

gender identity behind the expressions of gender;" Butler observes, "that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."²⁶ For Lyotard, performativity refers to the expediency of knowledge as such an informational commodity—that is, how the transformation of knowledge into information only substantiates information's current status within the postmodern condition, whereby "the goal is exchange" or its mercantilization.²⁷ One is reasonably hard-pressed to imagine how the gestures of female TV personalities on a game show might constitute "knowledge" in light of the master narratives Lyotard litanizes and describes. But their repeated appearance in Birnbaum's work—their stylization as gendered—most certainly amounts to information as mercantiled, and a means rather than an ends, the very stuff of the game show. It's by the *efficiency* with which such images cycle within media consciousness that they gain traction as forms of cultural information, the results of which are far from virtual or abstract but bear concretely on the identity of the female subject and the reigning fictions that naturalize this identity as a game of behavior.

For this reason, I want to say that Birnbaum's game show cannot strictly be called an "intervention," the notion of which is boilerplate to contemporary art criticism. "Intervention"

²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

²⁷ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 5.

suggests a hermeneutic or depth model of analysis—something lying beneath or within the realm of appearances that the artist excavates or uncovers—into which she therefore intervenes. Contemporary communication lives and dies on the principles of extroversion and recursion, however; and Birnbaum's move is to trump both through their reproduction. She plays the game already given her, enters into its regulatory contract, but does so in the service of its invalidation. Lyotard reminds us that you cannot import one language game into the sphere of another without performing a certain epistemic violence. Birnbaum and many other artists working with time-based media seem to have taken on this logic as a matter of course in work largely (by no means erroneously) deemed "appropriation."

The next section follows this model and returns us to an earlier game show, one that puts additional pressure on the intermedial relations between video and television and brings us back, in cyclical fashion, to the game-theoretic protocols confronted in the last chapter. As played by Richard Serra and the community of artists and performers associated with early SoHo, it is, like Birnbaum's, a competition over the terms of rationality and irrationality. In the process it demonstrates the stakes over the interests of the individual subject versus a common or collective good.

Television Delivers People. In 1973, Richard Serra and Carlotta Schoolman made the now-canonical video bearing this title

and thus established the terms for an especially durable genre of media critique. Incongruously set to the insipid strains of muzak, the soundtrack of the profit-driven life, the video is a scroll of blue upon which a string of aphorisms call out television's corporate imperatives, each statement more implacable than the next. "The product of television, commercial television, is the audience," the tape begins, "... television delivers people to an advertiser." Some seven minutes later, Serra's tape concludes with a withering aperçu: "Television is the prime instrument for the management of consumer demands." Under the influence of *Vladimir-and-Rosa-era* Godard, the artist channels his message through a stripped-down presentation miming the very medium it attacks.²⁸ *Television Delivers People* hence affirms the logic of video as bearing an antagonistic relation to the apparatus which effectively birthed it. The genealogical metaphor is to the point: according to David Antin's influential essay on this relationship, television is but video's "frightful parent." "To a great extent the significance of all types of video art derives from its stance with respect to some aspect of television,"²⁹ Antin wrote, a statement that confirms the reproductive logic of contemporary media. The degree to

28 "Prisoner's Dilemma" first published in *Avalanche* newspaper, May 1974, reprinted in Clara Weygraf, *Richard Serra: Interviews, etc. 1970–1980* (New York: The Hudson River Museum, Archer Fields Press, 1980), 40.

