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**Oral History Project
Interview Transcript**

**Robert Geddes
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius
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Date: 28 JANUARY 2010

Linda Arntzenius: This is Linda Arntzenius here at the Institute for Advanced Study with Professor Robert Geddes, the Dean Emeritus of the School of Architecture at Princeton University; Henry Luce Professor of Architecture, Urbanism, and History at New York University. I think first of all, what I'd like to do is – the focus is the Institute, of course, and the buildings that you erected here - but I would like to ask you a little bit about yourself: where you grew up, what your parents did, where you were born, and perhaps what made you into an architect, if architects are born or made.

Robert Geddes: I was born in Philadelphia in 1923. I know exactly when it was that I decided to be an architect. It was in seventh grade in California. I was in John Burroughs Junior High School and had to take – the girls took domestic science (cooking) - and I took drafting and woodworking. They asked me to draw a plan of the house we lived in, in Los Angeles, and I discovered how fascinating it was that the walls had different thicknesses, and it had a courtyard and so forth. So I really got smitten with the idea of drawing and drawing houses and thinking about them. We lived on the East Coast, but I always wanted to be a Californian.

Linda Arntzenius: Why was that? Were your family out there?

Robert Geddes: No. Well, my father had for business reasons - he manufactured things in Philadelphia and New Jersey and shipped them to Los Angeles - and I always wanted to go through the Panama Canal but never managed to do that. So we had this dual life, and I really wanted to be a Californian.

I went to Berkeley as a freshman, but that was the year in which Pearl Harbor occurred, and it became impossible to travel back and forth – my parents were still in the East – by train. And so I transferred back East and went to Yale, became a snoot ever since, and went into the Army in '42 and served for three years and came out – and after another year at Yale, I went to Harvard Graduate School of Design, because by that time I really knew that I wanted to be engaged in modern architecture. And the outstanding place then was led by Walter Gropius, and so I went there. How much detail do you want on this?

Linda Arntzenius: You're getting enough. You're rattling through here.

Robert Geddes: One of the characteristics of Harvard at that time, but even more the characteristics of what was happening in modern architecture, was a great engagement in urbanism, in social factors, in housing. And Harvard had some wonderful people there: Catherine Bauer in housing, and Holmes Perkins in planning, and others.

So my thesis was a collaborative with three others on a plan for downtown Providence, and that was, in fact, much influenced by the planning that had been going on in Philadelphia, my old hometown, but which had really done a remarkable job of creating a comprehensive plan and housing and so forth. And I have had this dual life of urbanism and architecture and planning ever since.

Linda Arntzenius: Can I ask what your first contact was with the Institute for Advanced Study, or with Princeton, coming to Princeton? Perhaps we could start there.

Robert Geddes: When I graduated from Harvard – by the way, thank you for the [opening of the window shades] – the sunlight just came out. When I graduated from Harvard, Holmes Perkins left Harvard to become dean at Penn, and he asked several of us from the school there to come to Philadelphia. And I taught at Penn for 15 years with people like Louis Kahn and others, and it became really quite a wonderful international center of thought about architecture and landscapes and cities. I taught there until 1965.

At that point, I had not really been at Princeton for anything other than one conference in all that time. But Bob Goheen, who was the president of the university, had a search committee to have new leadership for the School of Architecture. The professor of architecture, Jean Labatut, in the great French tradition, ran the school as a studio. He was essentially the school. He was a great teacher and a great person.

He retired then, and it was Bob's choice and the choice of Mike Oates, who was the chair of the Humanities Council at Princeton, at the university, to select a new leader of the school. And that's when I came to Princeton. In 1965, I was appointed the first dean of the School of Architecture, and we came to Princeton and built our house over here on Lovers Lane and Mercer Street.

I had had no previous contact with the Institute. I did have one brief moment of glory in an elevator in San Francisco at the American Institute of Architects convention in 1960. My first building had been built at Penn, and it won a National Honor Award, and I was there to receive the award. I went down in the elevator with Robert Oppenheimer. He gave the keynote address at the convention.

He was a very great favorite of architects, in large part because of his ability to deal with and to communicate about the humanities, science, technology, and society. His book, *The Open Mind*, had been published. He was a remarkable influence on me, I think, in that way, as an intellect. I did not have any other opportunity to know him, regrettably. But anyway, that's a minor point.

Linda Arntzenius: So you never ate in the old cafeteria, in Fuld Hall, did you?

Robert Geddes: Well, I think I did, because – well, I must have, because this [the current dining hall] wasn't here. But I'm not sure I ever did. I certainly don't remember it. We came without any real knowledge of the Institute or of its leadership or people at all, and it was Kay Kuhn and Tom Kuhn, who had been friends of Carl and Annette Kaysen, either at Harvard or Berkeley, but in any case, they were dear friends of ours and friends of the Kaysens, and they introduced us.

