

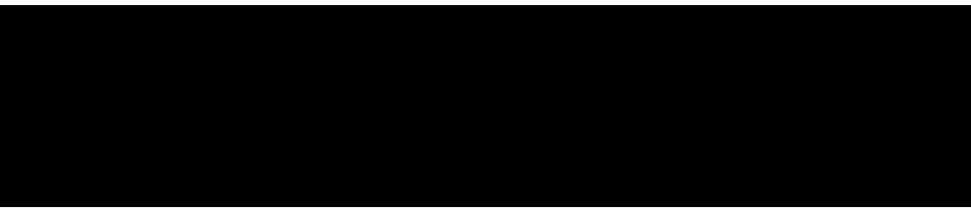
# conversation piece

marco scoffier

1996-2003

## Abstract

**conversation piece** is about non-verbal communication, the extensive queues we humans can pick up from another's facial expressions. Also under investigation are issues of synchronization and sympathy. The pairs who participate in the project share a primal task, one which we rarely have cause to think about, balance.



The participants are asked to stand on either end of a long board and balance it between them. This physical sensation of being on a seesaw is, however, just a pretext. This change of state is prepared to shake off at least one of the layers of protection through reservation in some, and protection through "theatricality" in others. Raw communication is the subject.

A proof of concept run of **conversation piece** was conducted with six pairs of students in Paris in 1996. The video of these experiences shows the power of this gimmick for eliciting a candidness in portraiture, and its ability to capture an empirically ephemeral subject which tends to be mostly hidden from view. We are usually not privy to these types of conversions of expression between others. A second iteration was filmed at the Goliath Visual Space in Brooklyn during the summer of 2004. All the technical problems were resolved at this filming and the project is ready to move on to other

spaces and film dozens of participants per hour.

The video can be presented in two ways. Single channel and multiple channel. Each has its strengths. Single channel most clearly shows the communication, the discussion is splayed open for viewing and is more readily perceived and analyzed. A triple channel presentation accentuates the magic of synchronization of the connection through space of the common sensation of balance through the board. An expression which starts in one channel actually travels through space to the other channel, the spatiality of this communication is more readily felt.

All portraiture is voyeuristic. We are curious about other humans, and constantly need to analyze them. This basic fact is as fundamentally human as walking upright. I hope, to continue taking samplings of portraits and to attract as wide and as varied a population of participants as possible.