29 David Antin, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent, Part 1," *Artforum International*, December 1975, 43.

which the artist explored, or more to the point, exploited, this structurally parasitic dynamic amounted to the work's politics. "An artist may exploit the relation very knowingly," to follow Antin's logic, "and may choose any aspect of the relation for attack."³⁰

So prevalent is this conceit within histories of video art that it has assumed the status of a given. Video's capacity for self-criticism is structured around the operative logic of commercial television; it is "political" insofar as it appropriates the medium that gave rise to it.³¹ We have seen how this notion might apply to Birnbaum's works: bluntly put, you could say that the content of both *Kiss the Girls: Make Them Cry* and *Technology Transformation* is television. The point is confirmed by Serra in discussing *Television Delivers People* but leaves ample room for greater elaboration with his video of a year after, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, a work that on first viewing seemingly bears none of the earlier piece's critical ambitions.³²

Yet this lesser-known video introduces a method that deepens our previous treatment of the game show as simultaneous mediation and extroversion of social behavior and

30 Antin, "Television," 44.

31 The most important recent elaboration of this thesis is David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

32 "My concern in making tapes right now," Serra remarked in an interview with Liza Bear in the pages of the SoHo newspaper *Avalanche*, "is to attempt to expose the structure of commercial television." Serra, "Prisoner's Dilemma," in Weygraf, *Richard Serra*, 40.

interaction. For in *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the artist presents an incisive way to conceive the to-and-fro between media through the work's convoluted structure, its strangely fitful ambience and the interaction of the performers involved. Birnbaum's work stressed the ways in which irrational behaviors are regulated through their mediation as a game; Serra's work showcases an adjacent methodology in the form of game theory. As summed up in a RAND document, "game theory attempts to provide a guide to rational behavior in situations that involve conflict or cooperation or both—whether the situation is blackjack or economic competition or thermonuclear war."³³ Serra trades on the appearance of game-theoretic methods in *Prisoner's Dilemma* to suggest the ways in which the most questionable features of television are continuous with the Nixonian politics of the times, presented as a comedy of contemporary strategy.

Serra made *Prisoner's Dilemma* with Robert Bell, in January 1974. Starring Leo Castelli, and a host of figures associated with 112 Greene Street, the legendary alternative space of early SoHo, the first part is a pre-recorded video (made on January 20) screened for the audience of that gallery on the evening of January 22; it features the scene of a criminal interrogation

33 "Game Theory," RAND memorandum, C-5 11/71 (author unnamed), Brownlee Haydon Papers, RAND Corporation Archive, Santa Monica, CA.

that runs about 20 minutes, loosely parroting a television police show (think *Dragnet*) (Figure 3.4). The second part documents a live skit following the viewing of the tape based on the format of a game show. The whole thing clocks in at some 40 minutes. Its black and white grain and rudimentary title sequence signal an economical production. With the exception of the elegantly turned-out Castelli, the denizens and friends of 112 Greene Street (including Bruce Boice, Richard Schechner, Spalding Gray, Gerry Hovagimyan, Jeffrey Lew, Joel Shapiro and Suzanne Harris) all sport the shambling uniforms of the era—jeans and t-shirts or long hair or both. The industrial cast-iron loft recruited as a progressive art space has yet to acquire the gloss of the present-day neighborhood while the audience filling the space, sitting rapt on squeaking folding chairs, are all participants in the vast communal experiment that was early 1970s SoHo. In other words, the work communicates bonhomie, not biting media critique.

More to the point of the work's inscrutability is that neither the narrative—such as it is—nor its format parse so easily; and its lighthearted tone jars with the methods and issues it internalizes and explores. The video, in other words, might *appear* to equivocate in its ambitions, as though it can neither commit to full-blown parody nor engage the grim reflections on media characterizing *Television Delivers People*. Yet however seemingly casual its presentation, the combination of

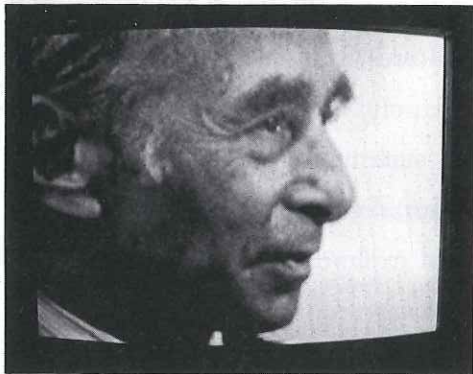


Figure 3.4 Richard Serra, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, 1974. 3/4 in. video transferred to DVD, 40:15 min., black and white, sound.

