
Place and Conflicting Powers in David Greig's The Architect

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ABSTRACT:

There is a reciprocal connection between a place and its inhabitants who attempt to shape it according to their aspirations and needs. This may result in the emergence of conflicting powers that struggle to control the place and decide its policies that, in return, affect people's lives and careers. This paper focuses on David Greig's *The Architect*. The play is concerned with the conflict between Leo Black, an architect who is commissioned by the government to design Eden Court, and the tenants of the building who are represented by Sheena Mackie. The setting symbolizes Scotland and Sheena Mackie and the tenants represent the new generation in Scotland and their aspiration for change. The play will be telescoped through the lenses of the Thirdspace theory by the American theorist Edward Soja (1940-2015). According to his theory, space is classified into three levels: the first space which represents reality as it is, the second space that embraces people's perspectives about the place they occupy, and the thirdspace which combines both of the above-mentioned spaces. The purpose of the study is to show how a place can be determined by the power that succeeds in envisioning a third space combining first and second spaces.

Keywords: place, conflicting powers, old and new generation, imagination and reality.

Introduction

David Greig is one of the prolific Scottish playwrights. He was born in Edinburgh 1969, brought up in Nigeria, and studied drama at Bristol university. He is known for his involvement in issues related to place. He thoroughly highlights this issue in most of his dramatic writings. Due to his father's profession in construction, he and his family experienced frequent transitions which gave him, consequently, a sense of criticism upon issues related to place and

watered his fondness for travelling worldwide. His play *The Architect* (1996) narrates the story of Leo Black, a talented architect, who is torn between his expectations about his building of “Eden Court” which was built during certain governmental policies, and the inhabitants of his building who suffer from ill services and decide to demolish it to be replaced with new and modern one. The two opposite forces are represented by Leo and Sheena Mackie, the representative of Eden’s inhabitants, who stand as rivals and only one force should prevail after all. Leo’s Eden Court represents a utopian city which should last forever. He cannot sustain the idea of demolishing it. On the other hand, Sheena is the new force that will make the radical change and give Eden’s inhabitants an opportunity to begin a new chapter in their life that they really deserve.

According to Edward Soja’s theory of the Thirdspace, space is classified into three levels, the firstspace which introduces reality as it is with all its old and deeply-rooted traditions, the secondspace embraces the perspectives of people about the place they occupy, and the thirdspace interlinks both first and secondspace to formulate a new perception that aims at bettering man’s life. Leo is trapped in his secondspace and doesn’t give himself an opportunity to experience something new which may change his life. Sheena, in contrast to him, steps forward and reaches the thirdspace by demolishing Eden Court. She sees a better future yet to come and thinks objectively not subjectively.

Place and Conflicting Powers

David Greig’s *The Architect* examines the impact of place upon people’s lives; place has a vital role in formulating different life styles by imposing its politics on people and their professions. *The Architect* (1996) was first performed at the Traverse Theater, Edinburgh. The play intensifies the relationship between place and its inhabitants. Furthermore, it explores the gap between reality and the imagined world represented by the protagonist Leo Black and his vision of his construction, Eden Court, which has been praised by the government but despised by its residents.

The play is set in a place resembling Edinburgh. It underpins Greig’s endeavors to shed light on the architect's vision of reality and the influence of place on it. Furthermore, the play explores human relationships in vertical building blocks and the extent to which urbanization affects people’s lives.

During the late 20th and early 21st century, a rage wave of development spread across Britain. The government depended mainly on housing and property to enrich its economy. It purchased shopping centers and skyscrapers as best notion to reflect urbanism and modernity. Individuals and society were mainly determined by

technological advancement that has been accelerated in the 21st century. Their notion of place has been reshaped accordingly and, in its turn, shaped their practices (Nur, 2021).

