



# Practice-based research Methods & Design process

**CMAG**

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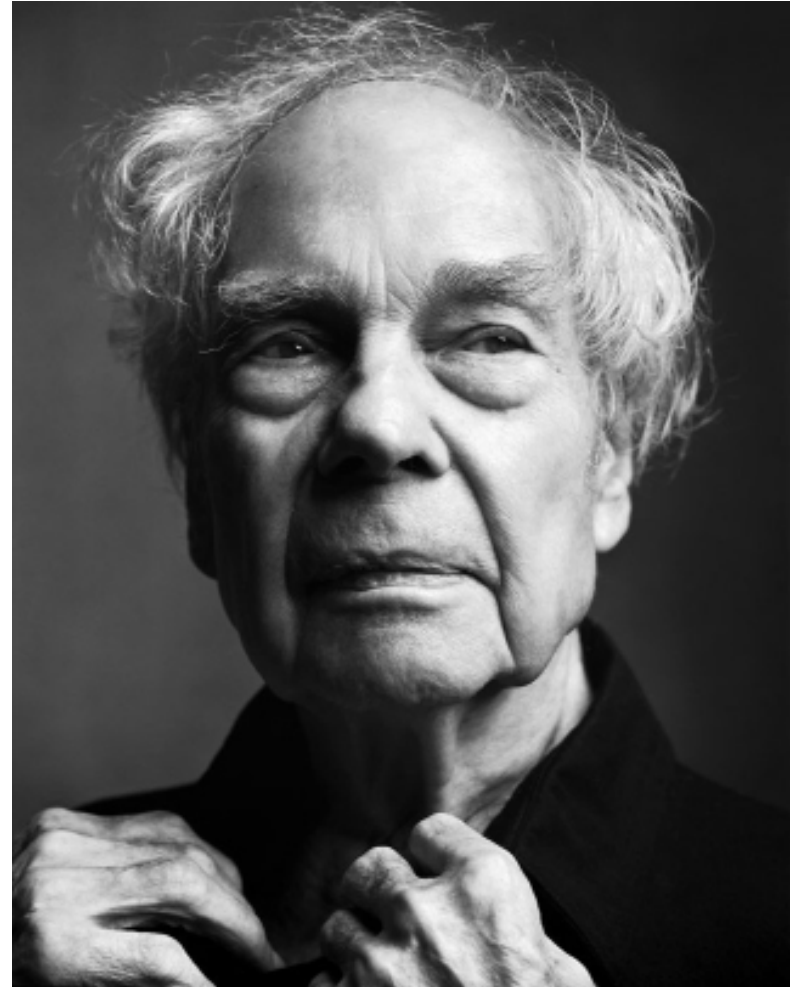
# Research

# Biography

‘Born in 1919 in Washington, United States, Mercier Philip «Merce» Cunningham was a dancer and choreographer. He passed away at the age of 90, in New York City. Studying acting at the Cornish School in Seattle, Merce Cunningham rapidly found himself a passion for the exploration of movement, especially through dance. He soon came to study at the Martha Graham Dance Company, after her founder, Martha herself, saw him dance and found great potential into his creativity and ability to move his body.

Later, his years of experience as a solist and dancer allowed him to give a change to his career. Avant-Gardist, Cunningham is now known as one of the most fabulous and talented artist in his domain of predilection, dance. His ability to innovate and change the conventional norms of dance, performance and visuals have allowed for the construction of his strong and successful reputation.

Some of his famous works include Suite for five (1956-1958), Ocean (1994), Scenario (1997) or even eyeSpace (2007). He also had the chance and opportunity to collaborate with artist including Andy Warhol, Daniel Arsam, Rei Kawakubo and John Cage. He was also rewarded many times, throughout his career, for his exceptional and dedicated work.’





Merce Cunningham with his partner John Cage, for The Washington Post.

