the above two perspectives that Merleau-Ponty further proceeds with his spatial archaeology of the perceived world to a more primordial level of being-in-the-world.

First, the limited perspective of space perception. Let us take the perception of orientation as an example, because in this perspective Merleau-Ponty tries to move from different kinds of space perception to the same foundation of being-in-the-world. The perception of orientation shows that our perceptual field always has its orientation in relation to a certain spatial level. The psychological experiments of Stratton and Wertheimer (*PhP*, 282ff/284ff) tell us how this spatial level with its orientation can be re-constituted with or without motor exploration of the body as a perceiving subject, and how every constitution of a new spatial level always presupposes another pre-established level. It seems that the new spatial level, or rather, space, always originates from “the hold of the subject on his world”, and “it is of the essence of space to be always ‘already constituted’.” (*PhP*, 291/293, translation modified) After a series of archaeological or regressive arguments¹⁸, when discussing the problem concerning the origin of first spatial level and its orientation in the first perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that all the problems can be ultimately solved *only if* we presuppose that there is a primordial spatial level, which precedes the first spatial level, originating from the *primitive hold* on the world of our body as a pre-personal subject or primordial perceptual consciousness. This “primitive hold” expresses nothing but the primitive openness of human consciousness towards the world, “a communication with the world more ancient than thought.” (*PhP*, 294/296) The perceived world is primitively orientated and structured according to the possible hold that the body can have on it. Thus the existential structure of being-in-the-world is revealed as the necessary condition of our *perceptual* experience of spatiality.

Secondly, the more comprehensive perspective from the whole of our spatial experience. Since

¹⁸ Charles Taylor characterizes the whole of this series of regressive arguments as a “transcendental argument”, and questions its validity. Cf. Charles Taylor: “The validity of Transcendental Arguments”, in his *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 20ff. However, this difficult problem is far beyond the scope of this paper and can only be left for future consideration.

the experience of spatiality is related to our fixation on the world, there will always be a distinct spatiality for every possible modality of this fixation, especially the different kinds of non-perceptual spatiality of dreams, myths and schizophrenia. In order to explain the unity of experience of these anthropological or human spaces, is it necessary to presuppose a single objective space and the universal constructing consciousness, which deploys the objective space, as their necessary conditions? Merleau-ponty denounces this possibility. He argues that these spaces have no thematic or explicit meaning, but only non-thematic or implicit meaning, which cannot be thematized by the objective thought of intellectualism. The unity of experience of the human spaces can only find its basis in a “natural”¹⁹ and non-human space, a primordial spatiality which originates from the pre-conscious hold of our body as a natural subject on a natural world and which merges with the primitive structure of being-in-the-world.

We thus find again that the archaeology of primordial spatiality ends *precisely* with that of the perceived world. The fundamental structure of being-in-the-world is finally established as the necessary condition of *any* experience of spatiality.

4 Archaeology and teleology

Now we come to explicate the *systematic role* of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of space in *PhP*. In order to establish the general thesis of being-in-the-world and re-define consciousness and world in their correlation, Merleau-Ponty tries to move from their irreducible distinction to their unity as a communicative relation, i.e. from the absolute difference²⁰ of the two related terms to the unity of their inter-dependent relation. Since this reciprocal relation has been blurred and distorted to a unilateral, constructing one by the sedimented idealizations of intellectualism, he has to remove these idealizations through the archaeological inquiry and try to reveal this relation in perception as the primordial experience of being-in-the-world. Obviously, this relation cannot be found in the matter of perception, but only in the form of perception, although the traditional form-matter relation should be re-considered against empiricism and intellectualism. Space is thus introduced as “a form of perception” (*PhP*, 281/283)²¹ into the whole phenomenological project in *PhP*. This argumentative intention explains Merleau-Ponty’s persistent preference or adherence to a *relationalist* notion of space rather than the substantialist or attributionalist one²². He thus defines space as

19 In Merleau-Ponty’s terminology, “nature” has been put in opposition to both “consciousness” and “culture”. Here it is obviously used in the sense of “consciousness-nature” distinction. So “natural” means “not yet conscious” or “pre-conscious”. Cf. also: *PhP*, 294/296, 344/347.

20 That is just what the “facticity” of man and world (*PhP*, i/vii) and “the absolute certainty of the world in general” (*PhP*, 344/347) mean.

21 It seems that Merleau-Ponty at least attributes two primordial forms to the perception: space and time, and time lies in a deeper level. For a rough idea of the two forms, Cf. *PhP*, 306–307/309; the subtle difference between their argumentative roles in *PhP* still remains to be disclosed.

22 This is clearly shown by Merleau-Ponty’s rejection to define space as “a sort of ether in which all things float” or “a characteristic that they have in common” (*PhP*, 281/284), but the real difficulty lies in whether an relationalist notion of space can properly account for those experience of spatiality traditionally explained by the other two notions of space.

“the universal power enabling them [i.e. things] to be connected” (*PhP*, 281/284), or the setting of “co-existence” (*PhP*, 306/309). This definition also brings to light the rootedness of Leibnizianism in *PhP*, whose influence will become more conspicuous in *The visible and the Invisible*.²³ Hence Merleau-Ponty regards this relationalist notion of space as “the symmetrical notion” of the intentional structure of being-in-the-world. This explains why he thinks he is approaching the structure of being-in-the-world “in a more direct way by examining ...the notion of space” (*PhP*, 281/283), and why he repeatedly chooses space perception as the example of his phenomenological analysis.