- Linda Arntzenius:* And it was Carl Kaysen¹ who became the director after Oppenheimer.²
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And in '69, he was the one who commissioned you for this building, for the dining hall.
- Robert Geddes:* Probably before '69. It may have been '68. Anyway, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There was a competition. I wonder if you can tell me, who were the others, and why did you succeed and why did they fail?
- Robert Geddes:* There was no competition.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, there was no competition.
- Robert Geddes:* No. No, it was a much more complicated story.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, tell me.
- Robert Geddes:* Well, let me go back to the notion of the competition. In the first stage of the Institute, when Flexner was the director – Abraham Flexner³ – and there were – it was a very powerful board, and the names –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Herbert Maass?
- Robert Geddes:* That's right, yes. And decided to come to Princeton, if you recall.
- Linda Arntzenius:* We're going back quite a bit.
- Robert Geddes:* There were other places that they had in mind. The only given was the fact that the house was there, the old farmhouse, really – mansion house – and the fact that it was a farm and there were the woods. And the board – there's wonderful correspondence in the Archives of the Institute.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Actually, I did hear the talk that you gave in 2005 to the Friends. There's a recording of that in the Archives, too.
- Robert Geddes:* Good.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So we do have some of your comments on that in there, but go ahead.
- Robert Geddes:* That was the first competition. They invited the university architects – at Harvard: Harry Shepley of Shepley Bulfinch, at Columbia: York and Sawyer (architects of New York Banks and the Federal Reserve); at

¹ Carl Kaysen (1920-2010), IAS Director, 1966-1976.

² J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), IAS Director, 1947-1966; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1967.

³ Abraham Flexner (1866-1959), IAS Director, 1930-1939.

Princeton: Ralph Adams Cram; and at Dartmouth: Larson. And they interviewed them, and they asked them for their ideas, and the ideas were for the campus as a whole, as well as for the first phase of architecture. And the Dartmouth architect won, and Fuld Hall is very much in that Georgian – kind of idiosyncratic Georgian. For example, if you look at the way the water comes off the roof and the chimneys and all that kind of very idiosyncratic stuff, but not a distinguished building – I mean, no, never mind.

Linda Arntzenius: Feel free.

Robert Geddes: No, no, no, I think it is the symbol of the Institute, and the tower certainly is. But the reason I think he won was he knew that there was a real possibility, by having a drive here, Einstein Drive, and building something here with a tower and the woods that are here, that he could create a kind of open space and he could create a group of buildings like that. Now, he won that competition because he had an idea about the Institute as a whole, and the directive to him talked about – Flexner was very good about this – that the Institute would grow gradually, and it would accumulate additional schools and so forth.

Now, actually, I think that was a poor proposal. The campus plan, I think, was rather good because it had an open space on both front and back. It took the woods into account and so forth. But what was really weak about it was that it was not a plan for future growth. In fact, the little outbuildings, I think, are problematic. If you have one faculty, you could've done either what Jefferson did at Virginia, which was to, in effect, build a single faculty and so forth, or you could do what MIT did, which was have an opening court onto the river and then build things in a kind of continuous way. But this [Fuld Hall] is very problematic in that you have the library, and you had then your cafeteria, so called, upstairs. But it wasn't evident at all why these [indicating the "little outbuildings A and B"] should exist or what would happen when you had multiple schools, so that became really a problem, I think.

Now, in fact, this building and this building [indicating D and E buildings] were built after the war, which is curious. Oppenheimer, I think, was essentially a modernist. He certainly was philosophically a modernist, and he broke the mold of the Georgian, and he broke the mold of this [indicating campus with Fuld and buildings D and E]. I don't know whether it became apparent that these small buildings were inhibiting the kind of oneness of the Institute or the development of the schools, but it was a problem. And he built the history library over here, asymmetrically to the rest and quite unto itself. That was the condition in 1965 that Kaysen inherited.

Linda Arntzenius: And how did he approach you? You indicated there was a story there as to how that came about.

Robert Geddes: It gets back to this. His first choice – it was not a competition - he chose Kevin Roche, who had been the architect of the Ford Foundation Building

in New York, a very fine building. And I think Carl – not only did he feel comfortable with Kevin, but he felt comfortable with the fact that the Ford Foundation seemed to be a kind of comparable intellectual level to – and maybe a corporate level, too – to the Institute. And certainly that would've been a good choice for the directors of the Institute.

When Carl came, the Institute consisted of mathematics, natural sciences, and history. And Carl came with the mandate to create a school of social sciences, which he did brilliantly. But when we did this building [West Building], there were no faculty, so Cliff Geertz⁴ and Michael Walzer⁵ and Albert Hirschman⁶ weren't here yet.