Source: © 2011 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

pre-recorded video, live performance and documentation in *Prisoner's Dilemma* makes for a complex work on the complicated mediations of social interaction itself. I quote a description of it at length, taken from Robyn Brentano's book chronicling the events at 112 Greene Street, in order to convey the work's convoluted structure and its dogged resistance to paraphrase:

A documentary audiotape prepared by Richard Serra's brother, dealing with methods used in criminal investigations, was played as the audience entered the space. Then the audience viewed a videotape made at 112 on January 20, 1974. This videotape began with Suzanne Harris singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and then continued with a dramatic situation involving a District Attorney (Richard Schechner) who tries to get suspects to turn state's evidence by confessing to a murder. Interviewed separately, both suspects (Getty Hovagymian and Spalding Gray) are given the opportunity to sign. They are informed that if they both sign, they get ten years in prison; if one signs and the other doesn't the one who signs gets off free while the other is imprisoned for fifty years; in the event that neither sign, they both serve two years in jail . . . The second part of the evening consisted of a performance which the audience could only view on monitors, since a cardboard wall had been built down the center of the space preventing the audience from viewing the performers directly. In this section, modeled after a TV quiz show, the Master of Ceremonies (Robert Bell) offered another "non-zero sum game" similar to the one presented in the first part. The contestants (Bruce Boice and Leo Castelli)

were offered bribes; given the choice of situation A or B, the least desirable outcome was to spend six hours alone in the basement of 112.³⁴

The doubling and recursive structure of this work figures importantly in what follows. Understanding these dynamics, however, requires that we first consider the video as it unfolds. Opening the tape, Suzanne Harris, a beloved figure on the scene, warbles her way through "The Star-Spangled Banner." She's channeling Eleanor Roosevelt in a fur stole and upswept hair as an image of Old Glory flits in the background. The scene then turns to a police station where Richard Schechner, in a star turn as a district attorney, talks up his female assistant as he prepares for an interrogation. A young Spalding Gray (playing the part of the Rhode-Island naïf) and the artist Gerry Hovagimyan (in his role as a petty criminal with a gift for a blue streak) are alternately pressed upon by the bellicose Schechner chomping on a cigar, attempting to extract a confession for the murder of one Mr. Angelo Badista on January 20, 1974. It is a riotous harangue of swearing and ham-fisted acting. (Schechner: "What do you do?" Hovagimyan: "I get around, man.") The two thieves are offered separate deals by Schechner, contingent upon how one individual effectively "rats" on the other by signing a confession; three unpalatable

³⁴ Robyn Brentano and Mark Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop Greene Street: History, Artists and Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 56.

options are available. If one betrays the other while the other says nothing, the former goes free while the latter gets 50 years. If both prisoners remain silent both will receive the *minimum* sentence of 2 years. If both talk—that is, if both betray the other—then they both receive a sentence of 10 years. The section concludes when Hovagimyan betrays Gray, preoccupied with apparently more important issues than the length of his sentence, such as the quality of food at Sing Sing or whether the infamous prison hosts Zen meditation sessions.

Absent these humorous asides, a game theorist would call this proceeding a two-person, two-strategy game premised on uncertainty and culminating in a particularly insidious result. What Serra has given us, more or less, is the Prisoner's Dilemma, if, as we shall see, with a notable departure from its canonical formulation.

Some 20 minutes later, the second half begins. Robert Bell, also with a cigar, plays the role of congenial game-show host. "Tonight we're going to play the game you've just seen in the video tape," he announces before asking Castelli and Boice, "Have either of you been in a video performance before?" He then presents to them and the audience a sign board detailing the Prisoner's Dilemma:

- 1 If both choose A both spend 4 hours together downstairs.
- 2 If both persons choose B both spend 2 hours together downstairs.

- 3 If one chooses A and the other chooses B, the person choosing A is free to leave, the other person who chooses B spends 6 hours downstairs.