Spatiality and place are irreducible. They strongly formulate each part of man's life because to have a thought is to have a place and whatever practices man does need to occupy a place such as moving, communicating, and behaving. Among the practices that are strongly influenced by place are professions. Architecture has a specific significance in this respect as it uniquely interacts with space. David Harvey, a British geographer, in his book *Spaces of Hope* (2000), believes that:

The architect shapes spaces so as to give them social utility as well as human and aesthetic/ symbolic meanings. The architect shapes and preserves long-term social memories and strives to give material form to the longings and desires of individuals and collectiveness. The architect struggles to open spaces for new possibilities, for future forms of social life. (p. 200)

In post-WWII, the world witnessed a fast process of tower blocks construction. But, these blocks did not last long as they became notorious for their bad conditions, poverty, and crime, reflecting the failure of public housing. The modern buildings of Le Corbusier, a Swiss-French architect, designer, and pioneer of modern architecture, became the standard after which many designs were built. There were not only tower blocks for residence but also for schools, shopping centers, and transport terminals (Martin, 2014, p. 5).

In Scotland, urbanization created the problem of overcrowding and slum housing. To settle this problem, the British government moved people from crowded city centers into new towns that became dominated by tower blocks construction due to land scarcity. Tower blocks were uncomfortable and unsuitable for families. However, it was welcomed by many, being a better substitute for crowded slums. This act of state intervention comes to be metaphoric of patriarchal authority whose challenges had been culminating till they reached their peak in the 1990s when Scotland witnessed advancement in economy and the opening of the Scottish parliament (Modern Scotland, 2014).

The public housing in Britain is elaborately tackled in the final chapter of Miles Glendinnig and Stefan Muthesis's *Tower Block* (1994) "Utopia on Trial". They state:

a plea, at least to historian, to stand back from the endless clashing of utopias of housing ... If it is proper to speak of any kind of 'failure' or 'blame' in respect to Modern housing, then to our view the major 'culprit' must be the polarization of utopia itself. (p. 327)

This chapter highlights Margret Thatcher ideology concerning public housing and tower building. Thatcher believed that the individual should depend on her/his own potentialities to better life instead of depending on governmental support. As a result, she reduced an excessive government interference in the economy including privatization of state enterprises, sale of public housing to tenants, and other social services in the fields of education and health care. On terms of such policy, an enormous increase of unemployment occurred from 1.3 million in 1979 to more than double two years later reaching to more than three millions in 1986 (Young, 2022). Regardless of any negative aspects of her ideologies, her objection to the strategy of governmental interference in residential projects denotes the dynamics of changing place politics that create spatial map not characterized by tower blocks designs, a matter not grasped by Grieg's architect, Leo Black.

Leo is the protagonist of the play, a creative and smart architect who adores his career and feels very proud of the outcomes of his creativity regardless of what kind of buildings they are or to which extent they can provide its inhabitants with the services they need. Law was inspired by the building of Stonehenge which represented the best architectural design in England and one of the masterpieces that was built before the wave of development and industrialization with simple tools and stones of different sizes. However, Stonehenge is free of inhabitants, whereas Eden is built to accommodate people. Leo is hired by the governmental orders to execute the project with poor services. However, deep inside, he is motivated to build his Eden to fulfil his imagination and talent (Nur, 2021).

Leo believes that architecture is a very powerful and effective profession since an architect by his maps and designs can transfer any space into a significant place. Architecture is not like any other professions which don't make a difference in a selected area. Therefore, he advises his son, Martin, to be also an architect in the future because this job mirrors the civilization of any place in the world. He explains this tendency and his superiority in the following lines:

Now, building, construction, engineering, architecture. These have effects. Here you have responsibility. Obviously you can dream, use your imagination, of course but there's a purpose. You put your dreams on paper... blueprints, drawings. The smallest line, the merest gesture of the pencil can be the curve of a motorway flyover, or pull a tower up from the slums, or shape a square from a mess of alleys. That's what we do, Martin, we dream these structures and then. (95-96)

Leo believes that an architect has an elevated position since he can transform a deserted place into an inhabited one, determine people's life, and have a magical touch to change the world around. That's why he prefers his son, Martin, to be an architect as well. He thinks that Eden Court stands as a utopian city, an everlasting building, and a compass by which individuals must adjust their lives accordingly not vice versa. Being unaware of the changing place politics and the loosening of the patriarchal grip of the government on construction projects and so proud of his career and designs, he is astonished when Sheena Mackie, the representative of Eden Court's tenants, asks his permission to knock down the building as it is built after governmental agreement in a time to serve a lack of residential shelters by building ill-constructed ones (Nur, 2021).