Carl chose Kevin, I think, to do it, and largely on the basis of the Ford Foundation Building, which Kevin in a way interpreted in a different way here. He proposed to build the building here [indicating area opposite front of Fuld Hall], and he proposed to have two wings of offices and a central courtyard, not unlike, in a way, the Ford Foundation, which is L shaped. The site plan was a major architectural error because the symbolic importance – there's even a rock here for the founders – the symbolic importance of this axis through the Fuld Hall tower, from the mansion house, to the woods, was violated.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, you've called it the symbolic axis or the honorific axis.

Robert Geddes: That's right. Yes. The sacred axis, maybe. Anyway, in any case, it was – it's not purely functional, although it would've been awkward for the faculty and visitors and so forth to cross the road. I think it's much more of a symbolic error.

I don't know whether Kevin was – whether he retired, resigned, or what happened. But anyway, his work ended, and Carl was dismayed. I didn't know Carl well then. He and I had a kind of parallel situation. He was here to do something new at the Institute, and I was at the university to, in effect, create a new School of Architecture. Before then, it had been in the Department of Art and Archaeology, and I created a new faculty and a new approach. And a large part of that had to do with relations between architecture and society and the social sciences. In fact, for example, our courses were called Values, Concepts, Methods, which were very much involved in the social sciences. Carl was very helpful, and we used to take walks together in the woods and talk about – this is before Cliff and the others were here – talk about the social sciences and architecture.

So I knew him, but Carl did not go through – I don't think he went through a linear process. I know that he interviewed Louis Kahn. I don't know who else he interviewed. It's probably all in the files. There's an apocryphal

⁴ Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1970-2000; Emeritus Professor, 2000-2006.

⁵ Michael Walzer (1935-), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1980-2007; Emeritus Professor, 2007- .

⁶ Albert O. Hirschman (1915-2012), Member in the School of Social Science, 1972-1973; Faculty in the School of Social Science, 1974-1985.

story that Lou was so upset with that tower that he found it very difficult to deal with.

Linda Arntzenius: Really?

Robert Geddes: Well, as a Philadelphian, I am too. I mean, I think it – anyway, never mind.

Linda Arntzenius: What is it you object to in the tower?

Robert Geddes: Well, I think this building is so literally Independence Hall and sort of pumped up. It's not a good transformation of Georgian.

Anyway, at a party at our house, a dinner party, Carl opened up about all this. I mean, I didn't know about all the background. I just knew that Kevin had resigned or left, and that Carl was very upset. And I said, "Well, I'll tell you, Carl, what the problem is. The problem is this [indicating Roche's plan to build on the space opposite the front of Fuld Hall and therefore interrupting the symbolic axis] should not be done. And in fact, with this history library," I said, "you have a real opportunity but also a problem. You have to have a conception of the campus." After all, Oppenheimer had built the Breuer constructivist site design [Member Housing complex] over here. I said, "But there's no conception of the campus. It's in shreds."

And I suggested that what he ought to do is to have a cross axis, essentially – I guess it's really actually there – and that that cross axis – where is it? It's here [indicating line running horizontally behind Fuld Hall]. That cross axis should be the functional axis of the Institute, whereas that [indicating line from Olden Farm through Fuld Hall to Founders Rock] is the symbolic one out to the woods. And he thought that was a very good idea, and he had a committee which consisted of – I only knew two – I only remember two of them. Millard Meiss⁷ was on the committee, and he was very helpful, very supportive, and a very knowledgeable person about architecture, landscape and so forth. And the other person who was important on that committee was Tullio Regge,⁸ for whom a law exists, or by whom a law exists – mainly in physics. And they were dominant characters.

Anyway, they seemed to be supportive of my doing it, and it was really quite a jump because, you see, all I had done before in Philadelphia was one building [that] had been built for the University of Pennsylvania and one group of dormitories at the University of Delaware. We had built the police headquarters at the city of Philadelphia, and we had won – we had almost won the Sydney Opera House competition. We were in second place, runner-up for that.

⁷ Millard Meiss (1904-1975), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1940; Professor, 1958-1974; Emeritus Professor, 1974-1975.

⁸ Tullio Regge (1931-2014), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1963-1964; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1965-1979; Visitor, 1979-1981, 1986-1987.

But we were very young and quite new, and Carl entrusted this to us. And I must say that Annette was also very much a part of the thinking about the Institute from the aesthetic and social dimensions both. In fact, I think it was a very good team. Millard was very much involved and regrettably died before – I'm not sure if he died before the building opened or not, but shortly thereafter.

Linda Arntzenius: Now, Regge had – I found in the files a quote from Regge, and I assume it was made in – his remark was made in November '67, so I assume he was talking about Kevin Roche's plans.

Robert Geddes: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Would you mind if I read you what he said?

