SOME OF WHAT IT IS THAT DONALD JUDD COMES TO FIND OUT WITH RESPECT TO SPACE

We even have a feeling about a rock, about anything.

—“Yale Lecture,” 1983

What is in front of you is what exists, what is given. This fundamental rock in the road is what must be described and analyzed. The rock is a philosophical problem and a structure must be built to deal with it and beyond that a philosophical structure must be built to deal with the fact that there is more than one rock, even a lot.

—“A Long Discussion Not About Master-pieces but Why There Are So Few of Them, Part II,” 1984

Bones on the land. Bones and rocks.

—Interview with Joshua Homnick and Rainer Judd, 1993

HIGH TIME

Mrs. May Tupper Quick’s eighth-grade history class sets out on a field-trip across town, down North Austin Street, a right at West El Paso there just past the tracks, and on along to Donald Judd’s property by the Godbold feed-mill. It’s around 1978, November maybe, in Marfa, Texas. A ways into the students’ interview with the famous New York artist and only-recent full-time resident here, one young lady haltingly recites her question. “H-have you, nnh, uh, have you reached y-your main goal in life or are you still pursuing it?” She must be about age fourteen, no doubt already call mid-life even though as a rule you’re long past that. It’s a tough read, make no mistake: sitting and watching as an artist tries to prove his success to you. Beneath the fist-pounding declarations of discovery and the barbed frustration at others’ misuse or neglect, I believe you can hear the voice of a dying man who doesn’t want to die. Judd’s not ready to let go, and isn’t planning on doing so peacefully.

For the record, though, he also includes remarks in this same text which soften and complicate the heavy-handed pronouncements that he’s the one who comes up with an assortment of major ideas you find all throughout art today. “Placement on the floor and the absence of a pedestal were inventions. I invented them,” and yet, “I think there was a certain, done what I, wanted to do in the very beginning, but then you consider the chances of ever seeing through what he hopes to. Judd’s reply comes curiously ready, as if now and again these same concerns toss around in his own head. “That goal keeps changing for everybody,” he tells her. “I’ve certainly, done what I, wanted to do in the very beginning, but then you think of more things to do. So, you don’t catch up. But I think I’ve gotten a lot more work done than I ever expected to do.”

To me that sounds like the quiet pride of a man who’s achieved something in his life and knows it, a man who also has a mind to take on plenty more before he’s through. But then have a look at scattered lines from an article he writes only fifteen years later, when he’s unwell and about to get the hard news of his cancer that November of ’93 (another three months after which, he passes).³

Since now it is common for work to be placed anywhere in a room, it is impossible for people to understand that placement on the floor and the absence of a pedestal were inventions. I invented them. […] Nothing had ever been placed directly on the floor.

A new idea is quickly debased, often before the originator has time and money to continue it. In general I think this has happened to all of my work, but especially to the use of the whole room, which is now called an installation, which basically I began. […] A direct relationship to the supporting structure had not existed before.

I think that I developed space as a main aspect of art. […] My work on the floor was a new form, creating space amply and strongly.

The three-dimensional work that I began in 1962 was new and the complete use of color was new. […] Color and three-dimensional space were placed directly on the floor, as one. Neither existed before.

If the list of exhibitions at the back of the catalogues is related to what the exhibitions contained, the diversity is obvious and the substantial prior invention proven.⁴

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For the record, though, he also includes remarks in this same text which soften and complicate the heavy-handed pronouncements that he’s the one who comes up with an assortment of major ideas you find all throughout art today. “Placement on the floor and the absence of a pedestal were inventions. I invented them,” and yet, “I think there was a small flat work on the floor by Lucas Samaras done at the same time or earlier”⁵⁶.¹³ “The use of the whole room, which is now called an installation, … basically I began,” although “in 1923 Lissitzky built the Proun Raum and in the late twenties Schwitters built the Merzbau.”⁵⁷ Lastly, “I developed space as a main aspect of art,” however “I was not completely alone.”⁵⁸ There was Lee Bontecou, John Chamberlain, “the canvas works by Oldenburg, enclosing a soft space, a flexible space, and the glass works by Larry Bell, which contained a visible space …” The other artist who has thoroughly developed space is of course Richard Serra.”

The seeming contradiction here—I invented blank, and so did others at the same time or ahead of me—illuminates Judd’s complaint about how there’s “no history” of space in art which he can refer to, something that’s part of the larger problem of wide-spread inattention to exactly what artist makes exactly what discoveries.¹⁰ “The earlier knowledge isn’t regarded as knowledge, but as appearance, as style, and so cannot continue, cannot accumulate, as scientific knowledge does.… One of the many destructive assumptions now is that all ideas have no originators. … But someone

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invents ideas. Someone wants something new.” I suppose it might be possible that in those lines from before Judd’s simply trying to show us how the lack of an accepted history of space in art leads him to unknowingly re-invent the already-existing notions of placement on the floor, absence of the pedestal, use of the whole room, and space as a main aspect.

Then again, he does sound as if he’s insisting that he himself works on these ideas earlier and more fully than anybody else. My guess is that at first Judd claims he invents this and that as he goes along writing; on reconsidering, though, he sees how debatable such statements are; all the same he decides to keep them in, but also to add some hedges sentences about other artists; and in the end he just ignores the inconsistencies that those then bring about. He’s short on time, don’t forget.

