

BENNINGTON SUMMER SCHOOL OF THE DANCE

Louise Kloepper

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history memoir is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Theresa Bowers of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office with Ms Louise Kloepper. The interview took place in Madison, Wisconsin on September 26, 1980. It is one of a series of interviews documenting the Bennington College Summer School of the Dance.

Ms Kloepper has reviewed the transcript and has made only minor corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind therefore that he or she is reading spoken and not written prose.

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Russell K. Kupper

(date)

May 28th 1980

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Interview with Louise Kloepper
in Madison, Wisconsin

Bennington Summer School of the
Dance Project

Interview #1

by Theresa Bowers

September 26, 1979

Bowers: Can you start by your telling me how you first got started in dancing and right up to your coming to Bennington eventually?

Kloepper: You mean how I very first started? Way back?

Bowers: Yes.

Kloepper: I had a sister who was very, very thin and very kind of fragile looking, and my parents thought that maybe dancing would be good for her. So they started her in ballet. I happened to go down and watch one day and that's how it started.

Bowers: This was where?

Kloepper: This was--oh my--this was when I was first in

high school and I studied for several years.

Bowers: But where in geography?

Kloepper: Oh--Tacoma, Washington.

First of all, it was only to be for a few months, just let me have a fling at it, so to speak. But then I got so involved and I begged 'couldn't I just please go on a little longer?' Well, they finally decided to let me go on.

Then I went to study in Seattle, which is not very far away. I commuted there and studied with ^{Mary Ann} ~~Wells~~ Wells. She had a very fine school in Seattle.

Bowers: This is still ballet though.

Kloepper: It was all ballet, yes. Then after about two years, after I graduated, there was a question of where should I go next? By this time my parents were ready to allow me to go on. New York seemed to be "the" place; however, my parents weren't too happy with that idea and so they said, "Why don't you go to Germany?" because I

had relatives there and my mother had read about a person called Mary Wigman. That was okay with me because I could get both ballet and modern over there; modern, I was going to try it. I didn't know what it was.

Bowers: This was instead of college.

Kloepper: Yes, instead of college, right out of high school.

So I went and studied in Germany for two years and graduated from the Wigman school which was in Dresden, Germany.

Bowers: Your name is German, isn't it?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did you speak German in your home or did you know German?

Kloepper: A little bit. I could ask for a glass of water and ^aplate--some very simple things. But I learned it

rather quickly because it was in the ear. When you hear it around the house it was in the ear; but I wasn't very conversant.

Bowers: So you went there to study both ballet and modern.

Kloepper: Mostly modern. I did take some ballet classes, too, but I didn't stay with that too long.

Bowers: Was there as much of a split in Germany between ballet and modern as there was in America, that they felt hostile towards one another?

Kloepper: Oh, I don't know. I suppose--that's natural to feel that 'my way is better than your way.'

Bowers: To paraphrase the dog food commercial.

Kloepper: Yes, right.

Bowers: How long were you there?

Kloepper: I was there two years and then I came back and...

Bowers: Wait. Let's talk just a little bit about what you did. Did you meet Hanya there?

Kloepper: Yes. She was one of my teachers. Actually, the Wigman school--there were several branches and I started out in Berlin for a year and then went to the main branch, Dresden. One of the reasons for going to Berlin, because it was closer to my relatives, which was still far enough away; but anyway, that was the reason for starting there, and then I went to Dresden.

It was at Dresden I met Hanya. Mary Wigman at that time was touring quite a bit; as a matter of fact in this country, she was touring. So we'd see her when she came back. She always taught some classes.

Bowers: So you went over there never having seen her perform.

Kloepper: No. I'd never even seen modern dance; I didn't even know what it was. Frankly, I didn't care

too much for some of it.

Bowers: For the technique that you *learned*.

Kloepper: For the technique. I liked some of it but some of it I didn't like.

Bowers: Did you, perhaps, like less the sitting-still business and you wanted to move more, or could you characterize it that way?

Kloepper: No, it wasn't that. I could show you this; it might be hard to talk about what it was. There was something they called tension and relaxation which, of course, as a principle was fine. But what we did, to me, was so undancelike. Well, I'll tell you what it looked like: It looked as though--well, you clenched your fist and it was as though you were lifting a very, very heavy weight, and you'd keep coming up and up and up and up and up over your head (said in strained voice) and then you'd collapse--HUUH!

Well, that ~~was~~ to me was just so--esthetically it

wasn't pleasing. I mean there were a few things like that I didn't care for, but I did like the moving across the floor. That was very free and fun, very rhythmic.

Bowers: Did you ever go to--I understand that [Adolf] Appia was down the road at Hellerau, right?

Kloepper: At Hellerau--I'm not sure that that was still functioning when I was there. Are you talking about the [Émile-Jaques] Dalcroze school? Wasn't the Dalcroze school there?

Bowers: I don't know if that school was there. All I know is that Appia sort of had his theater there where he did all these experiments...

Kloepper: I'm not acquainted with that.

Bowers: ...and the set business and the Bauhaus.

Kloepper: The Bauhaus, yes; I knew about the Bauhaus.

Bowers: But Wigman was real interested in those people I thought.

Kloepper: Oh yes she was.

Bowers: But she didn't have you as students run up and down...?

Kloepper: No, no. She had her own place in Dresden.

Bowers: Did you have a lot of visiting people who would come? Did you feel like you were involved in a whole "scene" of modern dance there?

Kloepper: No. It was just the school, and she had several teachers there and Hanya was one of them, and her own sister was one of them, and then she had two or three others, too.

They tried to really do a school--we had a little bit of anatomy. We had percussion. We had some music. Then we had different classes. Like one was called--it was really a technique class and another class would be

a group class in which you moved as a group and improvised as a group.

Bowers: Trying to ^{be an} ensemble, pick up from the group.

Kloepper: Yes. Then they had something called a class hour and that was moving too, but that was more improvisation on a theme.

Bowers: Did you have any actual composition classes as we think of them now?

Kloepper: Not as such, no.

Bowers: So you were getting used to the idea of creating movement.

Kloepper: Yes, within this improvisation technique.

Bowers: And you liked it there?

Kloepper: Yes, I did. I finally got over my dislike for

some of those tension things.

Bowers: At this time, were you starting to hear about the American modern dance--[Martha] Graham, [Doris] Humphrey, [Charles] Weidman?

Kloepper: No, not really too much.

Bowers: Were you familiar with [Harald] Kreutzberg and [Yvonne] Georgi?

Kloepper: Yes, I was. And [Gerta] Palucca was another one.

Bowers: And Sakharov, did you ever see her? [Clothilde von Derp who married Alexandre Sakharov]

Kloepper: No. I didn't know Sakharov...

There was another one--Tina Flade.

Bowers: Oh, you knew her there?

Kloepper: Yes. She's in this country now, has been for

many, many years.

Bowers: Yes, I know.

Did you hit it off with Hanya right away?

Kloepper: Over there you mean? Yes, I liked her very much.

Bowers: Was it sort of a friendly place, the school?

Kloepper: Yes, it was. It was a small community and we were there quite a few hours a day so we all knew each other well.

Bowers: Then you came back to this country and what did you do?

Kloepper: I went home and, in the meantime, I tried to start a private school. I was not very good at such ventures. But Mary Wigman came to Seattle to perform and I was in Tacoma. A train did go through Tacoma to Seattle and I got on the train with her in Tacoma and ^{rode} ~~and~~

over with her to Seattle.

At that time, Hanya had been in the U.S. for one year and she sort of talked to me about would I be interested in this school, in the New York Wigman school.

Bowers: In working in it with Hanya, or taking it over?

Kloepper: More or less taking it over financially. I think they were having a little hard time and I said no, I wouldn't.

But then I received a letter not too long after that asking me to come and be a teacher there, and that's how I happened to get there.

Bowers: You knew about Hanya being in New York, didn't you?