Theoretically speaking, the significance of place and space is highlighted by Edward William Soja's (1940-2015) theory of the Thirdspace (1996) which classifies space into three parts: the first can be perceived directly on an everyday basis and the second focuses on spatial imagination, which means that it deals with subjective views on material concepts of life. People who use the second space always want to change the world in a way to match their desire. Some critics say that both the first and second are interlinked to the extent that one cannot differentiate which is which. In this respect, the imagined world becomes real and the material one is a dead signifier. The thirdspace, on the other hand, combines both and reconstructs them into an ontological way (Soja, 1996, p. 3).

The Architect can be discussed according to Soja's Theory of Thirdspace in which the real and the imagined are interwoven. According to Soja's perception of space, Leo's image of Eden Court stands for the second space. It represents the utopian city in his imagination, blueprint, but it is refracted when entering an angle of view grasping the reality of the first space. Sheena has a full perception of the first space and determination to change its ugly reality and replace it with one more suitable to support the tenants with comfortable life. She realizes that Leo's project cannot afford the tenants with the option to live happily. She confronts Leo with the reality of the construction that he considers to be the most significant building he has ever designed, insisting that it must be knocked down. This leads to the deconstruction of Leo's image in the play. Hence, Sheena takes a step forward towards the thirdspace. This is illustrated in the following speech by Sheena:

Mr. Black, we just want houses. We've been in Eden Court, some of us, for twenty years. This isn't a new problem. We've tried but things have gone too far now. We're not interested in plastering

over the cracks any more. We want to live in proper houses, decently built. (106)

She addresses Leo informing him about the ill conditions the inhabitants suffer from in such a decayed building with cracked walls. What Leo thinks of his building as a strong and an everlasting construction is no longer there with the wave of development and passage of time. He regards his building as that of Stonehenge.

Dorothy The models aren't supposed to be realistic. They're impressions.

Leo The original design was, in fact, loosely based on Stonehenge.

Paulina I didn't think anyone lived in Stonehenge.

Leo Standing stones were the inspiration. (164)

Thus, Sheena has a future vision that deconstructs Leo's old-fashioned conception of space. Leo's imagination is too limited to go beyond the standards of an outdated governmental approach. He clings to fallacies caused by his past achievements, whereas Sheena adopts the priority of the group over the individual and all her intention is directed to better others' lives. She argues with Leo saying; "boxes piled one on top of the other and we're stuffed in them like exhibits. You weren't asked to design houses, you were asked to house people, there's a world of difference" (167).

Sheena's point that what matters is to house people not to build houses overcomes Leo's own dream in maintaining Eden Court and refutes his fallacies regarding his profession. He believes that the architect profession carries a deep responsibility but it is not the architect to blame if the building cannot fulfil all the requirements because he does so according to governmental contract which has an upper hand to impose authority over social restrictions. He tells Paulina, his wife, about Sheena's endeavor to deconstruct Eden Court which formulates a disastrous act according to him. His wife cannot share him the pain and sorrow and he feels as if she is in distance from him and talks in something else away from the main point he raises. This notion is illustrated in the following conversation:

Leo You remember Eden Court? Paulina? The housing estate I did... for the council...⁷¹ I think, feels like yesterday of course, Martin was just born. A woman came to me today. She wants it blown up.

Paulina Are you having an affair?

Leo No. No. I haven't Paulina. No. For God's sake. I was talking about work. I said they want to demolish Eden Court. (121)

Then Paulina shifts to talk about the grape juice and how it is made. She feels disgusted of how he drinks the wine and it is made in such a dirty process. He answers: "It's a typical attitude, of course. Blame the architect. People are poor. Blame the architect. Place is a

slum, blame the architect. They fill a place with pigs and then complain it's turned into a pigsty" (122).

It's clear that Leo sees things differently. Paulina is much concerned with mini details which are worthless according to Leo. She starts to comment about the etiquette of table manners which is fake and doesn't reflect reality and truth. He behaves spontaneously without any artificiality. He adds: "I never understand the point of table manners you know. Fork this side, fork that side. It's all class. There is no beauty in it. No truth. Do you know, in some countries, if you are enjoying a meal, it's considered polite to belch" (122).