Moreover, the communicative relation between the lived body as consciousness and the perceived world is not an external relation, but an internal relation of reciprocal constitution. In other words, this relation should inhere in the essential nature of the two related terms so that they are essentially defined in its correlation. It means that the relationalist space should also inhere in both the lived body and the perceived world. This explains not only the fundamental relation between body and space, or between space and world, but also the necessity of bifurcation of the spatial investigation in *PhP* into two inquiries and that of their ending with the revelation of the same primordial spatiality. Since the ascending process of objectification or idealization of the primordial structure of being-in-the-world is simultaneously that of its every moment, i.e. consciousness, body, space and world, it is not surprising that when the archaeology of spatiality proceeds from objective space to primordial spatiality in a descending movement, the correlated, parallel archaeologies of consciousness, body and world follow it correspondingly until they reach the same foundation of being-in-the-world.

These elucidations finally enable us to conclude that the role of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of space in *PhP* is in no way a *dispensable* one of only contributing examples, “a touchstone for the general theses he wants to defend”.²⁴ Quite the contrary, it has fundamental significance in the overall argumentative structure of *PhP* and is indissociably integrated into the whole structure. We have just shown that its *argumentative significance* originates precisely from the fact that space is one of the primordial expressions of our being-in-the-world²⁵, and hence structures the layout of the whole phenomenological project in *PhP* in the *primitive* sense of the word *space*, i.e. the “being-there” (l’être-là) of the things, or their appearance as things.²⁶

However, it is the same indissociable integration that explains the similarity between the limitations of his phenomenology of space and those of the whole investigation in *PhP*.²⁷ The initial positing of consciousness and world as two distinct kinds of facticity brings unbridgeable moment

23 Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, pp. 263–269, “Merleau-Ponty’s Leibnizianism”.

24 Joseph J. Kockelmans, “Merleau-Ponty on space perception and space”, in Joseph J. Kockelmans & Theodore J. Kisiel (ed.): *Phenomenology and the Natural Sciences*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 280. In our view, there is no problem about the role of “touchstone” or contributing examples. The real problem lies in what qualify them to become “examples” and whether they are dispensable.

25 Or rather, the primordial spatiality is the direct expression of the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. Also Cf. G. B. Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. 56–57.

26 Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, p. 235.

27 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–32.

into, hence threatens the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world, but Merleau-Ponty never questions the *possibility* of this structure itself. He appears to presuppose its possibility together with that of primordial spatiality or natural space. This primordial spatiality seems in *PhP* to be nothing but an ambiguity between interiority and exteriority, which is criticized later by Merleau-Ponty himself as a “bad ambiguity”²⁸ to be overcome. From this ambiguity it is hard for us to discern something positive to explain the idealization from natural space to objective space. If we can borrow the expression “teleology of consciousness”²⁹ and freely speaks of a “teleology of spatiality”, such a teleology has been destroyed by the contingency of the objective space’s being only one of the determinations of space. Actually, the rejection of intellectualism calls for a genesis of ideality of space. It seems that in *PhP* Merleau-Ponty only tells us how objective space is *not impossible*, but never makes us understood *how it is possible*.³⁰ In fact, after the period of *PhP*, he comes to realize these limitations and tries to reconsider the general problem of being-in-the-world beginning from the initial unity of body and world, i.e. from their homogeneous “flesh” or “Being”³¹. Thus he begins to question the *naturalness* as such of natural space, and to conceive a more radical archaeology to support his teleology of spatiality. The primordial spatiality will not be founded on the problematic structure of being-in-the-world, but on “the truly fundamental *arche*—Being”³². This not only explains why Merleau-Ponty returns to the philosophical interrogation of both perception and space in *Eye and Mind*, and further proceeds the archaeology of primordial spatiality to the bottom, i.e. to Being or flesh as the ultimate ground of spatiality, but also explains why, in the same work, he tries to elucidate the possibility and the genesis of Cartesian space on the basis of Being or flesh.³³

28 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty”, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, no. 4 (1962), 409. This is a statement he provided for his candidacy to the Collège de France, in which he summarizes his past works and outlines the perspectives of his future studies. English version of this statement has been incorporated into: James M. Edie (ed.): *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

29 Merleau-Ponty borrows this expression from Husserl, Cf. *PhP*, xii/xix. For its basic meaning and different usages, Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, pp. 30–33, 59–60, 83–88, and *passim*.

30 Merleau-Ponty does suggest that a “dialectical ferment” or “point-horizon structure” which inheres in the bodily space may help *transform* the bodily space into the objective space (*PhP*, 118/117), and geometrical space may originate from our *thematization* of the perceptual space without questioning its origin (*PhP*, 439ff/446ff), but he never makes us understood how this transformation or thematization is possible.

31 Cf. G. B. Madison: *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, pp. 97ff, 168ff.

32 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–72, 183–184.

33 Cf. Renaud Barbaras: *De l’être du phénomène*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1991, pp. 235ff.