

Time and Eternity: Can sacred space change perception of time?

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Prayers, rituals and meditations require a particular attitude of the individual. This particular condition is able to modify perception of reality and time's flow. This theoretical research project starts from considering that sacred space is related with the attribution of a 'centre', as theorised by Mircea Eliade. Investigating this characteristic from a psychological perspective, the act of concentration may be the means by which individuals bestow a space with sacredness. Sacred space is argued to be a human construct here and ethnographical experiences report a suspension of the flow of time in sacred space. During psychical states of concentration, the stasis of the present moment seems to dilate the perception of time. The philosophical debate on the nature of time has enlarged the complexity of the question and this paper opens further research questions to consider how different levels of concentration may affect the perception of reality and bring the individual from a profane into a sacred world.

Introduction

This essay will critically examine if sacred space can change the perception of time. The research project is placed in a context of investigation debating if sacred space can be considered a human construct. Firstly, the examination will provide a definition of the perception of time distinguishing between mechanical and subjective time. Secondly, the investigation will deal with the concept of sacred space, in particular attempting to define the attitude of people in this kind of space. Thirdly, the concept of concentration will bring the discussion onto the changing of time's perception. The attempt to provide a complete view about this topic is limited by the contested character that any attribution of sacred drags along. Moreover, the philosophical debate about the nature of time adds complexity to the analysis. This essay will consider the evidence arising from a literature review of key theorists using an ethnographical methodology based on reports of experiences in sacred space.

Mechanical and Subjective time

The flow of time on a clock moves at a steady rate and the time's unities are originally derived from sub-divisions of astronomical periods of the Earth's

motions.¹ According to Enrico Bellone, during the long evolutionary process the human being has elaborated a concept of time as an objective quantity based on the periodical cycles of days and seasons.² This conception found theoretical elaboration in Aristotle (c.384-322bce), who affirmed that time cannot be slow or fast depending on place but it is always the same.³ A contrary idea was introduced by the physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955), who elaborated the theory of relativity for which a universal time, unique for the whole universe, does not exist: each body has its own time.⁴ Since human beings remain stationary on the Earth they share the same time. Therefore clock-time is a convention established in order to have a practical and clear communication in society.⁵ For the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the clock doesn't show time but quite the contrary. For Heidegger, the reckoning of time is more precise and there is less possibility to meditate on the real essence of time.⁶ It is necessary to distinguish between mechanical time, which is the standard time reckoned by clock, and subjective time, defined as the time perceived by the individual. The philosophical debate on the real nature of time was notably influenced by Einstein's definition of time as a relative concept. Starting from an analysis on the theory of relativity, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) defined time as a relation between points and asserted that 'our own experience is governed by the proper time for our body'.⁷ Additionally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) suggested that time is not a real and objective process but has a subjective character: it is generated from the relation between human being and objects.⁸ Conversely, for Jacob Needleman, the human inner sense of time is determined by the mechanical one and acted upon obeying to its rhythms.⁹ It can be argued that perception of time by human beings is relative to a perceived connection between subject and the situation experienced. However, if the object involved in this relation is a

¹ McCarthy, Dennis D. and Kenneth P. Seidelmann, *Time: From Earth Rotation to Atomic Physics* (Weinheim: WILEY-VCH, 2009), p. 1.

² Bellone, Enrico. 'Molti Tempi' in *I Volti del Tempo*, ed. G. Giorello, E. Sindoni and C. Sinigaglia (Milano: Bompiani, 2001), pp. 95-100.

³ Aristotle, 'Fisica', *Opere*, Vol. 3, trans. A. Russo (Bari: Laterza, 1983), IV, 10, 10-18. [hereafter Aristotle, 'Fisica']

⁴ Einstein, Albert. *Relativity: The special and General Theory*, trans. R. W. Lawson (Andras Nagy, 2010), p. 20.

⁵ Bertrand Russell, *ABC of Relativity* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1925).

⁶ Heidegger, *Tempo ed essere*, ed. E. Mazzarella (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1988), p. 117.

⁷ Russell, Bertrand. *ABC of Relativity*, p. 20.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia della Percezione*, trans. A. Bonomi (Milano: Studi Bompiani, 2003 [1945]), pp. 526-352.