In his book *Spaces of Hope*, David Harvey stresses the importance of the architect profession in maintaining heritage or statues which play a vital role in the history of a nation by mentioning that the architect can preserve long-term social memories and open new possibilities and hopes to change the future of social life (Harvey, 2000, p.200). What has been mentioned by Harvey cannot be applied to what has been done by Leo when designing Eden Court, a short-term building which serves governmental needs during a limited period of time; the tenant can no longer live a healthy life in a decayed and cracked building like it. Currently, he aspires to preserve it only because it appeals to him. He succeeds neither in maintaining a national heritage nor in promising better future opportunities and hope for social improvement. Harvey's ideas instead are echoed in Sheena's concept that the architect's profession covers bigger responsibilities than mere designs.

Fredric Jameson, a Professor and Chair of the Literature Program at Duke University, in his book *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, believes that any place in the world is open to change according to what kind of ups or downs that the country may pass through with different dynamics and development during postmodernism. In other words, the emergence of new lifestyle resulted from collective struggle which, in return, launches new social system (Jameson, 2013, p.2). Leo is so immersed in his nostalgia for the past glory of his career and how powerful he was that he is entrapped in a static state preventing him from coping with the process of change that a successful architect needs to follow.

Whereas Leo stands for the diminished and faded governmental power, Sheena metaphorically occupies the task of the new architect who wants to organize and better her and her community's life. She is the new wave of development recommended by Greig.

Greig highlights the jarring disparity between the opposite views of Leo and Sheena by molding dialogue using a Brechtian technique that allows characters to talk at the same time in a non-

linear scenes in order not to make the spectator anticipate what is going on onstage (Basuki, 2002). Leo and Sheena's dialogue is confused by Martin's utterances:

Leo I don't follow this, Mrs. Mackie. This petition you've got here. This correspondence. It's been sorted out. The council have spoken to me about the Eden Court flats. I've talked to them about it. They're going to refurbish them . . . I've sent designs . . . I don't see what you're getting at.

Martin Martin Sheen maybe.

Sheena You didn't know?

Leo No.

Sheena I'm not sure how to say this. The problem is . . . we. . . I mean, us, the tenants . . . we don't want the flats refurbished.

Martin Martin Luther King.

Leo But they need work. Some of those blocks haven't been maintained for years.

Martin Martina Navratilova.

Leo I told the housing executive. They'll fall apart if work isn't done on them soon. The surveyor's report was – Martin, don't do that!
(105)

This makes the audience struggle to capture Leo's and Sheena's points of argument. Each is keen to say what is on her/his mind, believing it to be true. This reflects that they belong to different spaces: the realm of reality and the imaginative sphere. Using this technique from epic theatre is suggestive as one of the significant characteristics of epic theater is to shed light on reality and imagination as well as to criticize political and social illnesses. Stephen Unwin stresses Brechtian call for "giving voice to the working class, let them do the necessary changes needed, and bettering their social position" (43). This feature of epic theatre is adapted by Greig to show social dichotomies, the way of living between classes, and how each belongs to a separate world that doesn't know what types of unrest the other world suffers from. Sheena stands for reality and the mouthpiece of Eden Court's tenants who represent the majority, while Leo reflects imaginative side of the elite.

Leo's delusion that restoring Eden Court to good repair can solve the problem does not reconcile with Sheena's idea of demolishing it. He is aware of the irritation in Eden Court and he believes that it only needs some makeovers to be more comfortable to its inhabitant. He is totally concerned with defending his design:

Leo There's nothing wrong with the design. . . .

Sheena Most of the flats are infested with cockroaches.

Leo There wasn't enough money spent on them at the time. . . .

But if the council are prepared to spend the money now, I don't see the need for destruction. (108)

This focus on Leo's self-delusion also highlights his alienation. From a psychological point of view, the idea of being alienated is introduced by Bill Brown, an American professor at the University of Chicago, under the term of *Selva oscura* (dark wood) which embraces the idea of being alienated in one's own world. The term 'Selva oscura' is encapsulated by Dante's *The Divine comedy* (1320) which adopts the experience of being alienated and exiled and how he succeeds in combining the real and imagined vision to introduce such a great literary piece (as cited in Tally, 2013, p.10).

The concept of the dark wood is reflected through the character of Leo who eventually commits suicide due to his alienation from not only his city but also his family: he is detached from his wife Paulina who is fed up with his nostalgia to the past; he treats both of his children, Martin and Dorothy, as strangers: he wants to impose his interest in architecture on his son Martin neglecting his ambition or what kinds of hobbies he has and his relation with his supportive daughter Dorothy is on tension although she is his secretary. As if boundaries have been built between him and the world around because he represents the old-fashioned mentality. He fails as a husband, a father and an architect.