Kloepper: Oh yes, I knew that.

Bowers: Did you feel any urge to go there and work with her?

Kloepper: Oh yes, definitely.

Bowers: But you were financially secure in Tacoma and that's what...

Kloepper: Well, no, that wasn't it. They'd already brought someone with them and that person left; I mean Hanya brought someone with her and that person left, and that's when they asked me to come.

Bowers: So you could only go there if you had a job.

Kloepper: Yes. I felt as though I should be on my own by this time. So I went and then stayed there ten years.

Bowers: What year was it that you came to Hanya in New York?

Kloepper: In 1932.

Bowers: Oh, that was real early.

Kloepper: Yes, it was--yes, 1932.

Bowers: How had Hanya translated the Wigman school into American? Had she made any changes in the technique or the structure of the school?

Kloepper: Oh my, yes.

Bowers: Can you talk about that?

Kloepper: Well, of course, these things all go gradually, as they should, in order to not just jump around. Gradually more technique came in, like more knee bends, let's say; more technique which you would repeat instead of always different technique which is what they used to do more or less. They had a few things they would do daily, but not too many. That began. She began to do more and more things like that.

Bowers: Because she was really building.

Kloepper: Building, yes. And this all came very, very slowly.

They still had the technique class. They still had

what was called a class hour where there were themes developed; really the theory was developed in those classes, and the improvisation with it. Let's see, what else? We had percussion. It was very much based on the ^{Wigman idea of} ~~the~~ a school.

Bowers: What sort of theory do you mean in the class hour? You mean theories about space?

Kloepper: About space, and time, energy, qualities.

^{Did she at}
Bowers: ~~At~~ that time have the thing about the four qualities--swing, the vibrating...?

Kloepper: That's right.

Bowers: So that was the kind of theory that you had.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: And she would talk about dynamics? Like you can slice space or float through it?

Kloepper: Yes. Now some of those terms, which Mary used to use, did sort of disappear in a way, after a while. For instance Mary Wigman talked about the passive scale and the active scale.

Bowers: What does that mean?

Kloepper: Well, I suppose passive means make it appear as though you are being acted on; and the active scale would be you are acting upon, you see. I can't remember exactly what the movements were for that. It was mostly an attitude which looked as though because you're acting; you have to be or you wouldn't stand up. But it was the appearance of the passivity side and the active side.

Bowers: Were you developing your own line of things, or were you developing with Hanya?

Kloepper: With Hanya, yes; we worked together and we'd say, "This seems to be a good thing." This seems to be a good thing."

Bowers: Hanya was under a lot of pressure. Politically, it was difficult.

Kloepper: Oh very.

Bowers: Financially, it was difficult.

Kloepper: Very, yes.

Bowers: The other people who were doing modern dance had all these reputations as performers, and that must have been a pressure on Hanya, too.

Kloepper: It was, yes it was.

Now, she could perform beautifully within a certain limited area. She was no great leaper, jumper--that sort of a person. But she could do the most delicate things beautifully.

Bowers: Like little gestures?

Kloepper: Oh yes. And her feet were just like little

hands; they just twinkled. Beautiful feet. She was just lovely when she was doing things like that.

Bowers: That's interesting.

Were you friendly with Hanya?

Kloepper: Oh yes.

Bowers: It wasn't just professional.

Kloepper: Oh no.

Bowers: Did she talk about those pressures on her? Did she seem concerned?

Kloepper: Yes, yes, it was a very difficult time. Her child was still in Germany and she wanted to get him out, of course. I don't know the details, but there was a little problem in trying to get him out and she did finally get him out.

Once that was settled, ~~she~~ she was happy again. One of the worst things I think that happened was that there

were rumors that the school had Nazi connections. You know this was just--well, it wasn't true, of course. But ~~that~~, rumors of that type, can really hurt.

Bowers: But I can see how at that time it would be hard for some Americans to distinguish between Nazi and Germany, right?

Kloepper: Yes, right. I'm sure.

At that time it was still called the Mary Wigman School, and people began to urge Hanya to change it. They said ~~that~~ it is now really your school.

Bowers: Because the material had altered.

Kloepper: Yes, the material had altered and she'd gone on and developed her own way, and with the war and all that it was just better. And so she did, and Mary Wigman agreed that she should do it.

Bowers: Why did Wigman always stay in Germany? I always

wondered about that.

Kloepper: As far as I could figure out--I went back to Germany after I'd been in New York one year. In other words, I went back in 1933. I'm not sure whether Hitler was already in--I think he was by that time; he wasn't when I left I don't think, but I heard about him.

Mary invited me, when I went back for a summer, to sit on her rooftop; she had a garden up there. And I asked her about that. She said, "You know Louise, I could go to America, yes. But whatever happens to my people should happen to me," and I thought that was very poignant. She could have very easily gotten out, and she stayed there and she suffered; she suffered quite a bit--bombings, cold, hunger--she went through the whole thing.

Bowers: Did she ever talk about Graham?

Kloepper: Not that I know of.

Bowers: Because people sort of set them up as opposite

numbers to one another.

Kloepper: Yes. Well, they look somewhat alike. They both had this kind of monkey--(chuckles) little monkey mouth, you know. I mean their bone structure was just a little alike, not exactly, but there was a similarity there.

Bowers: But also they were known as very intense solo performers.

Kloepper: Right--dramatic.

Bowers: And heavy--they dealt with heavy stuff rather than being pretty.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: But you never remember her talking about that?

Kloepper: No, I don't. I'd meet her only in classes and of course she wasn't about to talk about Graham. I'm

sure she must have to Hanya.

Bowers: While you were teaching in New York I'm sure you had your hands full, but did you ever want to study Humphrey-Weidman or Graham? Were you aware of them by this time?

Kloepper: Oh yes, I was very much aware of them. As a matter of fact, Hanya invited Louis Horst to come and give us a series of composition classes, which he did.

Bowers: Did you get along with him?

Kloepper: Oh fine, yes. We adored him. He had such a lovely sense of humor and such a knowledge of composition and he could pinpoint something right away.

Bowers: Was he teaching Pre-Classic Forms then?

Kloepper: I think he was; I think that was what he was doing. ~~_____~~

Bowers: But some people think he was really sort of cruel in the way that he used his critical eye.

Kloepper: Well--I never saw him cruel. I saw him be pretty straightforward.

Bowers: So that was a success?

Kloepper: Oh yes.

Bowers: And Hanya ^{Louis} really got along well.

Kloepper: Oh yes.

Bowers: Was Louis very closely identified with Graham at that time?

Kloepper: Oh definitely. He was her composer at that time. He taught for her.

Bowers: It didn't seem to be a conflict for anybody?

Kloepper: No. I'm pretty sure he was with Martha at that time.

Bowers: Yes.

Did Hanya bring a pianist from Germany with her?

Kloepper: No, not with her.

Bowers: Who was doing your accompanying?

Kloepper: Frieda Miller.

Bowers: And somewhere along the line you found Harvey Pollins.

Kloepper: Yes. He was from the Dalcroze school.

Bowers: Over there.

Kloepper: No, here, in New York. Dalcroze school in New York.

Bowers: Louis had created these notions about what music for modern dance was supposed to be like. Was Frieda Miller working in that idiom, or was she doing something that was closer to what you did at the Wigman school?

Kloepper: No, she was not from the Wigman school; she was from New York.

Bowers: But what sort of accompanying was she doing?

Kloepper: She improvised, and she also composed. Her music things tended to be very gay and very light, very rhythmic. But she did mostly accompaniment for us--she improvised. And we also had John Coleman; he was also from the Dalcroze school. Both of these people were beautiful improvisers, ~~and they were also~~

Bowers: When Hanya first came to this country, she was teaching, but she also had the goal of building a company that would be performing, right?

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: Was that part of the drawing card for you? Were you eager to have a performing career?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did you and Hanya talk about that and plan about getting a company?