⁹ Needleman, Jacob. *Time and the Soul: Where Has All the Meaningful Time Gone-and We Get it Back?* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), p. 132.

clock, mechanical and subjective time will coincide. Indeed it seems that the continuous use of the clock accustoms to a notion of time as an objective and inalterable category. Whereas mechanical clock-time should be considered absolute only relative to the Earth's surface.

Perception of time

The aim of the following paragraph is to provide an analysis of time's perception in order to re-form it in a set of definitions. The psychologist Richard Block distinguished subjective time into succession, duration and temporal perspective. Succession is referred to as the perception of sequential occurrences. The second, duration, is related with the estimate of a lapse of time between two events. Finally, temporal perspective regards the distinction between past, present and future and how the individual experiences them.¹⁰ Firstly, Russell pointed out that succession depends on the time-relation between objects, since it is based on the notion of before and after. While duration and temporal perspective are related to the time-relation between subject and object.¹¹ It can be argued that the order between cause and effect may be perceived differently by different people, as Carl Gustav Jung (1842-1896) pointed out. Therefore succession may convey the relation between multiple objects and subjects, not only between objects.¹² The complexity of this discussion on succession involves the wide concepts of causality and synchronicity; this latter concept being a no known causal connection between events. Secondly the concept of duration is conceived by Henri Bergson (1859-1941) as the particular rhythm which characterizes the temporality of consciousness, or the inner reality. The elemental psychic state lasts for a specific time, although it is in perpetual becoming.¹³ For Bergson the inner life is reduced into a multiplicity of states following one another in a continuous flux and linked together by an element of static and eternal unity, since it is the substrate of any movement.¹⁴ Heidegger criticised Bergson for having defined time as a function of space, therefore failing to grasp its real essence.¹⁵ Indeed the conceptualisation of time in function of space is derived from Aristotle's assertion that time is the measure of movement. This interpretation reflects the origin of

¹⁰ Block, Richard A. 'Models of Psychological Time', *Cognitive Models of Psychological Time* (New York: Psychological Press, 2014 [1990]), p. 1.

¹¹ Russell, Bertrand. 'On the Experience of Time', *The Monist*, V. 25, 2 (1915), 212-233.

¹² Jung, Carl Gustav. *La sincronicit * (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013[1952]).

¹³ Bergson, Henri *Matter and Memory* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 75.

¹⁴ Bergson, Henri *Introduzione alla metafisica*, ed. V. Mathieu (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1987 [1934]), pp. 69-80.

¹⁵ Heidegger, Martin *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. T. Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2010 [1925/26]).

time's measurement in relation with celestial bodies' motion.¹⁶ The main difference between Block and Bergson's definitions is that Bergson interiorized duration as the fundamental element of the inner life, whereas Block considered it as the esteem of a lapse of time in respect to the duration reckoned by the clock. Following this investigation, the perception of time will be restricted in this essay, to an analysis of duration and temporal perspective: the former is defined as the perception of present time's unity in the stasis of a particular psychical state, the latter as perception of past, present and future.

Sacred Space

The aim of the following section is to provide a definition of sacred space. It is necessary to investigate when the character of sacredness is associated to a determinate space and if this quality is absolute and objective. In this essay the term 'space' firstly involves both the notion of physical place, that is a site that the individual can access materially, and any abstract dimension, like the inner world. Secondly, the notion of sacred carries many attributions suggested by scholars; like 'power' by Gerardus Van der Leeuw (1890-1950), 'holy' by Rudolph Otto (1869-1937), 'real' by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and 'eternal' by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.¹⁷ Considering these qualities and the definition given by Eliade, the sacred will be identified here with the ultimate reality from where life takes force.¹⁸ After having defined the terms, the discussion can deal with the examination of sacred space. Jonathan Zittell Smith compared sacred space to a focusing lens, since a thing becomes sacred by being looked at a special way. He claimed that 'there is nothing that is sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation'.¹⁹ In contrast Christopher Witcombe pointed out that there may be places that are intrinsically sacred due to drawing continuous worship from the earliest times.²⁰ For example, Jualynne Dodson and José Millet Batista referred the dynamicity of some sacred sites to activate an interactive collaboration between human, natural and supernatural powers, although the participants did not request it. In this case it must be considered the expectation of participants to experience something not

¹⁶ Aristotle, 'Fisica', IV, 12, 220b24-221a2.

¹⁷ Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Rudolph Otto. *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); M. Eliade. *Il Sacro e il Profano*, trans. E. Fadini (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1967); Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Eliade, Mircea *Trattato di storia delle religioni* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1988 [1948]), pp. 38-39.