The ambience is festive and self-knowing. Filmmakers, artists, actors, dancers and other performers are in league with a famous art dealer (a "celebrity" in Serra's words) in the production of a performance-cum-documentary video. The audience itself gets in on the action by laughing at all the right moments: the most famous joke involves the punishment of spending six hours alone in the basement . . . "about the length of your average boring artist's video." And the basement of 112 Greene Street—a popular site for a host of artistic interventions in the early 1970s—features prominently in serving as a holding pen for all of the prisoners involved, Boice and Castelli in the second half; Grey and Hovagimyan in the first. The game ends when the players, in a display of mutual respect, both choose the second option, effectively consigning themselves downstairs for the duration of four hours.

Ultimately the second half of the work is more user-friendly, for the interactions between its participants are less scripted (even as they are mediated by monitors for the audience present) and the game-show format is more readily grasped and dismissed by the contemporary viewer. Given Serra's video critique of television of just a year earlier, it's not hard to see

why a game show might serve as its model: Stressing that the second half was "modeled after a TV quiz show" the chronicle from the 112 Greene Street volume highlights a programming format at the nadir of an already much despised medium, a sentiment hardly restricted to the radical artist milieu. In his famous speech of 1961, Newton Minow, the controversial chairman of the Federal Communications Committee under JFK, decried television as "a vast wasteland." What lends Minow's well-known comment special urgency here is that the game show was the first example he gave to describe this blighted scenario; indeed his announcement followed the quiz show controversies of just a couple of years earlier, when contest-rigging was the subject of hearings before the House Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight in 1959.³⁵ The format's reputation for mendacity was certainly not lost on Serra, but in 1974, he would weigh in on its proceedings with especially affective vehemence. "In programs like *Let's Make a Deal*, or any of those quiz-format programs," he opined, "what the audience participates in is a sort of sado-masochistic contempt for materialism. Like 'Win your new Pontiac or you have to suck on a piece of ice.' The audience develops a contempt for the participants in relation to the game—and gets off on it."³⁶

35 On this history see, Joseph Stone and Tim Yohn, *Prime Time and Misdemeanors: Investigating the 1950s TV Quiz Scandal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

36 Serra, "Prisoner's Dilemma," 42.

The dynamic described by Serra—between a player all too eager to debase himself for material gain and an audience indulging in these spectacles of self-mortification—will bear strange ramifications for the logic of the game show.

In the early 1970s, the very rules structuring a game show called *Prisoner's Dilemma* would assume meanings in excess of the television genre. For the Prisoner's Dilemma is the most notorious scenario of all in game theory; and in 1974, making use of its paradox as a work of video amounted to a different order of media engagement, at once entangled in the machinations of Nixon's White House and a peculiar brand of formalism advanced by the RAND Corporation. In his interview with Bear, Serra was plainspoken about his work's confrontation with Nixon, notably how the 37th president engineered his own television profile just a couple years earlier. "When the '72 election was being rigged, Nixon had the young Republicans hand-picked to clap on cue with that Sammy Davis handshake—good TV."³⁷ From his sweating and stammering debate with JFK in 1960; to the Watergate hearings of over a decade later; to the final humiliation in his interviews with David Frost, Nixon's relationship to his public image and television was perhaps the most vexed of any president's since the medium's invention: as Jonathan Schell has written, "In his first eight

³⁷ Ibid., 40.

months, President Nixon . . . had established what amounted to an almost new form of rule, in which images were given precedence over substance in every phase of government."³⁸

But Serra would also refer more cryptically to Nixon's tactical maneuvers relative to the game-theoretic scenario after which the artist named his performance. The morality of the Prisoner's Dilemma, the idea of "to confess or not to confess"—right, wrong, justice, injustice—paralleled on the one hand the politics of TV programming and on the other hand, the specific dilemma of politicians like Agnew and Nixon:

The game does not allow for Agnew to confess, but the other people did—plea bargaining. That's why Nixon's so popular now. He can't confess and people love him for it. The Schechner-Spalding tape is a straight parallel, very obviously so.³⁹

Later on in the same interview, he would make another specific reference to game theory:

I made an earlier videotape, *Surprise Attack*, which used a game theory that went: If you hear a burglar downstairs, should you pick up a gun or not pick up a gun. It was taken from Schilling's [sic] book *The Strategy of Conflict*. About a year and a half ago Robert Bell and I had talked about the possibility of making a film on a train going to Las Vegas which would deal with game theory. And then when I saw him

³⁸ Jonathan Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 51.

³⁹ Serra, "Prisoner's Dilemma," 43.

in New York recently he'd just finished a paper on Deterrents which mentioned this specific prisoner's dilemma.⁴⁰

Two months before Serra made his work in January 1974, Nixon appeared in a televised press conference in which he infamously proclaimed "I'm not a crook" in response to charges of Watergate's illegal activities. For his part, Agnew had already resigned in October 1973 due to accusations of tax evasion and, more seriously, bribery. His extensive plea bargaining—copping to the lesser charge of failing to pay his taxes—kept him out of jail, reduced his punishment to a proverbial slap on the wrist and relieved him of having to make a confession.

The facts are well known and are implied by Serra's statement. For a contemporary reader, the connection between Serra's references to game theory and his desire to "expose the structure of television" is neither transparent nor especially obvious. By the time Serra made *Prisoner's Dilemma*, RAND's reputation was virtually synonymous with the crisis in Southeast Asia: In 1965, for example, artists and art critics would protest what countless other Americans saw as the think tank's morbid influence in Vietnam.⁴¹ Still, this phenomenon does not wholly explain the place of the Prisoner's Dilemma in Serra's work

40 Ibid. Note that "Surprise Attack" is the title of the fourth chapter in Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

41 See Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 33–38. Frascina's striking account of

on television. As I've suggested earlier, my contention is that there's a strange kind of formalism to much game theory—and, in a manner of speaking, an aesthetics by extension—that can illuminate the structure of this work and Serra's thematic engagement with game shows as displays of strategy.

The Strategy of Conflict, Schelling's highly influential book on deterrence of 1960, does indeed take on a formal logic foundational to game theory generally, if acknowledging both the abstractions and limitations of game-theoretic discourse when applied to international strategy. As described in Chapter 2, the first wave of game theory—most famously elaborated by von Neumann and then Nash—made fundamental assumptions about these interactions. It prescribed that "rational agents will draw the same inferences on how a game is to be played," often referred to as the "common knowledge of rationality"; and that one's "best-choice strategy" is founded upon what the other person does; and that both parties are rational parties, acting in their own best interests.⁴² Yet of the 78 two-person games

this protest is drawn mostly from the Leon Golub archives at the Archive of American Art; one notes that the RAND archives do not seem to possess any material related to the Artists' Protest Committee. Serra, for his part, would be tangentially implicated in these controversies for his participation in the Art and Technology program organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Though he worked with Kaiser Steel in the production of his famous "Skullcracker" series—and though his opposition to the war was radical and staunch—the partnership of the RAND Corporation with artists (first Larry Bell, then John Chamberlain) was the source of no small amount of vitriol on the part of many of the era's most visible critics.

42 See Shaun P. Hargreaves Heap and Yanis Varoufakis, *Game Theory: A Critical Text* (London: Routledge, revised edition 2004), 6–40.

derived from its methods, none has captured the popular imagination as much as the Prisoner's Dilemma, the name the Princeton mathematician Albert Tucker bestowed upon a well-known paradox formalized by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher at RAND in 1950.