Kloepper: Yes. We had to wait until--as usual--we had people with us for a while as students before we could start something like that. I don't remember exactly which year it was. But we did start out with students we had; we were really just working at making group dances, and it was run somewhat like an orchesis group. Do you know that name, orchesis? It means that you get together...The group members contribute. Sometimes one person will take over and do the whole thing. But in the early days, we all sort of worked with Hanya. We found movement segments and we'd improvise and she would say, "Yes, that's good. Let's use that."

Bowers: Is that because Hanya is the kind of person that

she is or because that was part of the way you worked at the Wigman school in Germany?

Kloepper: I never did work in a group ^{in Germany} ~~which~~ which was to go into a performance, so I don't know how Mary did it. Of course, Hanya didn't do too much group performance; that is, she performed in the group but she did not do her own concerts, let's say.

Bowers: So you think it might have had just to do with the fact that she's a really democratic easy-going person herself, that she would draw on people...

Kloepper: I wouldn't say easy-going. (laughs) No, I think that was just a way that had been worked on in classes. It was a way of doing things and this was taken further then. So that she really made the selections. But we all tried out, tried to help, and this lasted for a few years and then she did more and more and more as time went on. Finally she was doing the whole thing.

Bowers: Bennington started in 1934 just as a teaching

institution and Hanya went up there and taught for the summer...But at that time, Hanya hadn't put together a company yet, had she?

Kloepper: That could be. I think we were working with it but I don't know that we performed yet.

Bowers: I think you probably performed the first time around 1936 or so.

Kloepper: Was it? Could be, could be.

Bowers: That's interesting because Hanya, without a company at this point, was invited to Bennington on a par with Graham, Humphrey and Weidman who had been performing for five years already.

Kloepper: Yes. Because Hanya's reputation as a teacher was very, very fine.

Bowers: It was?

Kloepper: Oh my, yes. Oh yes, yes. And she was particularly appealing to people who were going to teach dance in the universities or in high schools or wherever they could teach, who wanted to teach.

Bowers: Why was that?

Kloepper: That was because of her theory. It wasn't only technique. She developed whole ideas about space, how you could build lessons on it; on rhythm; on qualities. So they began to get materials. It gave them more tools for creating themselves. So that was the reason that she was invited.

Also, by the way, we did do lecture demonstrations. That we did before we got into the concerts. These lecture demonstrations had small studies in them. We started with the smaller studies, and then we began to add one or two dances, full-fledged dances, full-length dances, to the lecture dem. Finally the concert grew until it was just a concert then.

Bowers: So it really evolved.

Kloepper: It evolved.

Bowers: That's sort of interesting because her classes were like that, too; she worked with progressions. It says something about the way her mind might work. *Succession* must have been sort of an important idea for her.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did Hanya feel honored to be invited to Bennington in 1934...

Kloepper: Oh I think she did.

Bowers: ...or did she feel apprehensive about it?

Kloepper: Oh I don't know. I'm sure she was honored, because that was going to be "the" American dance center.

Bowers: She felt by 1934 what she was doing was American.

Kloepper: I think she was beginning to feel more and more

that way, yes.

Bowers: What about Helen Tamiris? The year 1934 was the first year that the Bennington artists ^{were} ~~was~~ sort of delineated and they never changed. Did you ever wonder-- did anybody wonder why Tamiris wasn't in the group?

Kloepper: Uh--might have wondered but (pauses)--I don't know of any reason why she was not included.

Bowers: Do you think of her as being of the same stature?

Kloepper: She was really very--she was not as well-known. I don't think she had her own group, did she?

Bowers: I really don't know that much about her.

Kloepper: I think she worked in theaters. She did choruses-- I mean in the...

Bowers: The commercial theater.

Kloepper: Yes, commercial theater, but I don't mean musicals.

But she did a lot in, say, Greek dramas; she would do the choruses.

Bowers: I didn't know that was a big thing then.

Kloepper: Well there weren't too many of them, that's true, but she did do things like that. And I'm sure she must have been in a musical or did dances for musicals.

Bowers: It was like she wasn't from the same milieu.

Kloepper: Probably not.

Bowers: I'm just curious, you know? Because I can see how she would fit in and how she might not.

I don't know how much of this you know, so I'll just tell you the Bennington five-year plan: In 1934 they did this teaching thing. Then they decided that what was really necessary was for the artists to have a place where they could create original works and have their companies at their disposal. So they decided that each company would have a summer to do that, but the students would

always have the three artists to draw on as teachers.

So in 1935, it was Graham. In 1936, it was Humphrey and Weidman, and in 1937, it was Hanya. In 1938, they all came and they all made works.

When an original work was being done, they would have a musician to do an original score for them. They would have sets and costumes done and their companies at their disposal, and everybody would be fed and housed.

In 1934, Hanya went and did her teaching thing and then she wasn't on the roster again until 1937 when she was going to go up there and do Trend. Tina Flade substituted for her in 1935 because Hanya went out to Colorado. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Kloepper: Now that you mention it, yes, vaguely, very vaguely.

Bowers: Do you remember why Hanya would rather go to Colorado than Bennington in 1935?

Kloepper: No, I have no idea. Maybe it was just that she had that opportunity and thought maybe ^{that} eventually ^{there} might be a

place ^{which} would be her place. I don't know what went on in her mind.

Bowers: Did she say anything about Bennington in 1934 when she came back? Do you remember if she said it was hard work, it was fun, it was easy, she made lots of friends, she spent a lot of time alone--anything like that?

Kloepper: No. No. (chuckles)

Bowers: You wouldn't remember, or she wouldn't say?

Kloepper: No, I wouldn't remember that. I think if she'd been very much against or adamant against, I probably would remember that. I think she probably enjoyed herself, but I don't know.

Bowers: While Hanya went to Bennington in 1934, you stayed and minded the store in New York.

Kloepper: Probably. Or I could have gone off. I did do

different things in the summers--went to other universities,
or I went to Gloucester one summer with a theater group
there, ~~in N.Y.~~ We didn't hold summer
schools ^{in N.Y.} too many times if I remember correctly.

Bowers: Did you ever want to go to Bennington? Did
Bennington seem like a big deal that you would have wanted
to be in on?

Kloepper: Naturally, naturally.

Bowers: Did you hear about it from students, maybe, at
the school, who went to Bennington, afterwards?

Kloepper: I don't know what I heard and what I read.
I can't distinguish anymore; that's so many years ago, you
know.

Bowers: Why would you have wanted to go to Bennington?
To study the other techniques, or just to be around?

Kloepper: Oh to go there and do--just be in a group and

teach. I enjoyed teaching tremendously; I did love to teach. It fed me--it fed my inner soul. (chuckles)

Bowers: The first time you went to Bennington was in 1937, right?

Kloepper: We went twice. I think it must have been 1937 and then I had a Fellowship in 1938. I think we only went twice ^{according to} ~~my~~ ^{vital} ~~sheet~~ sheet....I thought we had gone more than that, but we could have gone up there for a performance. Did that ever happen?

Bowers: Yes, it could have happened.

Kloepper: It could have happened--just to come up for a performance and not teach.

Bowers: The year 1937 was the year of Trend. Did Hanya work on that in New York before she got to Bennington?

Kloepper: Yes, I'm sure we did, with the group.

Bowers: That was a big undertaking.

Kloepper: Oh it was--yes it was.

Bowers: By this time you were a company and there were, I think, six of you who did solos.

Kloepper: Uh--yes--probably. (chuckles) As you see my memory isn't all that good.

Bowers: Do you remember what yours was, by any chance?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: What was it about?

Kloepper: It was called The Effete.

Bowers: And it was about pseudo-artistic appreciation, or something?

Kloepper: Something like that. (chuckles)

Bowers: Was it the way you worked before, the way you described working before where you...?