¹⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual", *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 55.

²⁰ Witcombe, Christopher L. C. E. 'Sacredness' in *Sacred Places* (1998) <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredness.html> [accessed 5 January 2015].

ordinary.²¹ The evidence suggests that sacredness may seem to be an objective character of particular places, but this quality is brought into play by their historical tradition and by people's attitude towards them. Supporting this argument, Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) pointed out that the attribution of sacredness is not absolute but variable and brought into play by the characteristics of the situation.²² It can be noted that the sacred has a contested character, since every individual considered sacred a different space. Moreover, the presence at a determinate space is not enough for experiencing the holy, but involved a particular attitude of the individual, as Smith pointed out, by looking it in a special way.

Sacred space involved an act of concentration

Comparing different experiences' and reports, the analysis will now examine what this special attitude is for the individual that participates in empowering a space of sacredness. For Roger Stump the interaction between body and sacred space involves a process of "religious concentration" for example in Buddhism where the practise of mental focus is primary for achieving divine inspiration.²³ Furthermore, Stump pointed out that during prayer or meditation the mental concentration is fostered by bodily control achieved through specific poses, like kneeling for Christians or the Islamic sequence of prostrations in the Mecca's direction. According to Ian Richard Netton the repetition of prayers is ascertained in the major world religions and their aim is to obliterate distractions from the reciter's mind, and to focus concentration.²⁴ An alternative view, suggested by Elémire Zolla (1926-2002), recalled the primordial wonder of the child as necessary disposition for the sacred experience.²⁵ According to Maurice Friedman, spontaneity is the condition that Martin Buber (1878-1965) considered indispensable during a prayer and this interpretation is comparable with Galimberti's one: the genuine and naïve condition of a human being opened to the world is the origin of all transcendental experiences.²⁶ The following reports demonstrate that the ordinary attitude of the child, genuine and spontaneous, may presuppose the sacredness as 'real' but not as 'power'. The

²¹ Dodson, Jualynne E. and José Millet Batista. *Sacred Spaces and Religious Traditions in Orient Cuba* (University of New Mexico Press, 2008), pp. 67-68.

²² Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013 [1960]), p. 12.

²³ Stump, Roger W. *The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place and Space* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p. 331.

²⁴ Netton, Ian Richard. *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (Curzon Press, 2000), p. 155.

²⁵ Zolla, Elémire. *Lo stupore infantile* (Milano: Adelphi, 1994).

²⁶ Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002); Umberto Galimberti, *Il corpo* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2003), pp. 115-120.

character of sacred as 'power' is particularly evident during shamanic rituals. The description reported by Rachel Corr showed that only through a high concentration of his mind was the shaman able to receive the indications on which depended the success of the ritual.²⁷ Smith claimed that the primary rule of the sacred place is to direct attention, while the ritual is a process for emphasising interest. He asserted that 'a ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way'.²⁸ The evidence suggests that there are many prayers and rituals practised in sacred space, but the main characteristic which unifies them is to predispose mind into a state of higher concentration. Every space has the potentiality to become sacred. It depends essentially on the individual, through which a state of higher attention has the possibility to transform a profane space into sacred one.

Theorising Concentration

The aim of the following analysis is to provide a theoretical connection between the attitude to focalise attention to sacred space and the symbolism of the centre. The word 'concentration' etymologically suggests a driving together to the centre and at the same time it means to focus the attention into a single point.²⁹ For Eliade, sacred space found its maximum expression in the symbolism of the 'centre'. He pointed out that 'every human being tends, even unconsciously, towards the centre, and towards his own centre, where he can find integral reality - sacredness'.³⁰ For Eliade, reaching the centre corresponds to an initiation and it is not easy to achieve, as it represents the passage from profane to sacred, from the world of illusions to the world of reality.³¹ The symbolism of the tension towards the centre is evident both in holy cities, which are considered centres of religious faith, pilgrimage destinations like Jerusalem, and in temple architecture, such as that at the Indonesian Buddhist temple of Borobudur. In contrast Margaret Cormack argued that some sites are defined as sacred without having the quality of a centre. The exception is the Ka'ba in Mecca, which is the unique Muslim sacred centre prescribed by the Quran. All the other places of prayer can

²⁷ Corr, Rachel. *Ritual and Remembrance in the Ecuadorian Andes* (University of Arizona Press, 2010), p. 137.