Not to mention he still has a fair amount to set straight. For one thing, Judd’s been making his art for thirty-odd years and even now only a very few really get anything out of viewing it. And someday soon he’ll need to leave the objects behind to the rest of the civilization. (He uses that word civilization ten times in his article; the thinking is big, and the writing plain and unreserved. Why hold back at this late hour.) The problem, so far at least, is that people tend to treat the work pretty badly. A hot-shot art-collector by the name of Giuseppe Panza has shoddily knock-offs built at will; a Charles Saatchi buys a work then won’t let Judd oversee its installation; the museum in Pasadena, California, puts up a show and a seventy-two-page booklet has sixty-four errors. The art-critics and art-historians are hopeless, as usual. And, worst of all, Judd believes fellow artists are squandering the knowledge of color and space you can take away from his objects (he names Barbara Kruger). So you understand where it’s coming from, this furious last-ditch attempt by Judd to catch us up on everything he learns in his life. Look at the works and the space for chrissakes, he about shouts from the page. There they are. Look at them and think about them. It may be the man’s searing final wish, and what comes to replace the easy-going assuredness in his talk with the local school-kids not so very long before.

THE SPACE AROUND AN APPLE CORE …

“Over two hundred years ago Samuel Johnson kicked a rock to prove its existence; fifty years ago Wallace Stevens described the effect of a jar upon the wilderness; this year there are two rocks; obviously this leisurely pace is too fast.” Too fast, Judd means, for a civilization as “gross” as he finds ours in the “inglorious present.” Already you see how what he has to tell us know nothing or thereabouts.

Yet the words make it sound a lot like how and and core and core and make it sound a lot like how Judd understands “Giacometti’s standing figures, which are the apple core and the wood statues in Japanese and the wood statues in Japanese.25 (He also writes thirty years along ‘all earlier sculptures.’) 27 As examples of things within that sizeable category he names the boulders in Scotland with pre-historic cup markings, Michelangelo’s David, and the wood statues in Japanese

After putting the first half-dozen of these to us, Judd sums up the wider notion he’d have us turn our thoughts to. “In general, in what way does the rock create space around itself? It is a definition of space, a center of space, in one way a core of space.”

I don’t have to tell you, that’s a fairly odd thing to say about a rock. Yet the words definition and center and core make it sound a lot like how Judd understands “Giacometti’s standing figures, which are the apple core of their spatial apple, and then Newman’s related vertical sculpture, and, also linear, Olle Baertling’s sculpture.” He also writes thirty years before that Giacometti’s “polelike figures are the core of the space surrounding them; the empty space appears to push inward on the figures, compressing them into an obdurate shaft… The core defining its space is a paramount idea.”

For Judd this apple of defined space is different from what’s alongside “all earlier sculptures.” As examples of things within that sizeable category he names the boulders in Scotland with pre-historic cup markings, Michelangelo’s David, and the wood statues in Japanese
Such works are “monolithic,” “totemic,” akin to “the stone in the field,” Judd claims, and in each case the space you get is “negative” and “pictorial” since it’s nothing but the background and surrounds in which the positive object exists. “The articulation of the solids … is always much more important than the articulation of the resulting spaces. The space around the work is only somewhere from which to look toward the continuous solids.” In that final text of Judd’s you find a change, however. There he has us staring at an actual stone in a field, and he allows for the possibility that instead of just sitting in negative and pictorial space, the rock will create space around itself by becoming a definition or center or core of space like the objects by Giacometti, Newman, and Baertling.

To be clear, we’re talking here about an uncommonly specialized use of the every-day word space—no longer meaning simply area, room, expanse, and so forth, but rather what you wind up with when order and definition get introduced into those kinds of un-ordered and under-defined intervals. “You see, I am interested in space and in what defines the space, what is visible,” Judd explains. Because “there is no space, in itself, as a ‘something’ that continues throughout everywhere … like ether.” Instead what happens is, “a given thing creates an interesting space.” “When you make a work of art, you are making space,” which is to say that “by making lines or points or planes in space, you actually make the space.” Still, creating or positioning an object is only part of it. Judd believes making space comes down to something else—us. “People make space,” he declares. “Space [is] just the way we feel about it,” “it is made by thought.”

But, hold on, does the art make the space, or do we make the space by thought? Well, the two manners of describing the situation seem to amount to the same thing for Judd. If you and I can agree that on looking at a broad- and flat-topped rock we’ll be likely to think of and thereby create a broad flat space around it, then after a while, once we grow a bit more accustomed to the whole idea, we might begin to look toward the continuous solids. In that initial text of Judd’s you find a change, however. There he has us staring at an actual stone in a field, and he allows for the possibility that instead of just sitting in negative and pictorial space, the rock will create space around itself by becoming a definition or center or core of space like the objects by Giacometti, Newman, and Baertling.

Strictly speaking, Judd argues, “the desirable ice cream cone is the cone desired,” in other words, desired by him or by Oldenburg or by you or by me, but wrong to see as being desirable by nature, or in its essence desirable, since “it is very elementary philosophy that objects do not have essences.” “This is what’s interesting about Oldenburg,” he goes on. “He’s not saying anything about, say, the ice-cream cone, so much. He’s saying, it’s clear that he’s saying, I feel, he, Claes, feels this about the ice-cream cone. He’s not saying inside that ice-cream cone there’s some essence, some real philosophical matter, because we can’t, ah, scientifically and philosophically and in all considerations, we can’t believe that now.” Judd also likes the sculptures by Arp with no more than an “oblique reference” to the human body as opposed to an unmistakable “resembl[ance],” “approximation,” or “description” of the body that’ll of
Or, as Judd claims elsewhere, “the only reality that can be known at once and more or less completely is oneself.” So we might casually remark on how an ice-cream cone is desirable, how Arp’s sculptures are interesting, how the desert is beautiful, and how something makes space. But all we can ever truly mean by this is that we think and feel the ice-cream cone to be desirable, Arp’s sculptures to be interesting, the desert to be beautiful, and rocks and art-works to be capable of making space. One more thing: Judd has it that “any work of art, old or new, is harmed or helped by where it is placed [and] this can almost be considered objectively, that is, spatially.” At the end of the sentence there he sort of implies that space is objective (or almost objective), however, as with the beauty of the desert, I believe you have to allow that in fact it’s nothing more than one’s own assumption of common agreement and one’s own small hope of objectivity.