Kloepper: No. That time I did that. We all did our own solos and Hanya looked at them and offered criticism. But we did our own solos. They weren't terribly long.
~~_____~~

Bowers: She was working out the choreography for this big augmented group.

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: Was this a pressured situation for Hanya? All the others had gone first and had done very successful things in that context. I'm just wondering how she felt.

Kloepper: I imagine she would have felt trepidations, but Hanya has a great deal of courage. There's nothing weak about her. I think she believed enough in herself to just say, well, I'm going to do my best--period--and it happened to come off very, very well.

Bowers: What do you think her dance was about, the whole dance?

Kloepper: It was really a social comment; those were the days of social comments. It was a lot about hypocrisy, and it was more than that--and sadness on one side.

She used the group--in Germany they would talk about a linear treatment of choreography, and mass treatment; and she used the group very often as mass which was not done here in the United States very much.

Bowers: I don't know what you mean by mass.

Kloepper: Instead of having people lined up--you three are here and you four are over here in a line, like a lot of ballet did; that's linear. People are in lines doing mostly the same thing, or countering each other.

This is a group of people, well, just like you would have in a crowd. I was thinking of people on the square--here's a crowd of people, and you don't see.... Arms ~~held~~ held out in any position. It's the bodies that count, and you're over each other and under each

other, just like any group of, say, forty people together. They don't line up. So that has a very different impact than the linear approach.

Bowers: And with Trend that was original; nobody had seen that in America before Trend.

Kloepper: I don't think so. I don't think so. I can't say for sure, but I know that she did use that mass feeling, and she used the ^{linear approach} ~~linear approach~~ too.
^

Bowers: She changed it when she presented it in New York, right?

Kloepper: I don't think very much. No--she used the same score I know, and it was on tape, but she could have changed it. I don't remember whether she did or didn't.

Bowers: That wasn't a big thing in your memory.

Kloepper: No. She might have changed little things, but I don't remember any major change.

Bowers: Do you remember feeling rushed at Bennington to get that enormous thing mounted in six weeks?

Kloepper: She might have felt rushed; I didn't. (laughs)

Bowers: Well your piece was done--the solos were.

Kloepper: I was also in the group, too; we just came out of the group and did ^{Our solo} ~~something~~ and went back in the group.

To me it was all exciting. I didn't have that major responsibility like she did. I'm sure she felt pressured. I think anybody would.

Bowers: Hanya doesn't really show that though, does she?

Kloepper: No--not really; she just goes ahead.

Bowers: What do you remember about Arch Lauterer in the course of that production? He did the big set for you.

Kloepper: Yes. And it was lovely.

Bowers: It was hard though--the ramps and the steps.

Kloepper: The steps--the ramps and the steps. Yes, it was hard, but that just makes it more interesting. It wasn't hard-hard; it was just different. We never worked on a set before, never could afford one.

Bowers: Was he friendly?

Kloepper: Oh very. He was a very generous outgoing man. He had a lovely dog, too. He had a big Irish setter we all loved dearly. No, he was a very outgoing--as far as I'm concerned; I didn't see him all that much--and I think very talented man.

Bowers: Were you aware that he was really interested in Appia and what had been going on in Germany?

Kloepper: Oh I'm sure he was.

Bowers: But he never talked with you about that.

Kloepper: No. We didn't talk with him very much.

Bowers: He was sort of a quiet man, wasn't he?

Kloepper: Quiet, yes. Big, sort of gangly.

Bowers: Do you have a picture of him working on the set?

Kloepper: I can picture him; yes, I still see him.

Bowers: What would you picture him doing?

Kloepper: Not necessarily working on the set. I don't think he built it; they had people to build. I'm sure he supervised.

Bowers: He had assistants?

Kloepper: He could have but then they had a workshop--we weren't around. I don't even know where the workshop was.

Bowers: Did you try things in that set and find that they

didn't work?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: It happened to work the way he did it the first time around.

Kloepper: Well, the thing is that a lot of ~~the~~ ^{the choreography} we didn't do until we got the set--couldn't. There were some of the things that you could do where she was not going to use the ramps because how can you do that if you don't have those ramps and if you don't have the steps?

Bowers: So you just had to know that it was going to work.

Kloepper: Yes, right. I think we knew that maybe this solo was going to be on that platform and I know mine was to be on the steps, and somebody else's was to be maybe in this section. But you can't plan too too much ahead without....Unless maybe you're experienced with working with sets like that. Then, I imagine, you could.

Bowers: Did you find the music difficult?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: You liked the score.

Kloepper: Yes, yes.

Bowers: It was two scores, remember? [Edgar] Varèse and [Wallingford] Riegger.

Kloepper: Yes... One was Varèse and the other was ^{Wallingford} / Riegger.

Bowers: He was up there.

Kloepper: Yes, he was.

Bowers: Do you remember him?

Kloepper: I certainly do.

Bowers: What was he like?

Kloepper: Again, I don't know any of these people personally. You know, you'd meet them maybe when they'd come in to a rehearsal, or you'd see them maybe at lunch or dinner or whatever. But we didn't have that much contact with them. I just know he was an excellent dance composer. His music was always very exciting.

Bowers: I know that you were really busy; you had rehearsals.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did you help Hanya teach?

Kloepper: Yes, during Trend. Yes, I did.

Bowers: So your days were really full.

Kloepper: Oh yes.

Bowers: But you had to have time to eat.

Kloepper: Yes, definitely. (chuckles)

Bowers: Who would you mix with? Who would you socialize with?

Kloepper: There were tables for those people who were the teachers and the ones who were choreographers; then the students, of course, they were elsewhere--I think in the same dining room if I remember correctly.

Bowers: You were nearby but in separate rooms. You went to the same cafeteria but you went to different rooms or something.

Kloepper: Something like that.

Bowers: But you would eat with Hanya.

Kloepper: I think I did.

Bowers: Did you meet many new people at Bennington or were you with the same crew?

Kloepper: I met Martha [Graham] and Doris.

Bowers: You'd never met them before.

Kloepper: Well, I might have. I used to go backstage after their performances and just say how much I enjoyed it. But here you had a chance to talk a little bit more with them. They were all kind of shy; I think everybody was shy with each other. (chuckles)

Bowers: Was it because you were so unfamiliar with being together?

Kloepper: I think that was part of it. I think, also, they were doing their thing: each one was doing his or her thing. And there's bound to be just a little shyness or a little tension, maybe a little sense of competition--you know.

Bowers: So you didn't really become friendly with Doris or Charles or Martha?

Kloepper: Well, friendly, yes; but not intimate with them.

Bowers: You wouldn't say that you got to know them?

Kloepper: No, not really.

Bowers: Did you ever have a sense that Martha was dominant at Bennington?

Kloepper: (pauses) I have a feeling that she was perhaps considered the top person.

Bowers: By the students who flocked to her?

Kloepper: Yes, and maybe even by the administration. She was very, very highly regarded as an artist.

Bowers: I gathered that impression just because of the way, at the end, the others sort of dropped away and Graham was left at Bennington.

You never had time to take classes with them.

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: Of course you were much too busy.

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: Some people have said that the students felt compelled to pick one or the other; that they had to have ^a favorite_A among each of the artists.

Kloepper: (chuckles)

Bowers: They had to say which "team" they were on. Did you find that in your students?

Kloepper: I think there was some of that, yes.

Bowers: Would people who had chosen to be on another team sort of resist?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: How would you be aware of this?

Kloepper: Well I wasn't--I wasn't. But I do know there was that little atmosphere and I think it was really the competition. People were just a little tied up, but not so much that they wouldn't talk with each other. Some of the students though did--every once in a while you had a feeling they would put their noses up at you. (laughs) But not too many.

Bowers: There were a lot of teachers of physical education at Bennington, people who never had any intention of having a career as dancers.

Kloepper: That's right.

Bowers: Now Hanya had experience teaching those people in New York.