## Second Hand (1970)

Music: John Cage, (Cheap Imitation)

Décor & Costumes: Jasper Johns

Lighting: Richard Nelson (1970) Christine Shallen-  
berg (2008)



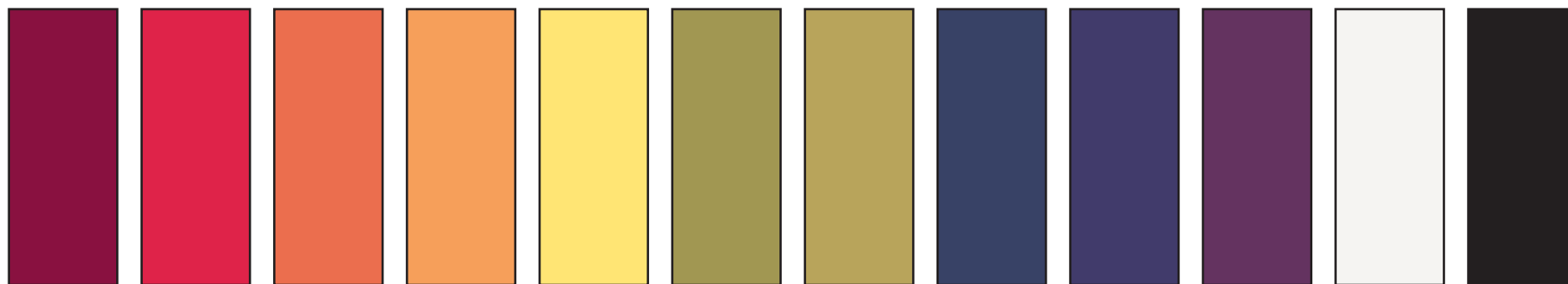
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‘Originally performed by Merce Cunningham himself, the opening solo of the piece is in fact a reconstitution of his 1944 *Idyllic Song* - now performed by Robert Swinston, whom surprisingly resembles the talented choreographer.

Greatly open to interpretation, the piece is said to explore the notion of death through the loneliness and emotional journey of one as they approach the end of their life. On this conceptual theme, the brightness and color choice of the costumes for the performance could be a contradiction to the darkness of a subject matter that is, death. On the other hand, it could be seen as a memory recall, representing moments of the life lived by the individual concerned.’





Colorography



## **Scenario (1997)**

Music: Takehisa Kosugi, (Wave Code A-Z)

Décor & Costumes: Rei Kawakubo

Lighting: Rei Kawakubo



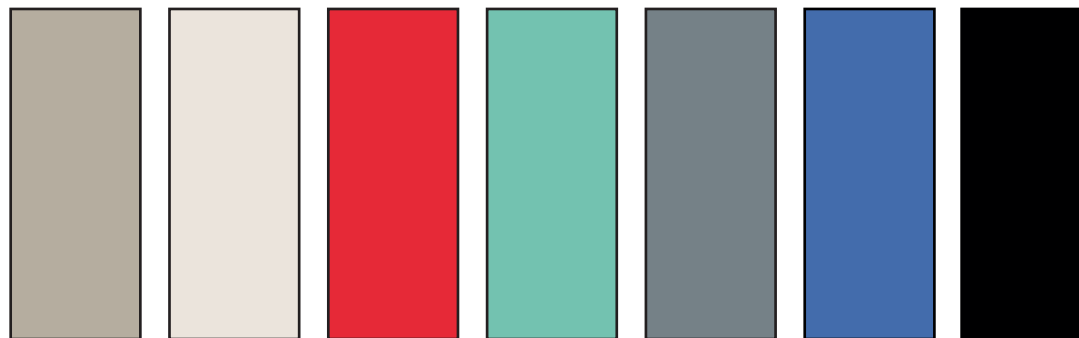
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‘Centered around the idea of physycal distortion, Scenario is the creation of Merce Cunningham in collaboration with the designer and founder of Comme des Garcons, Rei Kawakubo. Having first refused the collaboration, the fashion designer later changed her mind after the presentation of her Spring/Summer collection in 1997, called *Body Meets Dress*.

The notion of the random and distortion can not only be found through the added curves and humps on the costumes, but through the movements and lack of coordination between the dancers that take place on the space created. The movements are rough, rapid and generally involve repetition as the performers move in linear patterns.’



