

*Le Cercle Channa Davis Horwitz 1973*

Channa Davis Horwitz, Le Cercle, 1973

# Channa Davis Horwitz: An Interview

**Ann McCoy**

**AMcC** - I first became aware of your work in the catalogue of Maurice Tuchman's, "Art and Technology" show. How did the proposal shown there fit into the overall scheme of your work?

**CDH** - The Proposal was for a sculpture with eight moving parts. I became interested in how the moving parts would look in time. As a painter, I could compose in two dimensions, as a sculptress I could compose in three dimensions, but I could not understand how musicians and dancers could compose in the fourth dimension: Time. To control and compose time, I created a system of notation that would show how the eight parts would look in ten minutes of time.

**AMcC** - How would you define "Sonakinatography I, II, and III"?

**CDH** - "Sonakinatography I" is a system of notation for the organization of time, space, color, movement, and sound, through the use of symbols. The compositions are

logical structures for planned, programmed, movement in time. Any media (sound, color or movement) may be used to interpret the compositions which can be performed separately, simultaneously, or sequentially. Because of their choice of: sound, source, pitch, color, sculptured movement, tempo, degree of intensity, density, distance, direction of movement, etc., artists are provided extreme latitude in their interpretation of the compositions. For example, sound can be close or far in intervals of intensity, pitch and value. I interpret my compositions on a grid surface (usually graph paper) which is used to measure time, indicate color, sound, and motion. I write the compositions in vertical or horizontal columns. If the interpretation is expressed horizontally, then it is read from left to right and from top to bottom. If the interpretation is expressed vertically, then it is read from bottom to top and from left to right. One symbol or square of color is representative of all media and is re-

ferred to on the notated sheets as instruments. Each instrument is numbered from one thru eight, one-low, eight high. Time is measured horizontally or vertically depending on the interpretation and is referred to on the notated sheets as beat. There is a constant or progressing measurement of time throughout the system. The time lapse between each progression depends upon the interpreting artist's choice of rhythmic pattern.

"Sonakinatography I," breaks down the barriers between the arts through the use of a simple language that can be applied to each art in a different way. "Sonakinatography II," is a notation system for sound motion, as applied to dance. It is used to notate choreography. Each beat is divided into segments representing the rhythm of that beat. It is read from bottom to top and from left to right. Color is used to designate placement in space. Symbols are used to designate action in time.

"Sonakinatography III," is a notation system for business. In this system I was interested in taking the complexity of many entities and notating them into a simple graph.

**AMcC** - Can you discuss the way/or ways in which each composition is determined in "Sonakinatography I"?

**CDH** - Each composition is determined by a logical number sequence. I think of these logical sequences as number games that play on the graph paper in different ways.

**AMcC** - Can you tell me about your first performance at U.S.C.?

**CDH** - The first interpretation of a composition was in 1969, at an Experiments in Art and Technology show at the University of Southern California. For that performance "Composition #III" was interpreted by eight dancers who danced on light platforms to forty-five minutes of sound done on the Moog Synthesizer. Each dancer had eight phrases, one for each color, each phrase lasted about half a minute. As the dancers walked on the platforms, colored lights would change in relation to the sound. If a light appeared under a girl as she walked then she would stop and respond to the colored light with her phrase for that color.

**AMcC** - Can you discuss the Cal Arts performances?

**CDH** - The first performance I had at Cal Arts was a happening with Allan Kaprow and his 'happeners.' For that performance I sequentially numbered the spaces between the banister rails, starting at the top, going to the bottom and then across to the other side and working back up again. I gave each happenner a number and eight colors, each of which had a number. They were told to add or subtract the banister rail number, their own number and the color number, in order to arrive at where they were to place each color. I conceived of the idea to use the banister rails as pulses in time because of the beauty of those rails against the stark whiteness of the institution. There was no color within the building when the Institute first opened and I felt the desire to place color within the walls. I also wished to expand my notation system from a two-dimensional expression to a three dimensional sculpture. For my next performance, using the rails as pulses, I ran

horizontal black tape across the rails creating a grid of eight high. I then placed eight colored jells, duplicating "Composition #III," this time running my time composition into space.

**AMcC** - What about the impermanence of that piece?

**CDH** - What really delighted me was, as I worked along the banister rail, there were people walking up and down the stairs, touching the banister rail. The grid was put together with thin black masking tape. One swing of an arm could destroy a whole section. I found that the further I got along the banister rail, the more I would have to go back and repair it, so that my progress got slower and slower. This in no way disturbed me, because I realized that the grid would last as long as I chose to stay and maintain it. To me this is equal to time - time is impermanent. If it had been put up as a permanent fixture this would have been a contradiction.

**AMcC** - I was very excited by your dance performance at Cal Arts. Can you tell me more about it?

**CDH** - While at Cal Arts I put together a multi-media performance using the dance school, the music school, the design school, and the school of photography. The performance was put on in March of 1973. David Mahler, a graduate student at the Institute did thirteen minutes of sound on the Buchla Synthesizer and Valerie Baadh choreographed motion for eight dancers. This performance was a new interpretation of "Composition #III," the same composition that had been performed at U.S.C. It was important for me to show that the same composition could have an infinite variety of interpretations. I did a scrim that hung, covering one end of the performance hall, it was a blow up of the notation and an explanation.

**AMcC** - Yes, I very much liked being able to see the notation and watch the dances at the same time. What do you think is the main thrust of your work, and in what way do you think your work is best expressed? Is it through your notations or through the dance performances?