Kloepper: Oh yes, very much so.

Bowers: And you all felt that it was valuable to teach those people and it never occurred to you to feel that your talents were being wasted on somebody who wasn't going

to become a performing artist?

Kloepper: No, no, no, no. I think this was because of the way the Wigman-Hanya Holm--the way that we approached movement. It didn't exclude anybody and the performance was only, naturally, if you went on and on and on and on. But the approach was such--it was the same for everybody. It was just that the ones who were going to perform simply had to do more.

There was such an interest in the schools--people who were teaching dance--they wanted more material and they wanted to know more what is dance about? That word movement wasn't around; it was dance. They didn't realize that movement was the medium, and this is where Hanya was so excellent. She could tell them what it was about.

Bowers: How did you feel about people coming from the midwest, maybe, and coming to Bennington for a six-week program, being bombarded ^{with} three different techniques; and going back and having a class full of forty college students? How equipped were they?

Kloepper: Well, I think it would be very confusing. They probably used some techniques from one and some from another [REDACTED] [REDACTED] They probably just mixed them up, chose what they thought was the best of the two or three, but not knowing any one of them very well; you can't in six weeks.

Bowers: Did you ever think about that as being a possible negative outgrowth of Bennington? A little knowlege is a dangerous thing.

Kloepper: Yes, (said hesitatingly) but then no knowledge is worse. So--I mean you just know, if you've lived a little while, that those things will eventually clarify; and if it isn't good it'll just die. Or change. You change; this is what you have to do is to change.

Bowers: When these teachers would take the three techniques....I'm sure you were aware of who was a teacher and that they were concerned about learning this and being able to transmit it back home.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did they ever come to you and talk about what was confusing them? Were you aware of what their confusions were, what their problems were, why it was hard?

Kloepper: I think what was difficult to grasp and is difficult to grasp in a short period of time really was the theory, ^{for instance,} ~~how does space relate to energy?~~ how does space relate to energy? It's all those inter-relationships that I don't think you can grasp. It takes time to do that. It takes a lot of time.

Bowers: Would they ever come to you and try to understand your technique in Humphrey-Weidman terms? Do you know what I mean--trying to reduce it all to some rubric that they could use? It really must have been so hard for them. I'm trying to get a little bit more specific idea of what was confusing. What was hard to assimilate, because we can't really see it now?

Kloepper: I think one of the problems was that they would

look at a piece of technique, as such; not as what it was doing to the body--what was the principle?

Bowers: And what motivated it.

Kloepper: What motivated it? What was it doing to the body? "What" was it strengthening? And, of course, each one had some strengthening exercises. I think Graham's technique was tremendously strengthening, but they repeated--kind of like ballet--repeated many of their exercises things, every day, and that does increase the technique. That is the skill of it.

Bowers: What that says to me is that students in those days really didn't know how to analyze.

Kloepper: No. That's exactly it. The technique--that was it, but not what it was doing or what it was based on.

Bowers: But any student nowadays can do that, right?

Kloepper: Oh I wouldn't say any. I wouldn't say any.

Much more so now, yes--much more so.

Bowers: Another part of this sort of non-analytical point of view that people had then is that when people saw choreography by various artists, their critical level just wasn't that....I mean they couldn't see like Louis Horst. They didn't have that other kind of analytical ability of seeing what motivated the choreography also. Would you say that was true? That it was an unsophisticated, uncritical response?

Kloepper: That happens with anybody who doesn't know his subject very well. I don't think it was particularly back then that that happened; I think everybody cannot be a top critic when they don't know anything--he or she doesn't know anything. They can be intuitive about it, yes; intuition is a good thing. But it's better to know whereof you are speaking.

Bowers: Did Trend go over well?

Kloepper: I thought so, yes.

Bowers: ^{The} Performances went well and you felt that the audience responded.

Kloepper: Very. I thought so.

Bowers: Were you very aware of John Martin being up there?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Was he friendly?

Kloepper: Oh very, yes.

Bowers: Some people have said that he was sort of tall and austere.

Kloepper: He looked that way when he was just walking because he was tall and kind of slender. But he had a lot of sense of fun. I remember one time he asked me what that "O." in my name was, for Louise O. Kloepper. I said to him, "Olga." (said slowly in Russian-exotic manner) Thereafter,

every time he saw me he said, "How are you Olga?"
(Olga said in same manner). So, that was a friendly
gesture.

I think he had a deep respect for all of those
people.

Bowers: Some people have said that he played favorites.
(pause) You didn't think about that then?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: That's nice.

When Bennington was over...at the end of that first
summer that you were there, was it like you had this nice
time in the country or were you really exhausted?

Kloepper: It was both. We loved being up there. It was
so nice to be out in that fresh air, to be taken care of.
You didn't have to cook or go to a greasy-spoon. You'd
hear the birds in the morning. That was^{all} so supportive
of one's spirit, and then the work was--just couldn't wait
to get to it.

When you're happy at what you're doing, even though you get tired, you don't care.

Bowers: You don't remember Bennington as a real social place though?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: There wasn't a lot of talking or parties?

Kloepper: There could have been, maybe amongst the students, but I don't think amongst the staff. See we had rehearsals at night, started teaching early in the morning, and I think we had rehearsals maybe even in the morning. I can't remember the schedule, but I know we did work at night, so we didn't have much of the night to be social. Oh I'm sure that we went out probably on the weekends.

Bowers: In 1938, you were invited to come as a Fellow. That was quite an honor, wasn't it?

Kloepper: Yes it was.

Bowers: Had you mentioned that you were interested to Martha Hill or anything?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: There was no way one could apply? You were simply asked.

Kloepper: I suppose you could, but I was asked.

Bowers: Had you done independent choreography in New York?

Kloepper: Little bit--not that much. Just miniscule little--mostly with Hanya, within her group, little parts here and there. And it scared me half to death. I was so frightened of that. It took me a long time to say yes.

Bowers: Really?!

Kloepper: But Hanya helped me; she really helped me on that. I said to her, "Hanya, I'm not ready for anything like this." She said, "Louise, don't be a Waschlappen." Now a Waschlappen in German is simply a washrag, and you know a washrag is kind of limp. Well, I could just see myself being this limp washrag.

It made me so mad--it really did. I don't get angry very often, but that--I could just feel the blood rise, so I just went in and said I'll do it. But it was scary, you know.

Bowers: Did you do a solo thing and a group thing?

Kloepper: I did two solos and a group.

Bowers: Did you start before you got to Bennington?

Kloepper: Oh yes, oh yes. I did the two solos; they were done before I got there.

Bowers: It was scary to be a fellow because you were performing in the same place with all these great artists?

Kloepper: Right, yes.

Bowers: Was it especially scary because the critics were going to be there? Did that matter?

Kloepper: Well, I don't know--it was just scary. I didn't know what I could do. I hadn't tried a big group dance.

Bowers: The group dance was scarier than the solos.

Kloepper: Yes. But there was enough scare about that group dance to take care of the solos, too! No, it was scary both ways.

Bowers: You were a magnificent dancer and technician, did you feel like maybe that could carry the solos? Is that why it was less scary, or was it easier to choreograph for yourself?

Kloepper: No, I didn't think in those terms at all, and I didn't consider myself such a great dancer either.

Bowers: Well everybody else did.

Kloepper: I know, which surprised me. No, I was just a working dancer trying to do my best. And I was surprised to hear that people thought I was pretty good. I think they thought I was better than I was--I don't know.

Bowers: No, no. I've seen a film. You know that film, don't you, that was made in 1939? It was of one of those solos that you did...

So you were really scared about doing all this choreography as a Fellow.

Kloepper: Oh yes.

Bowers: The dancers at the school auditioned for you and you picked. How did you pick your dancers?