Colorography





## **Antic Meet (1958)**

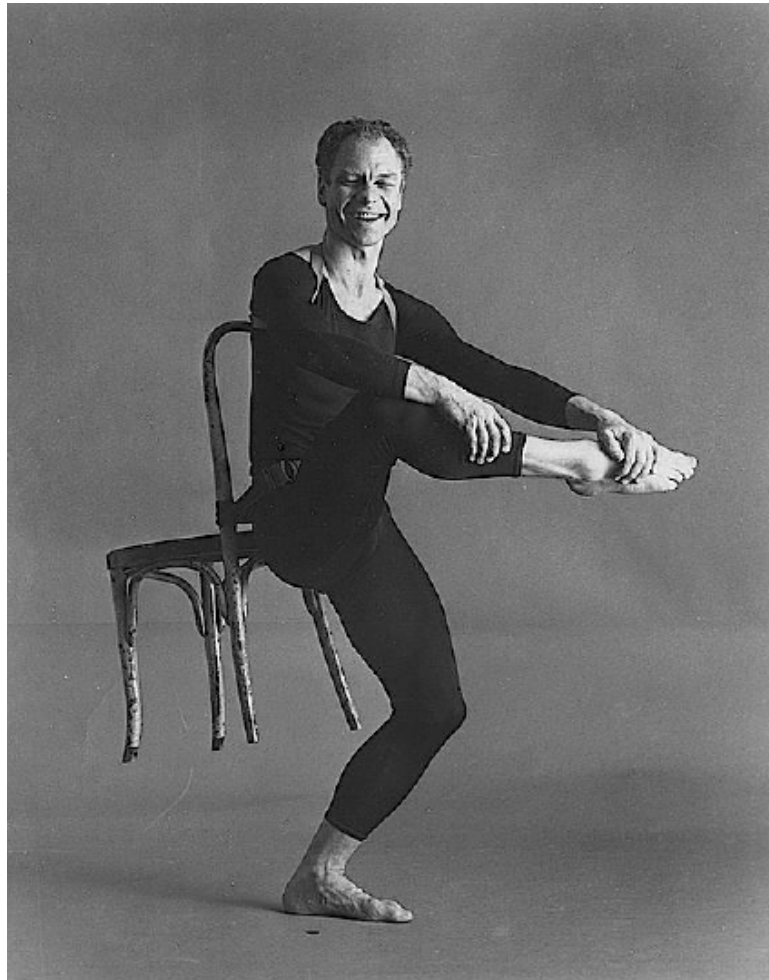
Music: John Cage Concert for piano and orchestra