²⁸ Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 103-104.

²⁹ Simpkins, Annellen M. and C. Alexander Simpkins, *Meditation and Yoga in Psychotherapy: Techniques for Clinical Practice* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), p. 107.

³⁰ Eliade. *Mircea Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 54.

³¹ Eliade, *Mircea Il Mito dell' Eterno Ritorno*, trans. by G. Cantoni (Milano: Rusconi Editore, 1975[1949]) p. 26.

be defined sacred without the concept of centrality.³² Smith challenged the Eliade's generalization by redefining the rule of this symbolism as mainly political, in other words as medium for centralizing power by religion.³³ However, it is necessary to distinguish religious rules from the spontaneous feeling of the sacred. In the case of Ka'ba, the notion of centrality is an attribution by the Islam religion that is apart from any phenomenological and individual approach to the sacred. Therefore it is possible to consider the 'centre' as symbol of sacred space. Furthermore, Simon Coleman and Jas Elsner pointed out the presence, in world religions, of trains of thought which tend to deny the power of sacred place as a material location instead collapsing it into an archetypal inner space.³⁴ According to Simone Weil in every person there is something sacred. The passage from the profane personality to the sacred and impersonal ambit is mediated by solitude in which it is possible to explore states of higher attention.³⁵ According to this interpretation, the sacred space may be also considered as an inner 'centre'. For Jung the process of self-development corresponds to the concentration of the many into wholeness. When subjective consciousness is connected with its centre then it is united with God.³⁶ It must be noted that in Jung's argument the term 'centre' is referred to a transcendental one, not a mental one, although the two can be related.

According to the Indian spiritual teacher Shri Ram Chandra (1873-1931), there are several degrees of concentration of mind. He described spiritual elevation using the metaphor of concentric circles as levels to underpass for joining the centre, which is the final and highest state of liberation possible.³⁷ In the experience of Lauren Artress the labyrinth is an archetype of the interior world and is the perfect place for practising concentration. She repeats a phrase during the walk until the spiral pattern takes her into the deep silence of the inner centre.³⁸ The evidence suggests that it is possible to consider sacred space as centre because not only concentration is fostered in sacred space, but the act of

³² Cormack, Margaret *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 8-30.

³³ Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place*, pp. 14-17.

³⁴ Coleman, S. and J. Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 208.

³⁵ Weil, Simone. *La persona e il sacro*, ed. M. C. Sala (Milano: Adelphi, 2012 [1957]), pp. 11-25.

³⁶ Jung, Carl Gustav. *Jung on Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 139-140.

³⁷ Chandra, Shri Ram. *Realtà all'alba* (Napoli: Shri Ram Chandra Mission Italia, 1988), p. 29-42.

³⁸ Lauren Artress, *The Sacred Path Companion: A Guide to Walking the Labyrinth to Heal and Transform* (New York: Penguin, 2006). [Hereafter: Chandra, Shri Ram.]

mental focus and attention on an inner centre can also be considered an experience of sacred space.

Concentration corresponds to a suspension of time

Now the investigation will look at concentration as a state of no movement and the effect this has on time's perception. According to Aristotle the perception of immobility or no-changing inside the human soul corresponds to the perception that time is not passing, since for him time and movement are strictly related.³⁹ Chandra asserted that to reach the point of complete negation of movement it is necessary to fix the mind upon a sacred mode of thinking. It can then be noted that a temporal suspension of the activity of mind has occurred.⁴⁰ For the psychologist Theodule Armand Ribot (1839-1916), attention is a psychical state of fixity and it is in contradiction with the natural state of changing of mind.⁴¹ Regarding the dynamism of mind, this state was defined as natural by Ribot but it might be conceived as ordinary, or even profane.

If sacred is related to fixity, profane might be associate with movement. Looking at some subjective experiences, Thomas Johnson-Medland wrote that in sacred space 'time slowed down and stood still long enough for me to become transformed'.⁴² Comparing the heart to an hourglass, Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) perceived the moment of sacredness as similar to the sand that, having finished to flow, rests: the same way the heart stops to beat.⁴³ During her contemplations at the seaside, Rachel Carson referred to a moment of suspension of time that matched with the sensation of a special understanding of essence of the animal she was looking at.⁴⁴ These previous experiences report a suspension of the flow of time in sacred space. If concentration is a state of fixity, time is perceived as resting because there is no movement in the mind. Like every motion before stopping needs to reduce speed, the intermediate state before the perception of time is suspended may also be the perception of a slowdown of time.