Kloepper: As I remember, we sat up on a platform in one of the rooms in Bennington, with Martha Hill and I think Marian van Tuyl was there and there could have been Eleanor King, too. I don't know whether they had the

names of the try-out people on their leotards or whether they were numbered. But anyway, somebody put them through certain things and they'd take so many and say, "Just run. Let's see you run." So you'd watch that, and then they did something else and then something else and something else. Then you had somebody sitting next to you who would write down what you said, and that's the way you chose them; you said, "I'd like to have that one."

I remember about Robin Gregory. I think Martha Hill said to me, "What do you think about that one?" and this was running, and I looked at this girl and she was going like--a sewing machine--fast! She passed everybody up, and I said, "Yes. I'll take that one." Oh she was so fast.

Bowers: You wanted dancers who could move quickly, or did you want a variety?

Kloepper: You could just tell.

Bowers: You just wanted people who were good at moving.

Kloepper: Yes, good at moving.

Bowers: You weren't looking for leapers or long people or short people?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: Did you work out some of the group work before you got to Bennington so you'd have something to teach them?

Kloepper: I might have worked on some phrases; I probably did. Because I think to walk in the first day and not have something to tell them would have been more frightening; probably wouldn't have done anything the whole summer.

Bowers: And it would have made them scared, uneasy too.

Kloepper: Oh yes.

I think I did work out some ^{phrases} ~~things~~ to try.

Bowers: Did you work at all like Hanya did, sort of working from their improvisation?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: You worked much more set.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Was that because of the level of dancers you were working with or do you just prefer that method?

Kloepper: It could have been that I hadn't tried much of the improvisation ~~with a group~~ with a group. As a matter of fact, I never had a group. So I ^{thought} ~~was~~ it better, and it would go faster, if I would work ahead of them. I'd get so far and then I'd work ahead and give it to them. But there might have been some improv here and there, but I don't remember that.

Bowers: Did you ever go and sit in on rehearsals--Eleanor's or Marian's, were you aware of what they were doing?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: Did you talk with them?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Were they sort of your colleagues?

Kloepper: Yes. Yes, they were.

Bowers: Were they scared, too?

Kloepper: I don't think they were as scared as I was.

Marian van Tuyl was a very competent choreographer. She did very interesting ^{dances} ~~moves~~, very different. And so was Eleanor.

Bowers: Marian had had a lot more experience in Chicago.

Kloepper: Oh yes. And so had Eleanor King.

Bowers: People have said that Eleanor was sort of hard to

get along with. Did you find that?

Kloepper: No. We weren't together that much to find out if she were hard to get along with.

Bowers: Was the ~~F~~ellows' concert successful?

Kloepper: I think it was.

Bowers: So it was quite an accomplishment for you to get through that and do it.

Kloepper: Yes. I couldn't believe it came off really.

Bowers: Was it a turning point for you, to say, "Well, I can do this"?

Kloepper: A little bit, yes. I tried doing some things after that in New York but it was very difficult, because where would you do it--all of that? And I was teaching full-time with Hanya and being in her group, but I began to do more ^{composing} ~~composing~~ in the summer then.

Bowers: Go places.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: In 1938 while you were a Fellow, Hanya was also doing a work, Dances of Work and Play. Could you be in that too?

Kloepper: Yes, I was. It had been done, I think, before we got there.

Bowers: So it was just a matter of going through the performance in the company.

Kloepper: Well, no. I went ^{to} ~~the~~ rehearsals too. But I think that was done or almost done.

Bowers: It was premiered at Bennington.

Kloepper: Yes, right.

Bowers: But it still must have been quite a hectic summer

for you.

Kloepper: Oh it was. But I have to tell you something very funny that happened in the Work and Play. We came out in twos and Harriet Roeder and I were the last two to come out. We came out--whatever the movement was--and all of a sudden there was this awful noise, and it shocked me so that I ^{lost} completely--I didn't know where I was. ~~It~~ It was some people clapping.

Bowers: Oh! (laughter)

Kloepper: I wandered around and I ^{can} still see Harriet's eyes. She looked at me as if to say, What are you doing? And I wandered around for a while and then I ^{caught on} ~~but~~, but it really was a shock. ~~It was a shock to me.~~

Bowers: And they were applauding your entrance.

Kloepper: Yes! I had just performed I guess the night before or something. That was fun afterwards, but it

certainly scared me.

Bowers: Was Hanya the kind of person to feel at all threatened by your being honored by being a Fellow and start in your own career?

Kloepper: I didn't start my own--really. I just did--when I would go to a college in the summertime or might do more than I would have done before.

Bowers: But your independent accomplishments didn't threaten her at all?

Kloepper: I doubt that.

Bowers: There was never any resentment because you couldn't come to as many rehearsals as other company members?

Kloepper: Oh well she knew that I couldn't. That's why I wasn't in--~~another piece~~ ~~another piece~~
~~I was just in the piece that had already~~

been done.

Bowers: One thing that's really interesting about the Fellow business is that there was so much emphasis on parity between all the artists that each of the Fellows each year came from one school or the other: There was Marian van Tuyl who was a Graham person; Eleanor King was a Humphrey-Weidman person; and you were a Holm person.

Even though that was underlying it, you were being singled out as an artist on your own merits. I was just wondering if, in 1938, you were seen as being less part of the whole camp and more independent; if you met more people, mixed ^{with} more people, or if socially things were different for you that year of the school.

Kloepper: No, I wouldn't say so. I was definitely a Hanya Holm person; there was no doubt about that. I was in her group, I taught in her school, and that's the way it was.

You know a lot of these things don't bother me. I mean I may be aware of them but I don't let them get to

me. Because if they're important to me--yes, but if they're not I just cut them out of my mind.

Bowers: But were you aware of that thing--that they had a Fellow from each?

Kloepper: No. Well, I suppose, if I thought about it I'd say, oh yes, she was from Humphrey-Weidman--yes. I don't know whether they did that purposely or not.

Bowers: Did you go to Mills in 1939?

Kloepper: Yes--I think so.

Bowers: I think you did, because I'm pretty sure that's where they took that film of you. Most of that film was made at Mills.

Kloepper: Oh, that one. There was a movie outfit that made a film.

Bowers: That was the one.

Kloepper: What was his name again?

Bowers: Ralph Jester.

Kloepper: Oh, yes! Yes, yes, I did see that...I just didn't quite get that last name.

Bowers: Don't you remember your dancing?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Don't you think it was wonderful?

Kloepper: Oh indeed it was! (laughter) Indeed it was!
(laughter) What was funny about it was that ^{I'd} had music done by...?

Bowers: Greg Tucker.

Kloepper: You know more about me than I do: ^{yes, Greg Tucker.} ~~The~~ movie firm put a whole orchestra behind that dance which had a slight Hawaiian flavor and it was so funny,

Bowers: Oh in the movie they did.

Kloepper: Yes, in the movie.

Bowers: Right. Because at the school they never would have done that.

Kloepper: Oh no. They didn't have an orchestra in the first place. But it was rhythmically completely accurate. It was right with ^{the dance} as though....Well, of course, they had the film I suppose and they just put the music in there.

Bowers: That movie was a really big deal that summer, wasn't it?

Kloepper: Oh yes, I suppose.

Bowers: You remember that the film crews were all over the place.

Kloepper: Yes, they were. I was a little surprised. I didn't realize that they weren't going to make Martha

and Hanya and Doris or Charles sort of the center of this film.

I thought mine was just this little segment and then when I saw it I was really surprised about that.

Bowers: It was really about young people learning about this new thing, rather than about the artists.

Kloeppep: Yes, I suppose. I often wondered what happened to that film.

Bowers: Well, it's around. There are a few prints.

Kloeppep: It's still around.

Bowers: Yes--it's fun.

Mills was different. Just being on that different campus made it different from Bennington, didn't it?

Kloeppep: Yes. It was a little different.

Bowers: Can you describe the atmosphere, what made it different?