In 1952, Flood published "Some Experimental Games," among the most influential tracts published by RAND, articulating in its third section this classic paradox of rationality, irrationality and strategy explored by Serra two decades later. As a challenge to earlier models of game theory—notably, the eponymous "equilibrium" model formulated by Nash—the conclusions drawn by analysis of the Prisoner's Dilemma were both striking and disturbing: first, that it is in the best interest of each player to "defect" from the other—that is, *not* to cooperate in making one's choice—and that second, people's choices were essentially, *irrational*. The Prisoner's Dilemma, in short, defies common sense reasoning. As the economists Hargreaves Heap and Varoufakis write, the "game has fascinated social scientists because it seems to be ubiquitous and because of its paradoxical conclusion that rational people, when acting apparently in their best interest, actually produce a collectively *inferior* outcome to what is available."⁴³ The Prisoner's Dilemma thus puts the irrationality of interaction itself on

⁴³ Ibid., 172.

show, where anticipating the other person's actions does not always result in the best outcome for those involved. It dramatizes the problem of reason itself within game theory, how expectations of the other's "best choice" strategy might devolve into the most absurd of exercises.

Indeed, even as much of it is premised on rationality, "rationality" will become a progressively vexed notion within the discourses of game theory. In an early paper for RAND, for example, Schelling questioned the application of "rational strategies" to non-zero sum games, that is games involving cooperation and mutual dependence, the basis for his subsequent work on international relations.⁴⁴ Schelling's thinking signals the increasingly precarious status of reason within game theory; and perhaps no one was in a better position to understand this dynamic where Nixon was concerned. A debate has raged over the president's notorious "madman strategy" and its relation to Schelling's game theory, in which the "performance" or *appearance* of the president's irrationality within matters of foreign policy served as the White House's unofficial deterrence platform. Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict* has long been linked, if controversially, to this most perverse Nixonian gambit. But more fundamental than the question of influence here is how Schelling flags a problem of interaction, reason and

⁴⁴ T. C. Schelling, "Prospectus for a Reorientation of Game Theory," P-1491, September 17, 1951, RAND Corporation, 1-2.

unreason as expressed between players within the game—a problem with a peculiar visual component as it so happens.

On the one hand, while possessing the “common knowledge of rationality” might in theory culminate in consensus—the triumph of the dialectic, enlightened cooperation—we’ve noted how it could result in a bad infinity of sorts, where, as the outcome of the Prisoner’s Dilemma suggests, there *is* no solution. The structure underwriting this exchange might instead produce an infinite regress, as articulated by commentators on game theory in the following terms:

The complication arises because with common knowledge of rationality I know that you are instrumentally rational and since you are rational and know that I am rational you will also know that I know that you are rational and since I know that you are rational and you know that I am rational I will also know that you know that I know that you are rational and so on . . . This is what common knowledge of rationality means.⁴⁵

In this surprisingly Beckett-like reckoning, one glimpses something of the *mise en abîme* to the formalization of game-theoretic discourse, an endless alteration between players in which the effort to second-guess the other results in an interminable feedback loop. To the extent that Serra was

⁴⁵ Hargreaves Heap and Varoufakis, *Game Theory*, 27.

engaged with Schelling’s terms it is uncanny that Hargreaves Heap and Varoufakis draw on a metaphor from the visual realm to characterize the mode of this exchange:

The idea reminds one of what happens when a camera is pointing to a television screen that conveys the image recorded by the very same camera: an infinite self-reflection. Put in this way, what seemed like a promising assumption suddenly looks capable of leading you anywhere.⁴⁶

One needn’t be so literal-minded as to imagine that these economists were thinking of video art when advancing their critique of reason in game theory. Resemblance is less the point here so much as the structure of interaction, no less the odd resonance such a reading might have with Baudrillard’s ecstatic communications. The recursive architecture the metaphor suggests does indeed find an echo in Serra’s video, where a kind of internal redoubling occurs not only relative to its tone and character, and not only within each section of the work, but across the pre-recorded video of the criminal interrogation and the documented performance of the game show. It is the incessantly circular logic of television—and the tautological character of contemporary communication—that results in Serra’s hall of mirrors, where television is endlessly refracted to

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

the point of implosion even while his video plays cheerfully to its conventions.