Robert Geddes: Not a bit.

Linda Arntzenius: Because I want to ask you about it. He said, "I think we're falling into the very common mistake of wanting a showcase architectural landmark, and I may go as far as saying that the architect had this in mind in working for a celebrated institution like ours. No matter how they put it, it has to be something striking which eventually will find its way into some architectural magazine. I could not dislike more this attitude. What we need is a building which disturbs as little as possible the present setup, which blends unobtrusively into the landscape, and, not least, which costs a good deal less than the proposed landmark. I still see no reason why we could not build it over one of the present parking lots and have instead underground parking. Both parking lots are centrally located and, for many, even better located than the proposed site." Presumably, he's referring to this [indicating current location of west building] as the proposed site, and the parking lots.

Robert Geddes: That was the parking lot.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, is that parking lot issue something that you considered as a location?

Robert Geddes: Well, that's where we built it.

Linda Arntzenius: That is where you built it. There was a parking lot there?

Robert Geddes: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Interesting.

Robert Geddes: It's amazing. You see, and I wish Tullio and Carl had showed me that.

Linda Arntzenius: Are you kidding?

Robert Geddes: It would've helped.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Really?
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, yes. Well, let me tell you, I really admire Tullio. I think he had an extraordinary, precise mind about this. When this was all done – did you ever meet him?
- Linda Arntzenius:* I did not, no.
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, he's a wonderful guy.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Freeman Dyson⁹ has suggested I interview him, and I think that would be a very good idea.
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, yes. Tullio said to me – when it was all built and everything, he said, "It's not bad. It's pretty good." He said, "From some places, you can't see it."
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, well, that's what he wanted: unobtrusiveness.
- Robert Geddes:* Well...That's not exactly what it is. I mean, the reason he liked it is, first of all, because the rooflines line up, because it takes advantage of the fall in ground, that it is not high – that it relates to the other building, the history library.
- Linda Arntzenius:* The Wallace Harrison designed library.
- Robert Geddes:* And that it's human, I mean, that you move through it, and there are places where you see each other. I mean, he was very much more interested in the human use of it rather than the dramatic landmark on the cover of a fashion magazine. Well, please, give him my regards.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Okay. I thought – well, the reason I pulled that out was because you had made a remark about Flexner in your talk in 2005, about his attitude that men were more important than buildings. And indeed, historically, when the Institute started, there was no plan to have a building. It actually came later. The idea of the community of scholars came first. So you had picked up on that, and I wanted to share that with you.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I did also want to ask you – this building [HS/SS library] was finished in '65.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did that influence your design in any way?
- Robert Geddes:* Yes. Oh, yes.

⁹ Freeman J. Dyson (1923-), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1948-1950; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1953-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994- .

Linda Arntzenius: Was it kind of daunting to have that building there? Tell me about how you approached that.

Robert Geddes: With admiration. I think it's one of the best buildings in Princeton. And it may well be, as Ada Louise Huxtable said, one of Harrison's better buildings. I'm not trying to put it down.

Well, sure. It was first of all a modernist building, a building of our time, a building in which the structure was very apparent, and the structure gave rhythm and modulation to it. For example, I mean, all the other buildings, they're just opaque. They're just brick boxes with not terribly well-organized windows and doors. I mean, not organized in the sense that there's not a sense of order inherently, as there could be.

But I think the history library is really quite a remarkable one in the relationship between it as a building and also its furniture, its furnishings. I believe it's the case that Florence Knoll did the furniture. You could check on that. But it certainly looks like Knoll. It looks like her work. And I thought the materials, the teakwood, the white and the black surfaces and colors and so forth, and the concrete structure, and also the level of the roof on it.

So what we did was relate directly to it. In fact, when you go out there [indicating walkway connecting dining hall to West building], you can see that the top of the dining hall lines up with the top of that [indicating roofline of HS/SS library], spoiled by that terrible elevator shaft.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, that's a pickle.

Robert Geddes: Yes, if you could invent a paint which made something invisible.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, maybe it will come. They are working on it.

Robert Geddes: That would be very good. Now, that's a disaster. But anyway, on the positive side, I think the history library was very [good] – and it gave a spirit to the Institute, that it is of the contemporary world, not an 18th- or 19th-century place.

Linda Arntzenius: I have heard some – I'm backtracking here to the Roche design, but some of the people who object to the Institute's plans for putting up new faculty housing, say, "They've got plenty of land right in front of Fuld Hall. Why don't they put them there?"

Robert Geddes: Well, I think they're right.

Linda Arntzenius: You do think they're right?

Robert Geddes: Not in front [of Fuld Hall]. I think the right thing to do is to build housing along Olden Lane.

Linda Arntzenius: Now you're surprising me. Interesting.