His alienation from his place is overemphasized by his attitude towards Eden Court which he considers as the icon of his success regardless of the rottenness and lack of services in the building. According to Soja's *Thirdspace*, Leo couldn't be able to reach the thirdspace and accept the idea of introducing something new to cope with the development around, on the contrary he sticks to his blueprint, his second space.

In contrast to Leo, Sheena launches her journey to capture the thirdspace from the point of her closeness to reality. She highlights the importance of the building and its symmetrical design. Still, it is time to deconstruct it. Grieg intensifies the idea of the power of place inhabitants by the way Sheena talks about the individuals rights to determine which is better to be listened to, the house or housing, the designer or inhabitant in the following speech: "architecture's for the people who pay. Always. All we want to do is take control. It's not about good or bad Buildings. it's about who decides. Don't we have the right to not like good buildings? You do" (167).

As being one of Eden Court's tenant, she observes everything and realizes the defects the building suffers from. In a long speech, she dismantles the construction of Eden and stresses that the building is just like cards. It is fabulous from outer look and goes in harmony with the advancement in the place, but at the same time, it lacks the

inner correlation with its inhabitants due to ill services. Urbanism helps governmental contractors to achieve their goals by constructing buildings with cheap materials and bad supervision within short periods. And, it makes working classes lose their work by using instruments instead of their handwork as shown in the following lines:

Sheena Watching over the city's front door. And then the front door closed. Containers. You know the containers you put on ships, on lorries... As soon as they invented containers there was no need for docks in the city centre. No need for dockers. A port and a motorway's all you need. The crane lifts the box out of the ship and onto the back of the truck. Done. So the dockers and sailors lost their jobs and you got yours ... making museums and restaurants out of warehouses and whisky bonds. Even the tarts moved inland. All that got left here was people who were stuck. Stuck in boxes on the dockside waiting to be picked up. Hoping someone's going to stop for us and take us with them. (186)

Bill Richardson's *Spatiality and Symbolic Expression* differentiates between what is abstract and what is concrete. He believes that abstraction refers to the philosophical inclinations about space which determine human spatiality with the widest and broadest dimensions of space and place. Whereas, concreteness assures what are connected with physical entities and objects that surround human beings (Richardson, 2015, p.3). That is to say, there is a movement or shift from individuality to collectiveness and that goes with Greig's attempts at conceptualizing Leo and Sheena's views of Eden Court in *The Architect*: Leo stands for individuality and the abstract philosophy of space by which he determines his work of Eden to be the perfect design in the city as that of Stonehenge in England. He concentrates on the appearance of his design and rejects the ill construction of it. His individual view is dismantled since the group's view prevails over the individual's. On the other hand, Sheena stands for collective consciousness; she is concerned with the bad services of Eden Court and the sufferings of its inhabitants and wants to be the iron fist to accomplish a better life.

Sheena and the inhabitants of Eden Court play a great role and represent the new spirit by which new tendencies and connotations appear to the surface. Furthermore, they orchestrate the new power of Scottish community to get separated from great Britain. In an attempt to deliver his message, Greig introduces Sheena as a revolutionary character who rejects the old-imposed governmental patriarchal rules and paves the way to spark a new wave of modernity and change. In other words, Sheena perceives the first space as it is through her own experience and pays attention to the other views of the tenants and how they can perceive Eden. So, she observes through the lens of

others, then she gets the thirdspace through which she decides, on behalf of others, to get the petition and knock down Eden.

The utopian image established by Leo vanishes even from his imagination in the long run. He thinks that Eden is a symbol of perfection, but realizes then that it will be demolished sooner or later. He has uselessly tried to give a blind eye to the weakness of the construction of Eden to protect his career and ambition by giving priorities to his personal tendencies on one hand and to fulfil the patriarchal governmental power on the other. Leo occupies an elevated place in the city, but the changes, in terms to what has been stated by Sheena, turn everything upside down and make him decide to leave the city. He says: “We’ll get out of the city. Paulina. A village somewhere. We’ll do up a house or something. I’ll work from the attic. Get back to the original us ... all of us ... You, me, Dorothy, Martin” (136).