In this sense the apparent breaks within *Prisoner's Dilemma* acquire a new significance relative to the question of media and postmodernism. Consider the overall arc of the work, which pits the mass appeal of the game show with the military associations of game theory, crossed ultimately with a moral dilemma involving cooperation or defection. The first part of the work—Schechner's interrogation of Gray and Hovagimyan—reflects such fissures. As Schechner applies pressure to Gray within the pre-recorded video, he makes a not-so-veiled threat about the mediation of the process itself. "See those cameras over there?" he mutters to Gray "We are prepared to send this tape to your family in Rhode Island . . . This is documentation, this is proof." He then adds in a more conciliatory tone, "there are advantages to going to jail." Of course this is neither proof nor documentation of anything so much as the ersatz recording of a recording of a process designed to ensnare the hapless Gray in a most confused interaction: the prisoner will go to Ossining facility for 50 years for refusing to sign. This tape-within-a-tape plays to the mediated interaction between television and video as it does the dynamic of rationality and irrationality within game theory.

And yet crucially, Serra's take on the Prisoner's Dilemma here is not entirely consistent with the actual game since vital

information is provided to both Hovagimyan and Gray—namely, how the other party involved might act. In the canonical scenario, neither prisoner is given any information as to what the other one is going to do, preserving the abstract or theoretical dimension of the interaction. Serra, as such, has "defected" from the dilemma in two ways: first, he has broken the rules of the game and second, he has had one of his personas (Gray) acting in a manner outside the usual range of behaviors accorded the game-theoretic subject. In the second half of the performance, these interactions will find their double in the taped documentation of a live performance.

Indeed, as if both to mirror and contain the tape-within-a-tape conceit in the first half of the work, the documented video performance is premised on a live audience watching a video recorded at 112 Greene Street *within* 112 Greene Street. Reviewing the terms of the game, the players are provided the options by Bell and happily deliberate on the choices for punishment, the worst being 6 hours spent in the basement or, as the punch-line would have it "about the length of your average boring artist's video." Even this witty aside takes on connotations of some seriousness in light of its presentation. The entire scenario—and the relegation of Castelli and Boice to the basement of 112 Greene Street as each awaits his turn to be questioned by Bell—can only be glimpsed through monitors by the live audience, meaning that the "liveness" of

the performance is itself split and mediated, another tape-within-a-tape scenario departing from the viewing of yet another tape-within-a-tape. That this bears some relation to the “average boring artist’s video” is to the point not only with respect to the punishment’s extended and taxing duration but the ways in which Serra and his generation of video makers in the early 1970s were enthralled by the logic of the feedback loop. And like the first half of the work *Prisoner’s Dilemma*, the contestants, too, will stray from the conventional script. In a gesture of good faith, both Castelli and Boyce ultimately choose *not* to betray the other so that both players of the game are sentenced to spend 4 hours together in the basement of 112 Greene Street.

This final strategic decision on the part of the two players—continuous with the community-minded spirit of early 1970s SoHo—confirms Serra’s simultaneous reproduction and inversion of both the game-theoretic and televisual scenario: through an act of cooperation, the artist and his players paradoxically *defect* from the expected protocols of defection just as they reverse the lighthearted romp expected of the game show. They reproduce the impulse to defection that is the hallmark of the Prisoner’s Dilemma while overturning its claims.

The game being played, then, is one in which the rules are followed but effectively trumped. The players have contracted with its recursive logic, assumed the fundamental terms of the game’s dynamic. But just as Birnbaum’s work reproduced the

images circulated through the game show, if to show up the ways in which the behaviors of its subjects are reproduced and regulated as information, so too is Serra’s “a demonstration of the operation of culture,” where rationality and irrationality are exposed as opposite sides of the same coin. If at first Serra’s work seems little more than a television parody, his appropriation of game theory’s forms betrays an altogether different approach. In this iteration, as the game itself is put on show, media puts the lie to itself and the community wins.