- Robert Geddes:* This would become, then – if you look at the grounds, this is a very ragged, unformed edge [indicating hedge along Olden Lane]. You could have a very, very pleasant faculty village there and still keep the area in front.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And still keep the greensward.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes. I've told people and gotten a cold response, but I think it's the right place.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, through symmetry, would you want [indicating area close to soccer field] – the village located here.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It makes more sense.
- Robert Geddes:* That's right. I mean, you already have the housing over here [Member Housing complex] and I think it would actually improve the whole condition. I was thinking, where might the next buildings go? And I think Cesar Pelli [architect of Simonyi Hall] was wrong in this respect, not architecturally, but he didn't make a plan for the campus which suggested growth. I think every time you do a building on a campus, you should think about what does that mean for the next building, and this [indicating Simonyi Hall] doesn't do it. This is probably an awkward growth pattern, whereas that is, I think, a good one. So I think future buildings, if they ever happen, are going to happen along there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Indicating – I'm just saying for the recording – indicating where the soccer field is now.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, exactly. Yes, and connected to the housing, I mean, in other words, the cross axis would extend and there would be [possible sites for] future [buildings].
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, we're getting a little ahead of ourselves.
- Robert Geddes:* Go ahead.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I want to go back still sort of chronologically to your commission from Kaysen. It was not you alone. I understand it was Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, Cunningham.
- Robert Geddes:* We had a firm. One of the attributes of Harvard was the idea of a collaborative profession, a profession that collaborated with, in that case, landscape, architecture, and city planning. There could be other kinds of collaborations, such as the engineering and so forth. And I had as a model not only the idea of a collaborative but of a professional collaborative, and our firm worked as a group firm, and, in 1974, we won the American Institute of Architects – no, '79 – the American Institute of

Architects highest professional award because of our work as a collaborative. And it was the four of us, three of us from Harvard and one from Penn.

Linda Arntzenius: And who did what? Is there a structural engineer in there?

Robert Geddes: No. Well, two of us were designers: George Qualls and me. We had been collaborating on competitions, and we talked together as a team at Penn. And then two were on the technical and management side. The one who was closest to construction was Cunningham, and Brecher was more the manager. But it was a team.

This project here, though – when we moved to Princeton, we opened a branch office in Princeton, so we had an office in Philadelphia and Princeton, and I was the designer partner for this building.

Linda Arntzenius: Tell me about working with landscape architect Bob Zion.

Robert Geddes: Bob was a classmate of mine at Harvard. Again, the Harvard idea of collaboration meant that we did joint problems together. We had the whole first year of the three-year program jointly. Bob was also a friend and a very, very talented landscape architect. In fact, he had been the landscape architect – now that I think about it – I think of the Ford Foundation Building. But he certainly was the landscape architect of important places in New York, Paley Park and so forth. And he just worked with me. We worked together on Liberty State Park and other sites as well.

Linda Arntzenius: How long do you think before the trees [indicating trees in Birch garden] need to be replaced?

Robert Geddes: I think they'll go with me. Well, they're over-aged already. That's going to be a traumatic thing. There is a gate at the end of the courtyard, and that gate is there in order to bring trees in and out. I hope that what happens is that the Institute administration – they should now choose – I don't know how many trees there are; probably 30, and they should tag them now so that they have a group. And then when the summer comes or the winter comes when they move them, they move them all out and move them all in. The early pictures show how small they were. They weren't much higher than that [indicating magazine article]. But this picture, I think, which is one of yours.

Linda Arntzenius: It's beautiful. Yes.

Robert Geddes: It's really quite beautiful.

Linda Arntzenius: It really is. It's an extraordinary, calming scene.

Robert Geddes: When the trees came, Bob and I walked around and placed them in an intentionally dynamic and asymmetrical way. And that was very much part of the idea of having two very well formed [buildings] (I mean well formed

in the sense of grids and rhythms and so forth) and then irregular in here [Birch Garden]. I think that idea is what makes it so good. If this [Birch Garden] had been – as probably I would've done it – a rectangular of trees, I think it would have been nowhere near as effective.

Linda Arntzenius: The birches keep it open.

Robert Geddes: Yes, and dynamic, that's right. Nobody asked for this courtyard.

Linda Arntzenius: Really? Tell me how that evolved in the design. I don't really understand. You have demands for a commons and for a social science building to accommodate a certain amount [of faculty] –

Robert Geddes: Yes, and that was about all.

Linda Arntzenius: How do you begin to create something such as this? Do you have budgetary restrictions?

Robert Geddes: Actually, you know, the budget was very low. The whole project, everything was \$4 million.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you choose materials based on the Wallace Harrison building?

Robert Geddes: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So the concrete was kind of a no-brainer?