³⁹ Aristotle, 'Fisica', IV, 11, 22-35.

⁴⁰ Chandra, Shri Ram. *Realtà all'alba*, p. 29-42.

⁴¹ Ribot, Theodule Armand. *The Psychology of Attention* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1903), pp. 2-3.

⁴² Johnson-Medland, N. Thomas. *Cairn-Space: Poems, Prayers, and Mindful Amblings about the Places We Set Aside for Meaning, Prayer, and the Sacramental Life in the New Monasticism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), p. 6.

⁴³ Unamuno, Miguel de. *Inquietudini e Meditazioni*, ed. E. Cellini (Soveria Manelli: Rubettino Editore, 2007 [1915]), pp. 109-111.

⁴⁴ Carson, Rachel. *The Edge of the Sea* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998), p. 5.

Perception of duration during concentration

The next question is whether concentration may change perception of duration. Thomas Rowland reported that athletes can perceive extensions of time during sport performances and for some of these athletes the slowing of time is associated with a state of high concentration.⁴⁵ For example, regarding playing tennis, Timothy Gallwey stated that ‘concentration seemed to slow time down’ so by focusing intensely on the pattern made by the ball, it appears to move slower.⁴⁶ In contrast, Susan McFadden and Robert Atchley argued having an object on which to focus attention can speed up the flow of time’s perception, whereas if unfocused the individual experiences boredom and time appears expanded.⁴⁷ It can be argued that the emotional state of the individual may change the perception of time experienced, since it changes the intensity of the attention. For example, in a state of arousal and excitement attention may be higher. Apart from the emotional state of the subject, Eric Franklin claimed that concentration lengthens time because the brain has the opportunity to learn more about a determinate object or event compared to being in a state of distraction.⁴⁸ This explanation is confirmed by the experience of Artress, who suggested that concentration is associated with the slowing down of thoughts and within the labyrinth time seems to disappear. A new world appeared and she started to be aware of memories and emotions she never paid attention to in the ordinary world.⁴⁹ Another interpretation is given by Pepper Lewis, who conceived of time as a vehicle of energy which can be manipulated, expanded and contracted as necessary. This vehicle can go quickly or slowly and move in any direction but the ability to manipulate time increases proportionally with individual’s awareness.⁵⁰ Lewis did not give any further explanation on how to “manipulate” time. Moreover, some accounts of pilgrimage support Franklin’s statement. In her account on travelers’ experiences on the Spanish route of pilgrimage towards Santiago de Compostela, Nancy Frey underlined that the walking is combined with a new way of perceiving the world. Regarding the pilgrims she recounted

⁴⁵ Rowland, Thomas. *The Athlete’s Clock, How Biology and Time Affect Sport Performance* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2011), pp. 146-147.

⁴⁶ Gallwey, W. Timothy. *The Inner Game of Tennis: The classic guide to the mental side of peak performance* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2015[1975]), pp. 79-90.

⁴⁷ Mc Fadden, Susan and Robert Atchley. *Aging and the Meaning of Time: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2006)

⁴⁸ Eric N. Franklin, *Dynamic Alignment through Imagery* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2012) p. 84.

⁴⁹ Artress, Lauren. *The Sacred Path Companion*.

⁵⁰ Lewis, Pepper. *Gaia Speaks: Sacred Earth Wisdom* (Flagstaff: Light Technology Publishing, 2005), pp. 320-324.

that 'they develop a changing sense of time' and a 'here and now' awareness of their body.⁵¹ The mode of travelling itself, by foot or bicycle, constitutes the sacredness of the journey and the slowing down motion permits a greater attention in being aware of the world around. Actually Diego Fusaro explained that hurry is characterised by nihilism, a vacuum in finding a sense of human existence, and distraction, the enemy of concentration.⁵² The evidence suggests that concentration seems to lengthen time in the sense that the information received by the brain is more in quality and fineness: this process is similar to the result of a view of the surrounding environment during a slow walk compared to a train journey.