By way of continuing to explain about space Judd tells of how as a student he “realized that the space underneath the desk was a lot more interesting than what was happening down in the art school. It always looked very good under there.” Sure enough, the top and legs of a desk mark out the void below and between, which then can become interesting and course always be chock-full of meaning. About the not-full ones Judd writes, “the emptiness suggests that if you are interested in a thing it is interesting, and if you are not it is not. That isn’t as obvious as it sounds.” And with respect to the desert, “most people think, looking out, that what they feel about the landscape, it feels. But it isn’t theirs.”

Last September [1985 or ’86, Judd is fifty-seven or -eight] … the desert was spare, as usual, but very green and beautiful. I realized that the land and presumably the rabbits, quail, lizards and bugs didn’t know that this was beautiful. Only I knew it, or we, since such observations are assumed to be held in common by everyone, all of us being perceptive at a distance. But then I realized that the observation is only ours, the same as the lizard’s opinion of the bug. The observation has no relevance, no validity, no objectivity, and so the land was not beautiful—who’s to say? It simply exists. My saying that it’s beautiful is as pointless beyond myself as saying, following Berkeley, that what I see cannot exist without me. Thinking the land beautiful is large and natural and if or anyone assumes everything agrees. Or to start over, it becomes somewhat lonesome when I realize that only we appreciate it, although there is still the communal assumption and some small hope of objectivity. But when I realize that our appreciation is really only mine or anyone’s, with nothing wider, that the appreciation exists as everything does, that’s it. There is no meaning. Except that it exists.

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start looking good to somebody who sees it as a space. But without anyone for it to seem interesting to, look good to, appear as space to—and with that, turn into space for—it’ll stay plain old emptiness. And this Judd calls *undefined* or *indefinite* space, “weak, nondescript, neutral space,” barely or not even space at all in some ways because as yet unseen and un-thought-about. In other words, space is something you think up and feel based on what else is there. It’s as real as any thought and feeling is, but it isn’t a physical fact like volume, and it can’t be shown to be “true scientifically.”

The apple Judd mentions is one kind of space, that which forms around an object, like, say, a work of art. Chances are you’ll view the space as being at its clearest and most defined near the core, then steadily less so farther off, and at a given distance as petering out altogether (in this sense unlike an actual apple, it must be said, seeing as how an actual apple is fully apple until it stops dead at its peel; though no great surprise that the analogy doesn’t fit perfectly). Judd describes the way his smaller works “make space around them … which just trails off.” “If you take a free-standing piece, it controls a certain amount of space, but that space, at a certain distance from the piece, goes off into whatever the rest of the room is.” And again, “the space generated by the object just sort of trail[s] off in four directions. […] Spatially it trails off in all directions into ah *indefinite space*.” His works out in the land do this too: “The small pieces can be put up right here [indoors] and I hope that they’re very definite and about the actuality of space.” We know of the space around a thing by seeing that it has no borders, it just trails off. For the big concrete pieces in Texas in the field, if you take the whole piece and then you go away from it, about the same sort of thing happens. How space is made, how it’s generated, how it trails off, how it’s *indefinite* when far and *definite* closer in—Judd’s already well on his way to building a vocabulary, a philosophy even, so as to try and deal with the space his art makes.

I’m wondering if he might also hold that a relationship exists between the physical volume of a thing such as a rock (the apple core, you recall) and the non-physical, wholly thought and felt space that we come to see the rock as creating around itself (the apple meat). If you’re willing to grant this for the time being at least, we’ll be able to talk through a few of the shapes space can take, even if in the end it’s always going to be invisible.

Perhaps space reaches from each side of our rock roughly the measure of the nearest corresponding dimension, be it length, width, or height: so about as long as the length of the rock to its left and to its right, the width of the rock in front and in back, and the height of the rock above (and below too if not for the ground, unless for you the space does indeed bore down into the earth a ways). The rock with the broad flat top lies in a long, wide, and low space, while a rock whose top is not as broad and flat might be in a shorter, narrower, and higher space. Or maybe the space stretches the length of a rock’s longest dimension in every direction. Or we can view the space as sticking closely to the contours of a rock, bringing about a lumpy apple that follows its lumpy edges. Judd won’t settle on any single possibility for us because it’s we ourselves who have to do the thinking that makes the space. Plus, this is only one type. There’re others you can think of and feel besides that which surrounds a thing.

... INSIDE A JAR ...

Early on Judd takes a liking to the several ways that Robert Morris’s objects create space, for instance. “The Cloud occupies the space above and below it, an enormous column. The triangle fills a corner of the room, blocking it. The angle encloses the space within it, next to the wall. The occupancy of space, the access to or denial of it, is very specific.” And the same out-spoken Marfa middle-schooler asks Judd later in the class visit about a work of his in the room “That, that, um, sculpture right there. Um, can’t you put it into a picture and paint it?” “Yeah, but why?” he answers. “It’s all about three dimensions, and the space inside the boxes,
Okay, but the jar and the glass also form a space on their insides. This is different. It’s contained by the thing and as such very well-defined, while the space around the thing is uncontained and fairly ill-defined. What I mean is that you have one type of space which butts up against the inner sides of your jar and stops cold, but you’re going to have a tougher time figuring out for certain where the other type of space surrounding the jar becomes entirely unrelated to it and therefore halts. Because when the space gets far enough removed that it no longer makes a great deal of sense to look at as being quote-unquote around the outside of the jar—at one foot away, say, or five, or twenty—right there it’ll cease to be defined and instead become undefined or indefinite, back to being part of the emptiness elsewhere in the room.