**CDH** - My expression of "Sonakinatography I, II, and III," is through graphic means. Any other means of expression of the compositions is usually not interpreted by

me. I devised the systems so that I would then have a linear content to express. How those pages are composed is of the utmost interest to me. When I arrange for others to work on a composition and express it, I feel that this way of presenting the work is fun and an extension of the potential of the whole concept of Sonakinatography. It is not my main interest though. Drawing my graphs is.

**AMcC** - Would you like to see your compositions interpreted in other ways than in dance?

**CDH** - I do hope to have other performances. I would like one to be a dramatic performance, interpreting one of the compositions in "Sonakinatography I." If it was interpreted dramatically then possibly each number could represent a phrase, a feeling, an emotion. It is so open-ended it could be interpreted in so many different ways. It will depend on my choice of an interpreter and how they feel about the work and their own work. The most exciting thing about the work, is that it is so open-ended, it is an open ended structure.

**AMcC** - Do you make any discriminations as to who performs your work?

**CDH** - I would like to say I do, but that wouldn't be true. I search for someone that I can interest in the work. When I find that person I familiarize myself with the person, through our discussion of the work. I am most concerned with a honest interpretation of each composition. If the basic structure is not adhered to, then I feel that the interpretation has no validity in connection with my work. Because of the open-ended freedom, the structure cannot be lost or there is a break down of the meaning or truth of the work. The freedom allowed is an intrinsic part of my concept. So, when another artist consents to perform I allow that person total freedom in the expression of the composition. In the second sound and dance performance at Cal Arts, I feel that both the sound and dance were brilliant interpretations of the composition.

**AMcC** - Do you ever make arbitrary decisions in the creation of your work?

**CDH** - The colors I choose are arbitrary. The fact that I chose eight objects in all of my compositions is arbitrary. But once I choose something arbitrarily I then consist-

ently use what I have chosen. I am interested in simplifying my tools in order to maximize the potential of the work.

**AMcC** - What about your ideas about simplicity and complexity?

**CDH** - The key to my work is simplicity and complexity. I have been working with the premise that any complexity can be understood in it's simplest form; that all diverse fields are in some way similar. In my notations I am interested in breaking through the barrier of the different arts, because they all have a common language. The language I use in my notations is applicable to some aspect of each of the arts. In these notations I am searching for some connecting link to establish a clearer reality.

**AMcC** - Can you tell me more about your

newer systems that utilize the full circle, half circle, etc.?

**CDH** - They are expansions of the previous compositions. For a number of years I have been working on just four compositions and expressing them. "And Then There Were None," was the first new composition. In it I started to play with black squares on graph paper, moving all of the squares in units rather than as individuals. I am playing graphically with motion in time. I will be expressing them in colors in different ways, but so far I have expressed them in black and white. They are really like games. A whole new frontier has just opened up for me as to the possibilities of the eight squares and how I move them logically and in sequence on the graph paper.

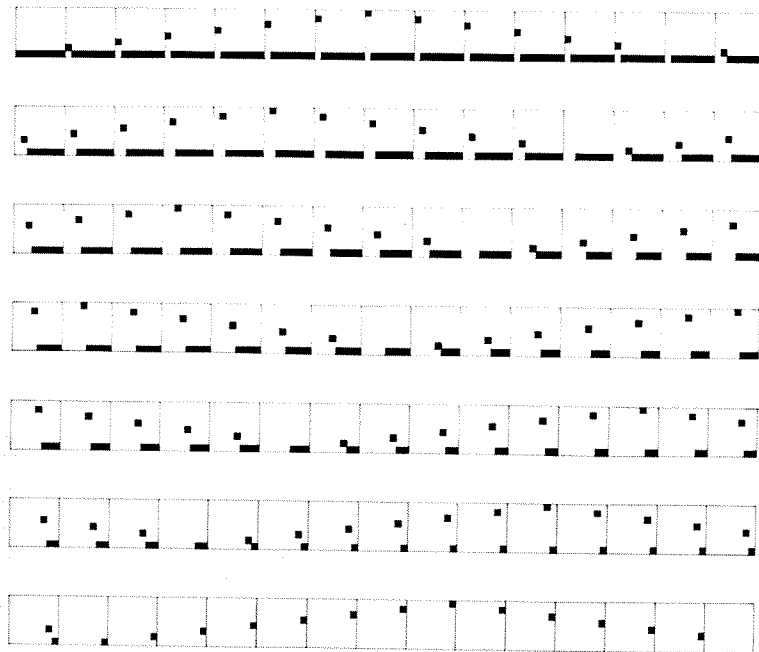
**AMcC** - Why do your notation sizes vary?

**CDH** - I take the same liberties with size, color, and form, that I allow the interpreting artists. I have made my notations so small that in order to be able to fully realize and appreciate it you would have to use a magnifying glass, and I have made them so large that they have covered 565 feet.

**AMcC** - Can you think of other things Sonakinatography can be used to program?

**CDH** - I would like to see somebody interpret a composition in poetry. And, as I said before I would like to see a composition done dramatically. Aside from my own adaptations I would like to see if the system could be adapted to make another language for computers. I would also like to see a composition done visually in a computer graphic or in animation.

Channa Davis Horwitz, And Then There Were None, 1973



*And Then There Were None Channa Davis Horwitz 1973*