Kloepper: The environment was different. It was very lovely, too; it was just different. Bennington was way up on a lovely hill and you looked out; and this was more or less down in the valley with lots of eucalyptus trees, but the working environment was much the same.

Bowers: You didn't take more time off to go into San Francisco because you didn't have big performances at the end?

Kloepper: We ~~didn't~~ performed.

Bowers: The companies didn't; just the Fellows.

Kloepper: No, no. But I was out there one summer I think when José was there, and the others like Martha and Hanya and those came later, as I remember, and we were the ones that did put on the performance.

Bowers: So you remember the intensity of the work as being constant.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did you like California? Had you ever been there before?

Kloepper: I don't think I'd ever been there. I liked it.

Bowers: That was a kind of ^{an} adventure for you.

Kloepper: Yes, of course. I don't think I'd like it all year round. I don't know whether I'd like the constant sun or smog. I like a change, which we have here.

Bowers: At that point in your career, what were you feeling? You had an accomplished reputation as a performer. You'd been recognized as a choreographer. And you had a career as a teacher. Is that really what you set out to do, or were you wanting to maybe try to have your own group, try to find your own niche in some other part of the country? What were you thinking?

Kloepper: About a year before I left--see I left in 1942--I never had an ambition to have my own group. I think you have to either have a very good business person or you have to have somebody who's going to take care of all those ^{business matters} ~~business matters~~ and of course there was no one. And I was not that ambitious to have a group; I still wanted to dance and I wanted to teach.

I decided about a year before I left Hanya that I was trying to look ahead in the future. In the meantime, for years, my parents had been urging me to go to college, kept urging me to go to college because of what would happen later on: When, you do, as you get older, the body begins to do other things--like get stiff.

So I finally decided maybe that was the best thing to do, so that's how I happened to come to Wisconsin, at the urging of my parents.

Bowers: You came to Wisconsin as a student and you got your degree.

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Did you get any credit for what you'd done in Germany?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: You started from scratch?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: Well good for you; that can't have been too easy.

Kloepper: No, it wasn't--but I also taught.

Bowers: But you were in Marge H'Doubler country, too, which was sort of foreign territory.

Kloepper: No, not really. Environmentally, maybe, but Marge D'Houbler's theory and the Wigman theory are very close together; they're going in the same direction.

Bowers: How? I've never heard anybody say that.

Kloepper: Marge does the time-space-force-quality thing too.

Bowers: But she doesn't really believe in teaching technique, I thought.

Kloepper: Well--(pauses) I think she doesn't like the set technique and that might be because of the ballet; there might be something there. But she felt it should be more creative. It was so similar to the Wigman that I felt rather at home. It wasn't exactly, of course, the same; as a matter of fact, she went even deeper into the theory.

Bowers: She used romantic music and not modern music, didn't she?

Kloepper: In the beginning, yes I'm sure. As a matter of fact, the first pictures that I've seen of the girls dancing, they were in Isadora Duncan costumes.

Bowers: Yes, right--with scarves.

Kloepper: Yes--scarves--but then that began to change too; she changed. She changed just like anybody else who was going to grow, of course.

Bowers: So it wasn't like Marge D'Houbler got set in defending what she had been, in opposition to the Bennington business; and it wasn't like you were from an enemy camp coming from the east.

Kloepper: No. I never felt that, no.

Bowers: You got your degree here and then you decided to stay. Is that how it went?

Kloepper: Yes. They asked me to stay and so I did. And I was teaching right along while I was studying.

Bowers: Did you continue to perform?

Kloepper: Somewhat, somewhat. I did a few group things and then gradually I ^{became} more and more busy.

Bowers: Was giving up the performing thing...?

Kloepper: That was very difficult. That was very difficult.

Bowers: I bet. And leaving New York sort of meant that you were cutting that off.

Kloepper: Yes--that I was cutting that off, right.

Bowers: You thought that there would be more of a long-term security in taking the other way.

Kloepper: Right. And it proved to be right. Hanya didn't go on too long after I left--I think a year maybe, maybe two years, because it was becoming more and more difficult to tour.

Bowers: Oh? Because of the war.

Kloepper: Yes, right--the war, and there was no national endowment in those days, so everything was more difficult.

Bowers: Thank goodness for the national endowment!

Kloepper: Yes, right. If that had been operating I'm sure that I would have just stayed there because ~~that~~ **I** would have had the opportunity to keep going in the performing.

Bowers: You wouldn't have felt that it was such a tenuous existence.

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: One thing that some people have said ^{has} ~~is~~ come out of Bennington is the notion of the "gymnasium circuit": That you bring all these gym teachers, physical education teachers to Bennington and you give them the bug, and then they go back to wherever it is that they're from and that they would then create this network of touring, places for the companies to come to.

I was wondering while you were touring with Hanya's company if you bumped into many Bennington people on the road, or if you found that to be true or not?

Kloepper: Many of the people who sort of supported us were people who had either been--they could have been at Bennington, but they were also people who came to the studio or went to Colorado where Hanya was. You see, she was there every year after she left Bennington--and still is.

Bowers: And for that year in between.

Kloepper: Yes, right.

Bowers: So it wasn't just a Bennington thing.

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: It was sort of a mixture of all the different contacts that you had.

Kloepper: A mixture--right.

Bowers: Another aspect of Bennington that is striking--if you look at the choreography that was done at Bennington

by the artists and the **F**ellows, you see a preponderance of Americana pieces.

Kloepper: That was the day. You see, each era seems to have a certain tendency. Like there was a ^{period of} social comment; before that, there was a whole business on machinery--there were a lot of machine dances. Then I think from the social comment it went into the psychological. Of course Martha was very strong in that. It just keeps evolving--as it would.

Bowers: But with Americana being in vogue--for lack of a better term--was that an alienating thing for Hanya or for Hanya's group? If the American dancers were really interested in and concentrating on their American-ness, I wonder if that became an excluding thing.

Kloepper: It could have. It could have. I don't think Hanya would have tried to do an "Americana," not early anyway.

Bowers: No--she didn't.

Kloepper: But I don't know--I think she's honest enough with herself to say, well, maybe that's not for me because I'm not an American--I am now--but not at that time. But that was ^{the} ^{comment} social period, the Bennington period.

Of course Martha was doing Americana. She did American Document which was very striking.

Bowers: Yes. Before that she'd done Panorama and Frontier which was leading up to that.

Kloepper: Right. That was her heritage.

Bowers: You don't remember Hanya ever feeling uncomfortable at Bennington. You felt like she made her own place and she fit in.

Kloepper: Yes. She might have felt uncomfortable because she was the one outsider, so to speak.

Bowers: Doris Humphrey, in her letters, says that she felt uncomfortable there; she felt like she was in somebody else's territory.

Kloepper: Oh--well, it could be. I think at that time Martha was given the main emphasis--you know.

Bowers: Do you remember Erick Hawkins...

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: ...being there?

Kloepper: Oh, being there--you mean at Bennington?

Bowers: Yes. The year 1938 was the first year he was with the company--American Document was ^{his} first performance.

Kloepper: Yes, he was in American Document. That's right, yes.

Bowers: Did you meet him?

Kloepper: Oh I suppose I did; yes, I'm sure I did.

Bowers: You don't remember anything about him.

Kloepper: Not too much about him. I remember seeing him there again. He's a very open person. I'm sure that if he bumped into me he wouldn't avoid me. (chuckles)

Bowers: Well in 1937--speaking of openmindedness; let's see how openminded you really were--Ballet Caravan came to Bennington with Eugene Loring and the Christensen brothers, Annabelle Lyon. Do you remember them?

Kloepper: No.

Bowers: Nobody does.

Kloepper: In 1937 you say.

Bowers: The year of Trend. Ballet Caravan came. Lincoln Kirstein was there, and they only came for a couple of days I think and just did one or two performances. But it was the first performance of that company anywhere.

Kloepper: Oh.