“One lot of the pieces work with the internal space,” Judd states. “It very much is a case of what’s inside of it and what’s outside of it.”53 “The works … create internal as well as external space. […] The smallest, simplest work creates space around it, since there is so much space within.”54 “One of my main concerns is to, um, develop the three-dimensionality as much as possible. And that’s why the space inside is vital.”55 A good many of his objects, we’re to understand, are like glasses and jars in that they make space not only around themselves but on their insides as well. Judd probably believes all of this is plain to see. It surely isn’t for me.

Hearing some more from him on jar-like art will be helpful. With John Chamberlain’s sculptures, “there is not space through the work; there is a lot in it.”56 “The metal seems superfluous because its involutions enclose so much space; the form is not only metal but is also space. The metal surrounds space like the eggshell of a sucked egg, instead of defining it with a line, core or plane.” I view the eggshell here as akin to the jar owing to how both make space by containing it. What’s more, Judd points out that several distinct varieties of space can be on the inside of an object. In a work of his from 1968, which he regards as a “tube” and a “box” and “one wall within another,” “you get two different types of space—the compressed space formed by the two walls and the open tubular space”57 The space in the narrow gap between the inner and outer nested walls does appear awfully compressed, and the space in the middle of the work is a heck of a lot more open. (This, in spite of how a drinking glass and a jam jar strike me as being more or less regular shapes that create really only a single kind of space within themselves—another moment when Judd’s analogy may come up short. An eggshell’s better. And what about a run-of-the-mill plastic milk jug. There’s quite a bit happening in one: changing widths and rates of tapering from the belly to shoulder to neck to mouth of the container, and then the handle which not only has space in it for the milk, but also, being a thing for your fingers to grab onto, space around and through it too.) You see how it gets to be more interesting to use your time going over the space...
on the inside, or insides, of an object rather than the less defined space in its surrounds. That type will be there too, but Judd doesn’t much care to step us through it again in his discussion of the Chamberlain and his own double-walled work.

Another object of Judd’s turns up in a good amount of the recent writing.6 It’s red and black, wood and metal, and he places it along with other art-works in a large room in the west building at his place by the feed-mill. Here’s how Judd himself describes it (and you’ll have to forgive my add-ons to his words—I’m hoping to make things clearer instead of complicating them even further). “In 1962 I made a right angle of wood placed directly on the floor…. The size of the [red wooden] right angle is determined by the right angle of a black pipe, whose two open ends are the centers of the outer planes of the [wood] right angle, which is painted cadmium red light; red and black, and black as space.” More:

There is scarcely an inside and an outside, only the space within the [red] angle and the space beyond the [red] angle. The only enclosed space is inside the pipe [where water would go]. This slight linear space determines the dimensions of the broad [red] planes. The shell of this narrow space [that is, the pipe itself] passes through the breadth of the inner angle [formed by the red planes], a definite space through a general space.

The piped space looks definite to Judd and the space it cuts across looks general, a new term which must mean less- or not-definite. Elsewhere he says of his art-work that “some of it has, you know, sort of a vague relationship to the space, and some of it, and some of it’s quite particular.” And we hear how when it comes to space, “you can have different degrees. It can be very general or it can be very particular.” Defined, definite, and particular on the one hand, and on the other, undefined, indefinite, general, and also vague (a word I take as characterizing not only the relationship of an object to space but also by extension the space itself that results, which is what happens with his two uses of particular there). Why not follow Judd’s lead and try and rank the assorted kinds of space in the right-angled work according to their degrees of this property.

Here goes. We might begin with the openness in the room where it’s far enough away from the art that there’s almost no relation to it, no order, no definition—barely space at all since barely thought of by anybody as being such. It’s the vague and general type Judd talks of before: negative and pictorial, no more than fundamentally, largely unarticulated, and made (such as it is) even by old sculptures just by virtue of being placed somewhere, again, like the monolith and totem and stone in the field that due to this same very basic fact create the same very basic kind. A more particular and more definite space still lies “beyond the angle” yet tighter-in, like an apple around its core. A third is “within the angle,” contained by the red wooden sides as if in a glass or a jar (or maybe closer to a saucer or a plate with “scarcely an inside and an outside”). Judd calls this space “general,” though if you ask me it’s noticeably less general and more defined than the first couple types, the negative-pictorial and the apple. Also he skips over how this space within the object splits in two.

There’s the oddly-shaped column inside the red angle but outside of the black angle, and then there’s the standing shaft girdled by the black pipe and running up the corner where the red sides come together. Last, number five is “inside the pipe,” “enclosed” and “linear,” “shelled” and “narrow,” thoroughly well-defined. I for one don’t often pay attention to the five kinds of space or degrees of definition you have around, inside, between, and through a thing. But you and I and others are able to sit down and have a conversation on the topic all thanks to what Judd accomplishes here.

A final point before moving on. Judd uses the word determine twice as he goes about explaining this work, yet you’ll note a big difference between the two instances. First he writes that “the size of the [red] right angle is determined by the right angle of a black pipe.” Here he’s either stating a physical fact about how he builds the object in ‘62, or he’s only remarking on how it appears to be built. For the sake of argument, let’s say he does start by finding or assembling the compound bend of pipe, and, after that, he joins together the wood boards to form the red planes.

In this case the L of pipe will indeed determine the exact width of both planes, given that each of the pipe ends has to be perfectly centered left-to-right in its own plane, and the two planes have to perfectly meet at a corner. (Put again: if one arm of the pipe L is longer or shorter, then the red plane parallel to this arm has to be proportionally wider or narrower. You see, that’s the only way you can keep both planes touching at the corner while also keeping the end of the other arm centered left-to-right in its plane. I’m using a model on my table to figure this out; you might want to try it if you have a minute.) And contrariwise too. If Judd in fact begins with the red planes and they happen to be wider or narrower than they are, he’ll need to proportionally lengthen or shorten the arms of the pipe to have both ends stay in the exact center of their respective planes. What I’m getting at is that either way—the pipe then planes, or planes then pipe—the size of the one actually, literally, physically determines the size of the other.