Temporal Perspective during concentration

Finally I will examine how temporal perspective, in other words the perception of past, present and future, changes in a state of concentration. In the experience of De Unamuno, during the sacred hour after the sunset the present is vanished and all becomes past and at the same time future: the soul is transformed in total understanding of the pure memory.⁵³ Differently for Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) not the present but the past and the future are vanished. He claimed that the individual must be without before and after to receive the highest truth. The 'Eternal Now' should be empty and free from reminiscence and images to be receptive to the divine gift.⁵⁴ These previous citations can be unified by the sentences of the poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), who spoke about 'the point where all times are present' (my translation), conceiving the sacred as an eternal dimension.⁵⁵ Therefore, in sacred space the distinction between past, present and future ceases to be valid. But in the temporality of the mind there can be one time possible for experiencing the sacred, as Guido Saraceni claimed. Concentration is an act of exclusion for to live in the present moment it is necessary to exclude memories of the past and images of the future.⁵⁶ Indeed Saint Augustine explained that there are 'three times' but all are connected with the present. The times of memory, direct experience and expectation can only

⁵¹ Frey, Nancy Louise *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 72-73.

⁵² Fusaro, Diego *Essere senza Tempo* (Milano: Bompiani, 2010).

⁵³ Unamuno, Miguel de. *Inquietudini e Meditazioni*, pp. 109-111.

⁵⁴ Eckhart, Johannes. *Meister Eckhart's Sermons*, trans. By C. Field (London: H. R. Allenson, 1909), p. 17.

⁵⁵ Alighieri, Dante 'Paradiso' in *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by D. Mattalia (Milano: Rizzoli Editore, 1984[1555]) XVII, 17-18; ('il punto a cui tutti li tempi son presenti').

⁵⁶ Saraceni, Guido. 'Durata, Evoluzione e Creazione. Appunti in margine alla filosofia di Bergson' in *Darwinismo e problemi di giustizia*, ed. by F. D'Agostino (Roma: Giuffrè Editore, 2008), p.120.

happen at the present time.⁵⁷ This implies that concentration can only happen in the present, although it permits the connection of past, present and future as a single entity. Indeed the Islamic Sufi mystics are named 'the sons of the present moment' suggesting a reduction of temporal perspective to the present moment.⁵⁸ For Nasr, the present is humanity's most precious gift. It is the door of access where eternity and time meet: it is characterised by contemplation, faith and joy.⁵⁹ In contrast, for the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) the present is tied to pleasure, while salvation is connected with a projection in the future.⁶⁰ Baudelaire appears to be in line with the tension toward the future which seems to characterise his historical period. Similarly, Andrea Tagliapietra defined the world as 'future-centered' inheriting from the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution a model of acceleration of history characterized by fast production of material goods, science and technique where the actual world tends to accelerate time.⁶¹ For Frey the choice of post-modern pilgrims to move by foot or bicycle represents a challenge to the rushing lifestyle of the mechanized modern world.⁶² Therefore the tension towards future corresponds to a profane tendency, since concentration is limited by hurry. The evidence suggests that the temporal perspective during concentration is focalized on the present: it becomes the fundamental time of the sacred experience. Furthermore, in sacred space past, present and future tend to become a single unity.

Conclusion

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of the essay, this study has deduced that in sacred space the perception of time can change because the individual tends to focus their concentration. This paper has argued that sacred space is a human construct, since the quality of sacredness attributed to a space depends on the human's attitude. According to theorists, sacred space can be considered a centre and therefore the act of concentration, which is to direct attention towards a centre, may be considered an experience of sacred space.

⁵⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, ed. by C. Carena (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1995), XI, XXVI 33.

⁵⁸ Schuon, Frithjof. *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence. A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. M. Perry, J. P. Lafouge and J. S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred: Revisioning Academic Accountability* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 222-226.

⁶⁰ Baudelaire, Charles. *Giornale Intimo*, ed. by O. Giordano (Lanciano R. Carabba Editore [no date]), p. 86.

⁶¹ Tagliapietra, Andrea. 'Prefazione' in Diego Fusaro, *Essere senza Tempo* (Milano: Bompiani, 2010), pp. 9-19.

⁶² Frey, Nancy Louise. *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 72-73.

Moreover, testimonies reported that in sacred space concentration is higher so that it seems to suspend time, since it is experienced as a state of fixity of the mind. Concentration can happen only in the present moment and has the potentiality to slow time down and increase comprehension. In conclusion, on approaching a sacred space the individual's perception of time is affected by virtue of their proper attention upon it.

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