This speech intensifies Law’s inclination to leave his city and go somewhere where he and his family can live peacefully and simply by choosing a village, meaning that he determines to stick to his past and avoid the development and progression in the city and practices his profession from an attic. Despite the fact that Leo decides to travel and starts a new beginning, he could not fulfil his decision or keep his word to live in distance. He is imprisoned in a struggle that paralyzes him from doing so as he could not sustain the idea of his failure and, in some way, he realizes that his building must be demolished according to the changes that have taken place around. This attitude strikes him and leads to his suicide. Apparently, Leo could not reach the thirdspace according to Soja’s theory and trapped in the secondspace where he doesn’t want his building to be corrupted or destroyed in order to maintain his perfect image as a talented and professional architect.

Leo realizes the big mistake he has done and acknowledges that Eden Court is not the utopian place; he was obliged to be in a hurry while building it because people want to settle at their houses. The radical change which covers Britain obliges every single individual to be flexible and ready to any drastic change that may occur. Despite the governmental power to determine everything, people’s consciousness prevails and that is the first step used by Greig to mirror the separation of Scotland from Great Britain to begin a new and strong start.

By stressing all the previous mentioned facts, Greig wants to interlink them with issues raised in his play. The tower blocks constructed by Leo represent the middle class that has been alienated in remote areas away from the city center where Leo and his family live luxuriously. This reflects a kind of class distinction raised by

upper governmental powers that lay control over individuals neglecting all their sufferings and bad conditions. The act of solidarity adopted by Eden tenants and their representative Sheena becomes the magic key with which doors of freedom from these powers are opened. Demolishing Eden Court and Black's catastrophic end symbolize the near end of those powers (Martin, 2014, p. 2). Hence, Greig wants to picturize a new life that will come up to diminish and erase all old leaves and produce new ones with larger terminologies by introducing the character of Sheena (Martin, 2014, p. 9).

Conclusion

David Greig presents Leo Black, a talented architect, who could not acknowledge the hasty political and social changes the country witnesses and remains in his blueprint sphere. Although he is professional enough to establish Eden Court, the building does not remain a suitable place with the passage of time and decaying factors. He could not realize that it is turned into wreck and an urgent case to be demolished. The conflicting powers are embodied through Leo and Sheena. Both struggle to accomplish success but Sheena's determination and responsibility to make a radical change prevail eventually. Leo's nostalgic spirit and confinement to the past prevent him to cope with his surrounding and lead to his downfall. There must be a connection and harmony between a place with its policies and requirements and any profession to achieve success.

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المكان والقوى المتصارعة في مسرحية " المعماري " لديفيد كريغ

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المُستخلص:

ان للمكان ارتباطاً متبادلاً مع ساكنيه الذين يرومون الى تغييره تبعاً لاحتياجاتهم ومتطلباتهم. وهذا بدوره سيؤدي الى بزوغ قوى متصارعة تهدف الى السيطرة على المكان وسياسته والتي تؤثر على حياة الناس والمهن التي يزاولونها. يركز هذا المشروع على مسرحية " المعماري " للكاتب ديفيد كريغ، حيث تستعرض المسرحية الصراع بين ليو بلاك، وهو معماري انيطت له مهمة حكومية من خلال تصميم مبنى سكني يعرف بـ ايدن كورت، وبين سكان المبنى الذين تمثلهم شينا مكي.

يرمز المكان من ناحية الى إسكتلندا ومن ناحية اخرى ترمز شينا ومستأجري المبنى الى الجيل الجديد في إسكتلندا ورغبته بالتغيير. فيما يخص الإطار النظري، تخضع الدراسة الى نظرية الفضاء الثالث للمنظر الاميركي ادوارد سوجا (١٩٤٠-٢٠١٥). ووفقاً لهذه النظرية يقسم المكان الى ثلاثة مستويات: الفضاء الاول الذي يمثل الحقيقة كما هي والفضاء الثاني الذي يضم مفهوم الافراد للمكان الذي يشغلونه والفضاء الثالث يجمع ما بين الفضاء الاول والثاني. تهدف الدراسة الى توضيح كيف يمكن للمكان ان تحكمه القوة التي تنجح في تصور الفضاء الثالث بواسطة دمج كلا الفضائين الاول والثاني.