In this regard the two parts of the work are highly related, highly ordered.

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Figs. 15a, 15b: Schematic illustration of Donald Judd, untitled, 1962.

Figs. 15d, 15e: Schematic illustration of Donald Judd, untitled, 1962.
So much so that even in the face of their mismatched colors, and shapes, and materials, you can wind up feeling that they’re a sort of whole more than they are separate parts. Like how, on balance, the handle of the milk jug is that self-same jug more than it’s some different thing stuck on.

The second use of *determine* is when Judd maintains that “this slight linear space [in the pipe] determines the dimensions of the broad [red] planes.” That’s something else entirely. In claiming it’s not the pipe but the space in the pipe which makes the planes the size they are, Judd’s going and adding his feelings, his own thought-up relationship and order, to the physical facts. Because if space isn’t “true scientifically,” and if instead it’s “made by thought” and “just the way we feel about it,” then these statements should also hold for any amount of determining that space is supposed to do: this too will come down to nothing more than one person’s personal thinking and feeling. When all’s said and done, however, Judd’s belief seems easy enough to follow and maybe even to agree with. Since the pipe determines the sizes of the planes, then, sure, I reckon you might see or feel or think of the space in the pipe as in some sense doing the determining. At any rate, we’re talking through several types of space, so far either around or within a single object.

**AND BETWEEN TWO ROCKS**

Time for another kind—the space in between two things. We have to go back to the last of the eleven questions that Judd starts us out with. He’s trying to keep it basic for beginners yet he still can’t come up with any better way to ask which of the two rocks on our sloping plane joins the plane as an entity. I’ll at least offer a hunch as to what he’s suggesting here. Right before, Judd mentions the rock whose top is flat and broader than its sides such that the rock becomes “a thick plane parallel to the surface, level or tilted.” If you see the rock-top and the ground as being “parallel,” you may soon find that you’re able to look at them as being “join[ed]” in a sense, and after a while possibly even as being one single “entity”—so, increasingly inter-related and integrated the longer you think about them, from mere commonality at first (two planes that simply happen to be parallel), to conformity (joined through their now seemingly mutual parallel-ling of each other), and finally to unity (in the end not two separate things at all but rather one thing, an entity).

I’ll admit it sounds a little strange to speak of added order being there, though perhaps it’s not unimaginable. Judd realizes we’re bound to have thoughts and feelings about what’s out in the world (“about a rock, about anything”), and how such a thought and feeling might well be a sense of order. “Four units in a row are only that,” he insists, “a small, finite order that I am interested in,” an order which is “mine, someone’s, and clearly not some larger order.” “I think that the work is, implies, beyond itself, that it’s a relatively chaotic and random world. It just happens to be that I want to order my own particular part of it. So it’s not
Sometimes two different colors make a pair of values. In a way, side by side, the red and the black become one color. They become a two color monochrome. Red and black together are so familiar that they almost form a new unity. Every easily known color paired with either black or white forms such a monochrome: orange, yellow, blue, green. Because of the black and white, also a pair, these pairs have a somewhat flat quality, are somewhat monochromatic.

Certain pairs we take as almost a single color, like black and white. I mean, black and white is so much a pair that you just take it [to be one] . . . . Red and black is, together they're a very definite pair, they almost make another color.

And there's more.

The contrasting pairs are just as well known: red and blue, red and green, red and yellow, blue and green, blue and yellow. Some are not: red and orange, yellow and orange. This list is finite, since it is of primaries and secondaries. The other possible pairs are infinite, as is color, whether in the spectrum or materially mixed. All colors of the same value, such as light yellow and light green, make pairs. All values of the same color [like dark green and light green] make pairs.

Judd sees something of the sort in an untitled 1946 painting by Clyfford Still. The relationship of the dark, scumbled brown area to the burnt sienna is characteristic. Still often uses two versions of the same color, approximately two values—light and medium-dark, or that and dark. Sometimes two different colors make a pair of values. This belief that colors can pair up and turn into a two-color monochrome (which is to say, can be paired up by somebody looking at them and get turned into one) is long-held. At least as far back as 1964 Judd comments on how a couple or more colors side by side look monochromatic. In Guido Molinari's works, “plain red and yellow together, as in one painting, or those two colors and straight green and blue, as in another piece, are monochromatic, dull in a way. They don’t affect one another very much. They are fairly even.”

In Roger Jorgensen’s paintings, “a black, flat Cubist pattern like the silhouette of a complicated structure has been placed against bright colors, orange in one work. The black and the other dominant color form one kind of monochrome.” And in a painting by Tadasuke Kuwayama, who to this day goes by Tadasky, “two triads alternate, each bounded by black stripes: red light, blue-green, red light; and red light, cobalt blue, and red light. [Instead of continuing to appear to be two red-blue-red groupings bounded by black,] the red and black become a monochrome, and the two blues become discrete and infrequent.” Ten years later in 1974, it’s Kazimir Malevich’s paintings. “In Supremus No. 30 the red and black make the most obvious set, a pair in this case, since they are about equal in area . . . . The larger white ground and the two much smaller yellow squares are also part of the set because all are full color, simple, primary and, in a way, monochromatic when grouped.

Two-color is the physical fact here and monochrome is not a physical fact but rather short-hand for order felt by Judd himself. The same goes for “together” and “unity” and “pair”—it’s Judd who views the colors as existing together, he who unifies them, pairs them, makes them one. What accounts for his understanding of added order? With red and black it’s their familiarity, and also proximity. “How far away is the black spot from the red spot?” he asks. “Enough for these to be two discrete spots, one red and one black? Or near enough for there to be a pair of spots, red and black? Or apart enough for this to be uncertain?” With these two colors you find certain qualities giving rise to a feeling of order.