Robert Geddes: Well, no. *[Laughter]* In the 1960s to '70s, we did – "we," GBQC – did a series of buildings, and we did them as a series, that is, the principles, the intentions of them were continuous, they evolved, and they differed from place to place and also according to the needs of the users. But they really were a language, an idea of architecture that went through more than just that immediate building. And this was one of those five or six buildings, and the language started with – so in a way what I'm saying is, I didn't have to sit down and say, "What is this building?" because it was a stream of work that was under way. And the principles of it – I don't know how much you wanna go into this, because it's written pretty much.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay.

Robert Geddes: The principles are based upon a concept of grids, of organizing a kind of cognitive map, as it were, a mental map which the grids underline. It's also true of painters like Cezanne and Poussin; it's true of Mondrian; it's true of so much of modern art after Cezanne.

Linda Arntzenius: You did explain this very well in your talk.

Robert Geddes: Good. Anyway, so it started with this. Now, the fundamental social decision was to have two units. Okay, Fuld Hall again, cross axis, and then to have the dining hall here so that people from over here, and so forth, enter the dining hall at that point, and then to have the social

sciences building here and have an entrance there, so you walk through. Then that creates the space between.

It's really like a quadrangle, except it's only created by two elements rather than four, but it makes a room. [Birch Garden] But as I say, nobody asked for an outdoor room, and that is one of the things that architects should do, which is to see the possibility of space. And it's interesting also that, to me, I read the other day what was said about the Institute and what I wrote about it, and the importance of the birch garden was nowhere near as apparent back in 1970 as it is now.

I think if you were to write an article about this building now, the birch garden might be the beginning or sort of coequal with the dining hall.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, it's interesting because, again, going back to – perhaps not Flexner, but Oswald Veblen,¹⁰ who had this "let's get out into nature and chop down trees and go to the Adirondacks in the summer" –

Robert Geddes: Oh, really? Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: And he thought of the Institute as where people who are working with their minds would also have an opportunity to get out into the woods.

Robert Geddes: Absolutely.

Linda Arntzenius: So that concept was right there at the beginning.

Robert Geddes: Yes, I think that's one reason they came.

Linda Arntzenius: And somehow subliminally, it manifested itself in this building.

Robert Geddes: Well, except that I did the reverse. This space here and that space there, it's a certain – well, not symmetry, but relationship between that green and this space.

Linda Arntzenius: You're indicating the green in front of Fuld Hall and behind Fuld Hall between the woods and the –

Robert Geddes: Yes. I think what we've done here is to turn the buildings and – let's say that the Institute started with buildings in which the open space is outside of the buildings, and what the dining hall – so in this complex, it's the reverse. It's buildings, buildings, which create the open space between them. It's almost like a three-part composition, three rooms, three pieces: the social science part/wing, the dining hall, and the garden, contained, internal, and looking inward. There's no other place on the Institute campus like it.

¹⁰ Oswald Veblen (1880-1960), Professor in the School of Mathematics, 1932-1950; Emeritus Professor, 1950-1960.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Can you tell me, when the building was under construction, did you have input from – did you have members of the faculty coming to you with comments to say, "We really need this," or trustees?
- Robert Geddes:* There were no faculty.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There were no faculty at the School of Social Science, but other faculty of other schools?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, it was Millard Meiss and Tullio and, I think, also Cherniss¹¹ – wasn't he in mathematics? – was on the committee. But, really, Carl did it – pretty much directly, and I think the answer really is now.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I understand there was a strike during the construction, in the summer of 1970.
- Robert Geddes:* Really?
- Linda Arntzenius:* What was that all about?
- Robert Geddes:* I don't know.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It was something to do with L.C. Bowers & Sons.
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, they were the builders.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There were delays to the kitchen –
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, really?
- Linda Arntzenius:* – and concerns that it wouldn't open in time.
- Robert Geddes:* I don't know. I did come over here often when the building was under construction. I mean, one of our associates was here practically every other day. But I came often because we had to show them how to build the concrete and all sorts of ways in which "Oh, what do you do about the slate? Do you carry it down to the floor?" and so forth. So I was – and then I lived right near here, so it was very personal.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Close to your heart. Tell me about construction methods and the concrete. What would you use nowadays?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, that's the big problem. Let me get a drink of water while I answer that big problem.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, yes, certainly. Let me pause that.

¹¹ Harold F. Cherniss (1904-1987), Faculty in the School of Historical Studies, 1948-1974; Emeritus Professor, 1974-1987.

