

Fall 2011

## Can We Relate?, I Never Got the Message

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2011

## Can We Relate?, I Never Got the Message

Isabel Cottingham  
*Bard College*

Can We Relate?  
and  
I Never Got the Message

Senior Project submitted to  
Division of the Arts  
Bard Collage  
By Isabel Cottingham

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, November 2011

## Isabel Cottingham

Can We Relate? / I Never Got the Message

### Artist's Statement:

At the core, people are essentially the same. We are made from the same materials, with the same working parts, we need the same things in order to survive, we experience the same life cycle, and yet there is so much variety. I am interested in what defines people as who they are, what ingredients are in charge of creating an individual. I believe that, as people there are certain unifying aspects of our lives to which we are all able to connect. I am intrigued and challenged by the exploration of this. Fundamentally, I am fascinated by the idea that though we are alike, no two people are the same: that which makes us unique provides us with a perspective that we use in every, and all relationships we have. How do we relate to another person, our surrounding environment, a message, information, a group or simply the external aspect of the self? If we take the time, can we all relate to and understand each other? Within these questions, I find the inspiration for most of my work.

As an artist I am interested in taking these ideas and applying them to dance. I believe in asking the audience these questions of themselves and creating an experience for them that engages on multiple levels. I want my work to mentally hold the audience, not simply act to please some idea of an aesthetic. As part of my aesthetic there are two things I am interested in: real life and creating a line of inquiry that an audience can follow and relate to. I create work with an audience in mind. As a practice I'm interested in the production and what a live performance can offer to the viewer. I find that as an artist, I am attracted to multi media productions. As I was once told, "Dream in all medias." They can present more opportunities to construct an environment, to portray a full experience.

A dancer asked to talk after dancing has no choice but to show the audience the realness of physical exertion. My work is first and foremost about the movement and the dancers' ability to move with full range of motion while developing my line of inquiry. I am most interested in movement that uses a range of velocity, energy, parts, and intensity. Movement that is technically and physically demanding juxtaposed with the simplicity of the voice creates a world of truth.

The relationship between the dancers and the audience, the group and the individual group, the performance and life, the relevance and the entertainment values are all considered every time I start a project. Dance is a means of engaging thoughtfully with the world around me. My dances are crafted to communicate with the audience, are deeply involved with the state of our world, are deeply involved with the state of our world, and are infused by my ongoing interest in the human condition. Dance should say something, it should be as involved with the state of our world as any other art form. I am interested in the human condition and that is what inspires my material and me.

Isabel Cottingham and Brieze Levy  
The Collective/Group Mind:

We are patterned to be individuals who exist in a world that sustains itself through a web of group thinking. Our political leaders, business CEO's, inspirational stories usually involve more than one person. Our ability to communicate is a direct representation of our societal norms; communication is a process that opens a door to possibilities unknown to a single human mind. The isolation of an individual from his/her environment, other humans included, only limits imagination and cuts available potential short. The "real" world functions collectively, yet we are schooled to be independent. Furthermore, most of our education has trained us to see working with another as cheating, copying, or an easy-way-out. The ability to communicate is grossly ignored and looked down upon until school ends. We are expected to be efficient in communication, working with others, building a relationship based on equality and trust, yet have no practice. We (Brieze and I) wanted to change that.

We set out on this collaboration to challenge ourselves in working with another artist as a balanced pair. Our process is stressed with the same intensity as the product. We are interested in learning about the benefits of teamwork, and how to overcome the obstacles that naturally appear. We took this theory to heart and structured our entire process from it. This influenced everything from housekeeping-- managing emails, planning meetings, making to-do lists, and organizing odds and ends-- to rehearsal structures and finding multimedia supplements. I believe our process is reflected in our product. For example, a method during the building phase was for one to say an idea (some vision or inspiration) and the other to think on it, visualize, and explain other possibilities from there. Little by little decisions become finalized. Each rehearsal became a practice in cultivating esthetic preference, informing what we found important. This way of thinking has facilitated a greater understanding of our individual identities as choreographers and has illuminated the benefits of a partnership. This model will serve as a guide and a map into how we proceed into the future. As artists, we are looking forward to building on what we have established and using our community as our greatest resource.

# I NEVER GOT THE MESSAGE

BY ISABEL

COTTINGHAM AND

BRIEZE LEVY

IN THE:  
**OLD  
GYM**

DECEMBER:  
2 & 3 AT 7:00 PM  
4 AT 5:00 PM

Questions Over Whether Terror Suspects' Aid in Inquiries Was Voluntary  
New York  
The New York Times

Their Air, or Carry On and Profit Soon