Now back to space. “If two objects are close together they define the space in between,” Judd states squarely. Instead of two spots, let’s say you come across two rocks. Of course the rocks, the distance that separates them, and the rest of the physical facts of the situation at hand remain unchanged whether you’re thinking about them or not. Yet as with the red and black spots, the nearness of the two rocks makes you inclined to see

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**Fig. 1:** Roger Jorgensen, [title unknown] 1964–65. Acrylic on linen with raised panels. Private collection.

**Fig. 2:** Tadasky, B 197 1964. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection.

**Fig. 3:** Kazimir Malevich, Supremus No. 30 1915. Oil on canvas. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
order—a pair of rocks—and the feeling of a greater degree of order, over and above the very little or none at all there to begin with, defines the undefined openness from this rock to the other and turns it into a space between.

Whether the rocks are close or far surely is an important consideration, although other qualities like their size also affect the order and the space. Judd: “two rocks of equal size and the space between them is a situation which is very different from that of a small rock and a large rock with the same space between.” He takes this as obvious and doesn’t bother to spell out how and why the situations are so unlike. That’s okay I guess, and in light of his circumstances at the time of writing I hate to keep on about it, but there’s a problem here. The words aren’t quite right. When he says *same space between*, Judd slips back into the ordinary use of *space* to mean only how far two things are from each other. What he’s aiming to get across here is that while the like- and unlike-sized pairs have the same distance between rocks, they’ll nevertheless bring to mind two pretty distinct spaces. Fine, but again, how, why? Well, two rocks of similar size near one another make me think of my morning medicine capsule or a bull-snake egg full of space, with a similar size near one another make me think of my morning medicine... naturally such a lack of order, and therefore space, can come about for them as a pair—and when order breaks down, the space between does too. The farther two rocks get from each other, the less likely you are to see two pretty distinct spaces. Fine, but again, how, why? Well, two rocks of similar size near one another make me think of an ice-cream cone of space, sort of a lop-sided tear-drop that starts big and broad and tapers down to a tight knob. Then there’re more qualities of the rocks to go over, like shape, and color, and mineral make-up, on and on. Any can be factors in how the rocks carry on with defining a space for you.

Or in how they don’t. “These definitions are infinite until the two objects are so far apart that the distance in between is no longer space.” The farther two rocks get from each other, the less likely you are to see them as a pair—and when order breaks down, the space between does too. Naturally such a lack of order, and therefore space, can come about for plenty of reasons. Two lone rocks only a few feet apart in a barren clearing might be a pair and form a space, yet those same rocks at that same distance might not do so in the middle of a stand of trees or thick underbrush or what have you. Likewise you may not view a boulder and a pebble as a sensible pairing, or two rocks whose shapes are entirely at odds, or any two particular rocks of the many in a rocky outcropping.

“Then the passerby remembers that one was there and another here.” All of a sudden the emptiness separating the two rocks is shot through with order and it becomes a space. “The space between can even be more definite than the two objects which establish it; it can be a single space more than the two objects are a pair.” A pointy gray boulder perched on a hill-side and, some ways off, a rounded brown pebble resting on the flat-lands—I believe you’ll be hard put to see these rocks as a pair, though it might just be possible if you find nothing much else of note in the void you walk through from one to the other. And, according to Judd, the weak order shared by the two thoroughly unlike rocks can still create a clear-cut space in such wide-open surroundings. With these two rocks you find certain qualities giving rise to a feeling of order, and order giving rise to a space between.

From rocks to order, and from order to space. It’s by thinking, by feeling, that Judd or you or I or anybody brings on this transformation. So at last back to question number eleven about our rocks. Again, the sentence goes, “if they are on a slope, which is higher, which joins the plane as an entity?” As written, the two phrases *which is higher* and *which joins the plane as an entity* might be in opposition (that is, the second contrasting with the first, as in, *If they are on a slope, which is higher, which is lower?*), or they may be equivalent (with the second restating the first, *If they are on a slope, which is higher, which is closer to the top?*). That said, I read the two as altogether separate questions which Judd places next to each other in a single sentence because he himself thinks and feels there’s a relationship between being higher and joining the plane, so, not an opposition but not really a true equivalence either. You and I needn’t necessarily agree with him, however.

Which rock would you say is higher? Well higher isn’t made by you thinking or feeling, higher is just higher. You report the physical fact in front of your eyes as best you can. Then, which rock joins the plane as an entity? Here it depends. It hinges on which rock or rocks—the higher, the lower, both, or neither—you yourself make join the plane by seeing order there between them, between the rock or rocks and the plane. After you figure this much out, kindly tell us if as a result you start to notice any space between the rocks. For Judd it might be something along the lines of the thick plane he refers to before, a slab of space that keeps low to the ground while following its slope from the higher rock to the lower. Hard to know for sure. And anyway the order and the space you fix on will stray from what he comes up with, since you’re now the one doing the thinking and the feeling that make them.

* * *
its wall to a T, the apple falls short of reaching the ceiling and side-walls that are farther off than the floor is. This is interesting to test out in person: a point three feet away from the object in any direction is related to it, defined by it, and within its spatial apple. Go another full foot, though, and in places the order and definition and space begin to come undone or already don’t exist anymore.

Then, unlike a rock yet like a jar, this work of Judd’s also creates space on its insides, actually two kinds. For starters, each of the empty pans wraps part-way round its own brick of space. And when bolted one to the next, the pans and their bricks wrap round the void running through the middle of the larger pipe-like assembly that they form all together. The colored metal means the contours of the emptiness within both the single pans and the overall object are sharply visible and physical. That in turn defines the two sorts of openness, and helps make each into a space.