- Robert Geddes:* I'm not an expert on it, but I do think that, especially at the façade that faces Einstein Drive, there seems to be some spoiling. Otherwise, I think, actually, it's quite beautiful to see the weathering and the age.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It's not – you don't think it's indicative – I mean, the building isn't falling down. It's not in danger of –
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, no. A friend of mine, Richard Sennett,¹² who's a very, I think, apt critic of architecture – he's a sociologist, but anyway – claims that one of the problems that modern architecture has is that it doesn't want to be old. It wants to be new and fresh and sparkling, and certainly the transparency of the building is still the case, and the cubist/constructivist aspect of it is still there. But its fabric is getting older, and he says, that's an irony or – and that's why people don't – I mean, if this really were made out of conventional stone and it showed the effective weathering, that would be fine. In fact, it's probably nicer to have older limestone than new limestone. But I think this is just fine. There's only one spot which I think has to be taken care of technically, probably by cleaning it. What would be an absolute disaster would be to paint it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Has that been considered?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, it worries me. I don't think it'll ever happen. I think it's just fine. There's no way in which you could build this building in any other way but concrete. You could not build it in brick; you couldn't build it in steel. It is a building which is authentically, structurally, spatially, aesthetically a unit. And it's very strange for me to – here we are, what, 40 years later, and so much has changed. So this building wouldn't be built today.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Why do you say that? It wouldn't be built today, or it wouldn't be designed today? What do you mean?
- Robert Geddes:* We gave up building reinforced-concrete buildings like this in probably 1980, because the quality control of the concrete was so bad that we couldn't assure ourselves or our clients to build it. We built similar buildings – Richard Stockton State College is a very large institution, and it was built in a very similar way, but it was built in steel: porcelain enamel and steel. And we did a large number of buildings like this in concrete, and the concrete has not – if we could've found ways to build pre-cast concrete, as we did the police headquarters, but the industry didn't develop that way, and it may be that we could go back to it today. But there was a real interim period from, I would think, say, 1980 till 2000 certainly, maybe now, in which this kind of concrete was not good enough for clients to accept.
- And you see, the spatial idea of the building is based upon the structure. It's not as if you built a structure, covered it all over, put a wall around it, and said, "Well, it is what it is." And that was part of its character and intention.

¹² Richard Sennett (1943-), Member in the School of Social Science, 1973-1974; Visitor, 1979-1980.

Linda Arntzenius: If you were building – putting this building up today, what would you change about it? I mean, you mentioned sort of small things, like the door and –

Robert Geddes: Well, you see, that's a strange question 'cause I'm not building it today.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, it wouldn't be built today.

Robert Geddes: And also, the Institute's not the same today. If I may say, what I think is remarkable – and I think Carl Kaysen and I were a good team in that respect – is the extent to which this – without the faculty being here, we anticipated what it should be. And I mean, there's that line in Hamlet, "to be or not to be," and I think that continues to be for architecture the fundamental question.

We knew, I think, that there should be – that the two buildings should be very different, because that [dining hall] should be very open and transparent. Carl wanted social transparency, and I was very interested in physical aesthetic transparency and cubism, and we knew we could do that there. And we also knew that this building [West Building] ought to be very solid and private, and it really does work. I mean, it's very quiet and peaceful, and then that's very reliably enacted, so it's an amazing thing that it still works. Not amazing. I think it's wonderful.

Linda Arntzenius: Was there anything about working with the Institute that surprised you?

Robert Geddes: Well, only in retrospect, because – are we going to talk about Bloomberg Hall?

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, yes, we'll get there.

Robert Geddes: Because the process that produced Bloomberg Hall would never have produced this building.

Linda Arntzenius: All right. So maybe we should jump a little bit ahead, although before we leave this building, I do want to ask you about the mosaics. In November of 1970, Kaysen sent you pictures of these mosaics that he wanted to purchase for the building. Did you incorporate those?

Robert Geddes: Well, it was not very difficult. I just walked around with Carl and –

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. Chose where they should go.

Robert Geddes: Yes. It was a very good idea.

Linda Arntzenius: You didn't find there was a tension between classicism and modernism in putting these ancient pieces into –

Robert Geddes: No, I think it's the materials that are so sympathetic. I mean, if you're going to put something in there – you could hardly find a better example

than of that masonry or tile, or color. No, there was nothing – no. I think the relationship between architecture and works of art is a serious problem.

Linda Arntzenius: How so?

Robert Geddes: Well, I think the Institute has had two unsuccessful adventures: the Mary Miss sculpture and the whatever – I don't know – the new –

Linda Arntzenius: Elyn Zimmerman [sculpture by the Institute pond]?

Robert Geddes: No. That's very good. But that's not in relationship to a building. And the Tony Smith – Einstein¹³ is wonderful and we're very successful in relating to the landscape.