Bowers: It was also radical because modern dance had hated ballet and vice versa, and it was like making friends for the first time, and that's why it was real significant. But you don't remember that?

Kloepper: No, I don't.

Bowers: I don't suppose it's possible that they were there and you didn't go.

Kloepper: That's possible. We might have had a rehearsal; that's very possible.

Bowers: Do you remember Martha Hill and Mary Jo Shelly?

Kloepper: Oh yes. I certainly do.

Bowers: How would you picture them?

Kloepper: Very efficient. Very, very concerned. They just seemed to be working day and night with all their best energies--they just seemed to be in there. I liked

them both very much. I respected their talents, and I thought they were very nice to everybody as far as I could see. And friendly.

Bowers: If you had any problem, you would have gone to them.

Kloepper: Oh yes. If there were any problems--yes, sure. They were very available, as far as I remember.

Bowers: And you remember it being well-run?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: When you wanted a rehearsal, you had a studio.

Kloepper: Oh yes. That was all set up so there was no bumping into anybody else. Very efficient.

Bowers: Did you have the feeling at Bennington that it was a new idea, that you were pioneering something?

Kloepper: Yes.

Bowers: What was it that was being pioneered?

Kloepper: All these people getting together; that was the new thing, yes. Working on the same campus, eating at the same tables, (chuckles) and performing in concert together.

Bowers: Do you remember that New York season that they put together ^{that} Tamiris was in on, I remember? They got a Broadway house and they were trying to put together a coalition of modern dancers. Remember that?

Kloepper: Tell me more.

Bowers: I don't really have it all in my head. I think it was around 1940 and it wasn't very successful; it just didn't work out.

Kloepper: Where was it held at? Do you remember?

Bowers: Just one of those big famous theaters on Broadway.

Kloepper: On Broadway--hmm.

Bowers: I was just wondering if you had any idea about what was the element at Bennington that made it click^{if} it did click--and why couldn't they work together outside of Bennington.

Kloepper: You mean you think it didn't go because people couldn't work together; is that your point?

Bowers: Well, it was certainly cheaper. I mean everything else was going for it, for them to get together and do a theater together. So the only reason I can see is that they just couldn't work it out; it just didn't work out.

Kloepper: I'm not aware of that at all. ~~_____~~
~~_____~~ Hanya would be the one that would be more or less aware of these ^{situations} ~~_____~~.

Bowers: Weren't you Hanya's closest person?

Kloepper: Yes. We were very close--oh yes.

As
Bowers: ^ You remember the company--were you friendly with one another?

Kloepper: Very.

Bowers: You'd have meals together and stuff when it wasn't absolutely necessary?

Kloepper: Well, most people in the company worked, so we would socialize sometimes but not too much. Somebody would run off and run an elevator, and somebody went down to wait on tables. They were all making a living because they certainly didn't make a living dancing. So almost everyone in that group had to do something else.

Bowers: I was wondering about the group at Bennington. If being at Bennington made you closer together because you lived together; or maybe it made you want to put a little more distance between yourselves because you were working together so intensively and you didn't have the distraction

of those other jobs.

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: How do you remember feeling about your colleagues?

Kloepper: I don't think I felt any differently up there than I did in New York about them. We were all very good friends.

Bowers: You were.

Kloepper: Oh yes. But, as I say, everybody scattered after classes or after rehearsals and each had to go and work. So it wasn't as though they had a lot of free time.

Bowers: And at Bennington you didn't have free time either.

Kloepper: No. Oh I'm sure we went ^{into} ~~^~~ the town and had a pizza, if they had them in those days--something like that, on the weekends. But otherwise it was mostly rehearsing and working and teaching and so forth.

Bowers: If you look at your life and your career in dancing, what does Bennington mean? Is it just a part of your time with Hanya or does it have a specific meaning for you?

Kloepper: I think it has a very good feeling. I mean what's left with me is a very good feeling of a way of working together with other people--at least side by side; maybe not together but side by side--and how much can be accomplished under that kind of a circumstance. Where the group is free, they're fed, they don't have any expenses, and you just work, and that's wonderful to be able to do that. That's the thing that really was thrilling to me, to see that that could be done.

Bowers: If you were to describe to a young person, who didn't know anything about the history of modern dance, what Bennington was or what it ultimately meant, how would you describe it that way?

Kloepper: By just telling them factually what the set-up was; I think that's very important. You can't say too much

about something unless the person has a picture of what really was there: What was offered. All of the opportunities that were available. The fact that these performances were put on with all the modern dance people--many different kinds--and it's continued today, even more than ever today.

Bowers: You mean the Connecticut and the thing in Durham .

Kloepper: Now, of course, it's in Connecticut. No-- it's not in Connecticut...

Bowers: It's in Durham, North Carolina.

Kloepper: I think they've just enlarged that whole idea.

Bowers: So you see it as the beginning of that American Dance Festival...

Kloepper: Yes, I do.

Bowers: ...and big teaching.

Kloepper: Right. And the fact that people could come from all over and at least get an introduction into all these different ways of doing, which was more difficult before because they'd have to run to this studio and they'd run to that studio.

Bowers: It ^{was} also harder to deal with the city, don't you think?

Kloepper: Oh much, much, and many times they didn't have anything going in the city in those days because they'd be out someplace else, so I think it was just wonderful. I think it really stimulated more interest in dance because people had the opportunity to come and see it and do it.

Bowers: So it was the doing and the seeing together that was important.

Kloepper: Right.

Bowers: Was there any-body or any-thing or any idea I

haven't brought up that you think we should talk about that relates to Bennington? Any little stories that just didn't come up, any funny things that happened?

Kloepper: Well, if you want a funny thing I can think of one.

Bowers: Good.

Kloepper: I think this was in the very beginning, the very first year. Everybody, all students wore the same outfit. That is, it was a flesh-colored pair of pants and a sort of brassiere with a bare middle. Then I believe each one-- like Hanya had a certain wrap-around skirt. I believe at that time Doris had a split skirt, and I don't know what Martha had because they didn't really wear skirts, but maybe she had something to put around her.

Anyway one day, kids were out there in the sun and dancing on the lawn.

Bowers: Just for fun.

Kloepper: Just for fun. They didn't have their skirts on; they just had these outfits on. They began to notice that down the hill, car after car stopped, and there was a whole line of cars down there.

Bowers: They thought they were naked.

Kloepper: They thought it was a nudist colony!

Bowers: That's funny.

So that dancing on the lawn really did happen, but it wasn't classes.

Kloepper: I don't think--maybe somebody took a class out on the lawn; that could have happened.

Bowers: Because all the publicity pictures from the time have everybody out on the lawn.

Kloepper: No--I think that was for pictures--the sun, and everything. I never did like dancing on the lawn. I always felt defeated by this great sky above; it was just too much,

too much space up there. And then the unevenness, too, and you had to be careful what you did.

Bowers: Sure. You never know when you might hit a rock.

Kloepper: No--that's right--turn your ankle in a hole.

Bowers: All right. Shall we stop?

Kloepper: Sure.

Bowers: Okay. Well thank you very much.

Kloepper: You're welcome.

(End of Reel One, Side One)

Index

Coleman, John 25

Graham, Martha 20-21, 47-49, 55, 86-87

Gregory, Robin 64

H'Doubler, Margaret 80-82

Hill, Martha 63, 64, 90-91

Holm, Hanya 5, 12, 14-19, 22, 24, 25-31, 33-34, 36-41, 46,
51-52, 61, 68, 71, 85, 86-87

Horst, Louis 22-23

Humphrey, Doris 47-48

King, Eleanor 66-68

Lauterer, Aron 41-43

Martin, John 57-58

Miller, Frieda 24-25

Shelly, Mary Jo 90-91

Tamiris, Helen 31-32

Van Tuyl, Marian 63, 64-66

Wigman, Mary 3, 5, 11-12, 16, 19-22, 80