Now as for space between two things, we’re aware of how it relies on your feeling of out-of-the-ordinary order between them. With these multi-color works, the more-than-usual degree can follow from the shared shape, close-by positioning, and matching colors, like it does with Judd’s spots and rocks. So, with this one on the wall, the red, orange, black, and white result in six monochromatic pairings: red-orange, red-black, red-white, orange-black, orange-white, black-white. (“The relationships of the colors are differently intelligible,” however, Judd notes. “One above another they are easy to see as a pair; diagonally they are not.”83) Another object on the west wall of the same room also happens to end with orange and black pans. Together, a set here and a set there, the two orange-and-black pairs pair up on the strength of being the self-same two-color monochrome. And from that straightforward instance of order—two alike things only a little ways apart with nothing much else in between—comes thoughts and feelings of a space, maybe a right-angled bar stretching out of both works into and around the corner of the room.84 There’s

How about non-rock examples. You can view first-hand the space around and inside and between what they call Judd’s multi-color works, which really show off some of the things you can do with color, order, and space—especially when they’re in a single small room. What seems to me to come about is just the sort of tutorial Judd might be calling for, some practice that gets us up to speed, at last, on not only the basics but also some fairly advanced ideas about space. Things such as: how you and I make it, how an art object gets us to make it, what types or degrees it or we make, and how when it doesn’t get made, why not.

If you ask me, a half-apple of space appears to be surrounding the work on the south wall of the little room in question, as if the art were a rock sitting in a field that’s been turned upright. The three and a half feet below the thing is well-defined down to the floor. But instead of fitting
orange-and-black yet again in a third object on the north wall. This time, though, the pairing is part of the work’s own ABCABC sequence, and, for me, that internal order outweighs the likeness to the orange-and-black in the other two objects. That means no space really takes hold between it and either of them. Last, predictably, I don’t notice much of a space between any of the three works and a fourth on the east wall without orange-and-black.

But, as before, there are grounds besides shared color for seeing a greater degree of order and then a defined space. Align a couple or more of these things, and they tend to want to make a space from one to the other to the next, regardless of color. For that matter, a row of parts in any single object by Judd will create space, like what’s in between the units progressing sideways in the so-called progressions, and the units stacked up-and-down in the so-called stacks, and the four big units in To Susan Backwalter (again, fig. 25). Somebody in the audience at a talk of Judd’s mentions how “the space between the cubes is very dense.” He replies, “the space between the units, the boxes, or whatever they are, is very important of course…. If you make it too far apart, it becomes just [undefined] space between the boxes, so you’ve got to make some equivalence between the volume of the boxes or the enclosed space [within the boxes,] and the open space [between the boxes].”

This discussion about the space between things soon leads to looking harder at walls, floors, and ceilings—to architecture, and how to “make a room.” (Assuming we get ourselves caught up, that is: “Of course I can’t continue, I can’t mention what would happen if a stick were put across the two stones.” All the more reason why it’s important for us to try and do so.) “The room is a general space; it’s not very particular in its quality,” and “if you have a bad architectural situation, you can destroy the space, or destroy the space, or harm the space anyway, that the ah piece itself makes.” It’s in the early ’70s when Judd says, “I got a little tired of big pieces that just sit there in an indefinite space, so I wanted to do something that deals more with the space of the room.”

Fig. 26:
Donald Judd, untitled
that went around Leo’s front room [Leo Castelli Gallery, 64–26]—it was an attempt to deal with, with the whole space and make it clear, ah rather than let the space generated by the object just sort of trail off in four directions." In ‘81 Judd comes right out with the big idea. "What is needed is a created space, space made by someone, that is formed as is a solid, the two the same, with the space and the solid defining each other." And then in ‘93, in what he has to sense is going to be some of his last writing, Judd takes it on himself to piece together the beginnings of a history of his objects that make space in a room, and also to plainly state his discovery. I found that if I placed a work on a wall or on the ground, I wondered where it was. I found that if I placed a work on a wall in relation to a corner or to both corners, or similarly on the floor, or outdoors near a change in the surface of the ground, that by adjusting the distance the space in between became much more clear than before, definite, like the work. If the space in one or two directions can become clear, it’s logical to desire the space in all directions to become clear.11

In the end the point is this, that when you look at a work of art by Donald Judd you’ve got to see if you see the space he’s aiming to make clear—that which is around the thing, and within it, and between it and whatever else. I’d really be interested to know, they don’t, how do you happen to you personally along with your conscious-make a column six feet deep and shut both up and then off into the sky.

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Shorthand citations of sources in the notes below include a reference in parentheses to the note with the first and full citation.