Décor & Costumes: Robert Rauschenberg

Lighting: Unknown

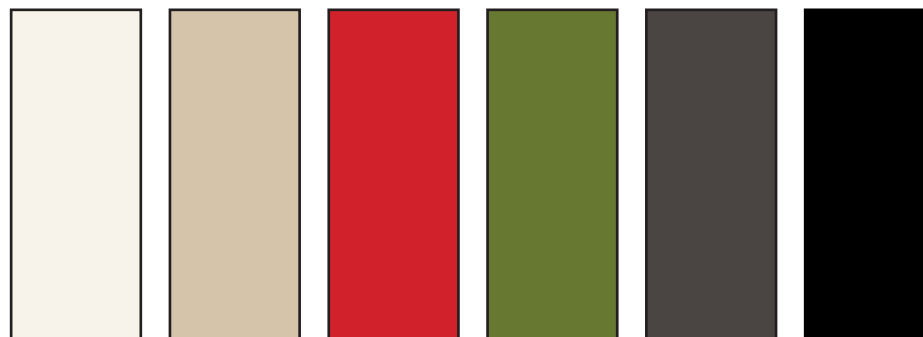


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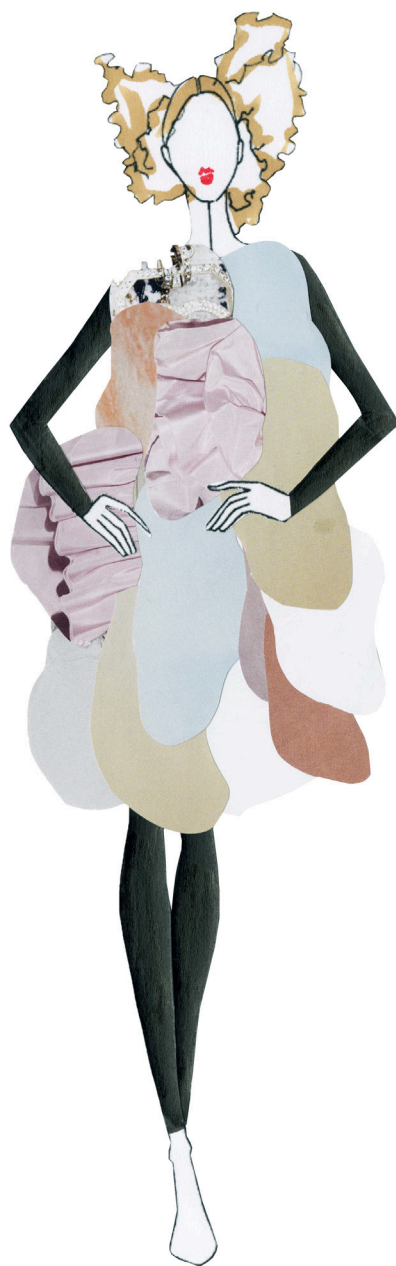


‘Originally played by Merce himself back in the days, his master piece *Antic Meet* remains played by dancers of his company today. The piece recreates ten distinct, playful and humoristic scenes spread over the 30 minute performance.

As the curtains open, Merce, amongst the other dancers finds himself *‘falling in love with a society whose rules he doesn’t know’*. The space, the volume of the costumes and the diagonal movements of the dancers accross the stage are elements encouraging and accentuating this idea of diversity and unknown rules, throughout the performance.’



Colorography



# **Biped (1999)**

Music: Gavin Bryars Biped

Décor: Shelley Eshkar, Paul Kaiser

Costumes: Suzanne Gallo





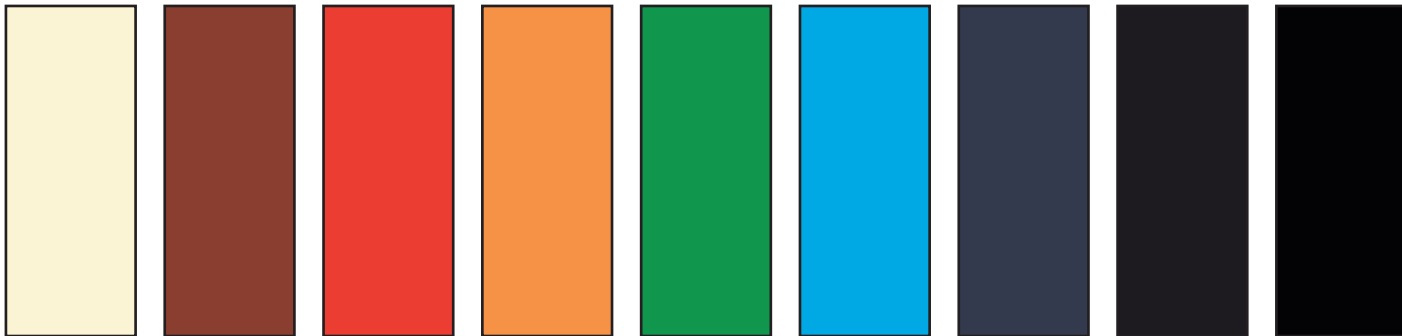


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*«The dance gives me the feeling of switching channels on the TV... the action varies from slow formal sections to rapid broken-up sequences where it is difficult to see all the complexity.»*

The performance is a melange of lighting, animation, colors and dancers. The deconstruction of the movements and the lack of coordination between the dancers allows for an addition to the complexity of the piece. The metallic costumes worn by the performers are not only a way to accentuate their movements but a contribution to the lighting projected on the background.'



Colorography