2 Donald Judd, “A Long Discussion Not About Masterpieces but Why There Are So Few of Them, Part II,” 26 in America 72, no. 9 (October 1984), 11.
3 Donald Judd, interview with Joshua Homnick and daughter Rainer Judd, Porter House, Marfa, Texas, October 15, 1993, video recording, Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas, at 7:51. Homnick (at 7:30): “And so, I don’t know if you’ve made up your mind yet, cops, about it, or me, in an hour, for you personally I’ll really be interested to know, they don’t, how do you believe, like, metaphorically, do you believe—what will happen to you personally along with your conscious-making?”
6 Donald Judd, Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular (Saas-Fee: Saastikirche Foundation, 1995), 7, 11, 12, 22, 25, lines 16–19 onward.
7 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 11. More: “Ohadnag’s Own was a store but it could be called an installation. Bob Whitman’s performances occurred in installations. Several years later Bryan Krumm made a free-standing room and Louise Samaras also. In 1976 in Los Angeles a work of Carl Andre’s, A C Sort, covered the floor of the gallery.”
8 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 7. Incom-placed.
9 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 5, 11.
10 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 11.
11 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 11.
12 “I gather that [since] most people don’t understand it, that my work is undefined” Donald Judd, win Seminar talk, Oberlin College, February 26, 1976, audio recording, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio, part 1, at 4:03.
13 Judd takes some time to Piotr Morawetz, Kazmir Malewicz, and Thue van Doesburg get disparaged for being idealistic and utopian, and it sounds like a justification of his own efforts: “Why is it idealistic—even when does that mean—-to want to do something new and beneficial, practical also, in a new civilization? And is it practical to let the civilization become as gross as it is becoming, to let it become stagnant, and then in a few hundred years or so to see it? I think it is completely mere, so that nothing can be done and nothing even imagined to be done. No one has realized that there isn’t a civilization. An usual civilization will be continued or not being one by its collapse.” Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 29–30. 14 On Panza, you can read Donald Judd, “Una Stanza per Panza,” part 1–4, (May 1993), 3–14, (May 1993). 3–14, (May 1993). 17–24, (May 1993). 17–24, (May 1993). 25–26, (May 1993). 25–26. On the “sixty-four mumakins” in the booklet for Zoe Judd, May 11–14, July 4, 1971, at the Pasadena Art Museum, read Donald Judd, “Some Aspects of Colour,” 11, 12. 15 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 7–8.
20 “One work occupying a whole room is still alive and now in the work of a few artists—Beni Horn, Michael Schudt, Oya Babakade—but many artists degrade the idea, for example Barbara Kruger, who is my favorite, because she also degrades red and black.” Judd, Some Aspects of Colour (note 6), 11. 21 Judd, Some Aspects of Color (note 6), 7. James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL. D, 2 vols. (London: Charles Dilly, 1791), 1.71, emphasis as in the original. “After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Robert-son’s enlightened society to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is true, it is impossible to refute it. Never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, still he rebounded from it; ‘if God has made it,’ he said below Willa Cather, “An Accurate History of the Jazz,” Part 3, 3 Magazine of Verse 15, no. 1 (October 1919), 8.
22 Anecdote of the Jar
23 I placed a jar in Tennessee, And round it was, upon a hill. It did not give of bird or bush, It took dominion everywhere. The jar was round upon the ground The jar was gray and bare. The jar was round upon the ground And round it was, upon a hill. I placed a jar in Tennessee, And round it was, upon a hill. It did not give of bird or bush, It took dominion everywhere.

The art exists. That’s not metaphysical. There’s the art and something exists, and other people later figure it out as best they can. They’re not going to understand all of it, either.22

The knowledge of space which I’ve made grew swiftly. This is a great deal of knowledge, but not written, a knowledge of a particular kind as visual art, made by a person, sometimes intelligible to other persons, not made by snakes or owls, probably not intelligible to intelligent beings elsewhere, perhaps not to our descendants in ten thousand years. The work is a great deal of knowledge about space, which is necessarily related to the space of architecture. This knowledge is, to me, particular and plentifully diverse; to almost everyone it doesn’t; it’s invisible.23

Judd, note from March 12, 1979, in David H. Hubbard, Donald Judd, transcribed by Richard Shiff, Donald Judd Foundation, Marfa, Texas, June 3, 1979, corrected transcript, Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas, Marfa Press, 1982, unnumbered page.

Donald Judd, video recording of interview at the Musée National d’Art Moderne (note 19), air date March 10, 1988, orf Multimediales Archiv, Österreichischer Rundfunk (orf), 6:00, phrases 14:23, 29:06. (Note that Judd is talking about Arp’s art, but in another tape of the same interview he says, “...and Richard Shiff, ‘A Space of One’s Own’” (note 21), 28.)

Donald Judd, “Duchamp: Another View,” Art Journal, 9 (October 1988), 33–44. Judd’s review doesn’t have a picture of Arp’s art, but his description of the exhibition is changed. “Further continuing the praise the manner is the Sculpture Classique in the show Judd is reviewing—April 1987, Paris, April 1987, transcript translated by Pascale Balso, Smith, and Smith, “Catalogue Raisonné” (note 6), 169, no. 129.

Judd, “21 February 93” (note 19), 10. And, again, note 17 for Samuel Johnson and Wallace Stevens.


Judd, “23 February 93” (note 19), 10, 11:30, uncorrected.

Donald Judd, video recording of interview in Kunstjournal, Österreichischer Rundfunk (orf), air date March 10, 1988, orf Multimediales Archiv, Österreichischer Rundfunk (orf), 10:40, audio recording, in devil 8, no. 2, 1987, tape 2, side 1, at 12:16, Tate Archive, London.

Donald Judd, “Abstract Expressionism” (note 41), at 13:00.

Donald Judd, “Chamberlain: Another View,” Art Journal, 9 (October 1988), 13. It’s after Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Bernini, sculpture, I think Judd means how you see Bernini’s sculpture, but no notes are recorded.

Donald Judd, talk at the Musée National d’Art Moderne (note 19), at 8:34.

Donald Judd, “Letter” (note 133), Donald Judd, interview with Klaus Staab, Leuchtenhorst, Kaminstraße 20, Berlin, April 22, 1973, audio recording, Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas, tape 1, side 1, at 6:37, 7:11; “February 23” (note 19), 9, 10; Judd, note from March 12, 1979, in David H. Hubbard, Donald Judd, transcribed by Richard Shiff, Donald Judd Foundation, Marfa, Texas, June 3, 1979, corrected transcript, Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas, Marfa Press, 1982, unnumbered page.

Donald Judd, video recording of interview in Kunstjournal, Österreichischer Rundfunk (orf), air date March 10, 1988, orf Multimediales Archiv, Österreichischer Rundfunk (orf), 10:40, audio recording, in devil 8, no. 2, 1987, tape 2, side 1, at 12:16, Tate Archive, London.

Donald Judd, “Abstract Expressionism” (note 41), at 13:00.

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