Where I think the Institute has not come up to that standard, it's been in terms of relationship of works of art to buildings. We would've been much better served – it would've much better achieved for Bloomberg Hall had we done what some of the members of the faculty wanted. Steve Adler,¹⁴ in particular, said, "Why don't we choose a really beautiful piece of sculpture and put it in the courtyard?" And he had in mind, for example – I'm not sure. I think Barbara Hepworth would've been very happy if – but I don't think that commissioning someone was the right way to go, but I think that was forced on the Institute by the donor. I'm not sure. But I suspect that the faculty would not have gone that route.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, we're jumping ahead 30 years to '97, when you were again commissioned by the Institute. Now, was there a competition this time?

Robert Geddes: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So tell me about that because it's a very different set of circumstances, and very different set of goals.

Robert Geddes: Totally different. That's right.

Linda Arntzenius: Different director, Phillip Griffiths.¹⁵

Robert Geddes: Before we come back, I have one more thing I wanted to be sure to mention. In terms of social imagination, Carl was very, very good at – and Annette were very, very good, and I think it's important to know that when architects work with someone who has social imagination, it's really a marvelous experience.

¹³ "New Piece" by the sculptor Tony Smith, donated to the Institute on the occasion of the centenary of Albert Einstein's birth.

¹⁴ Stephen L. Adler (1939-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1969; Professor, 1969-2010; Emeritus Professor, 2010- .

¹⁵ Phillip Griffiths (1938-), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1968-1970; Visitor, 1981-1982; IAS Director, 1991-2003; Professor, 2004-2009; Emeritus Professor, 2009- .

Linda Arntzenius: And what do you mean by social imagination?

Robert Geddes: They could think about how people would relate to each other, relate to the building and to space, and could suggest ideas that I could see immediately the potential for. There are two examples of them. One is in the dining hall. We just saw it. The upper level. That was Annette Kaysen's idea. Not the form of it, but the idea of it. Knowing that you would come in from upper level, or come in from the lower level, and there could be a place to have coffee or tea. And then the court – the shape of it, the form of it, where the columns occur and all, that was my task. But hers, she suggested the idea of having it.

And the second one is the Dilworth Room. Nobody – and this garden [indicating garden outside Dilworth Room].

Linda Arntzenius: Ah, yes, there's a second little garden.

Robert Geddes: Which has been terribly ruined by that horrible elevator. Yes. Originally there were two trees, you see. It was a beautiful composition, for Bob Zion to play with the two trees and how they relate to each other. This – frankly, it's there in order to make – it started to be there in order to make the courtyard that long. The stair tower here, and then that line here. That wasn't in the program either.

Linda Arntzenius: The Dilworth Room wasn't in the original conception?

Robert Geddes: No.

Linda Arntzenius: It developed –

Robert Geddes: I said to Carl, "Look, we could put something here which would have the wonderful quality of being of the dining hall, but away."

Linda Arntzenius: Apart.

Robert Geddes: And that's what it is. You take this little walk, and you feel like you're – it's not as if you partitioned off the end of the dining room. It really is a place–

Linda Arntzenius: And the conception for that was as a boardroom or –

Robert Geddes: Seminar/meeting room.

Linda Arntzenius: – another meeting room?

Robert Geddes: It became, for a while, a boardroom, a meeting room, yes. But it came about in large part because of the opportunity that the size – if he was willing to extend it to there. Otherwise, the dining hall would only have been that big [indicating dining hall ending before the corridor that adjoins the space to Dilworth Room].

Linda Arntzenius: Right. And it would have been asymmetric with the West Building.

Robert Geddes: Yes. I think that he saw the possibilities for that being, as it is every day, a meeting of one of the groups. I think those two things are examples of social and physical imagination.

Linda Arntzenius: So that's what you mean when you talk about social imagination from Annette and Carl Kaysen.

Robert Geddes: Mm-hmm. Yes. Okay, now.

Linda Arntzenius: So now we move to Bloomberg, to the situation 30 years later. And I wondered, when I saw that – when I looked at the demands for the new situation as compared to this situation of the dining hall, they're very, very different, and yet – so it seems surprising to choose the same architects.

Robert Geddes: They didn't choose them.

Linda Arntzenius: So tell me what happened.

Robert Geddes: When I say they didn't choose them, it was a struggle.

Linda Arntzenius: Tell me. *[Laughter]* I'll just say, at this point, Bob Geddes is taking his jacket off and rolling up his sleeves. *[Laughter]*

Robert Geddes: Well, the situation was very different. I think the differences are – one, let's say, the faculty was here, and that is so important to the hall. The second thing is the donor was here, I mean, in existence. The third is that Carl Kaysen was not [here], and the leadership of the Institute was a very different kind of leadership, so it didn't have the same mandate and so forth.

The reason for the building is different – the reason for the building was that, as I understand it – I knew John Bahcall¹⁶ well, I didn't know Ed Witten¹⁷ or Nati Seiberg¹⁸ or Steve Adler at all, but as I understand it, it was their desire to relate particle physics and astrophysics, intellectually and as a science. And they had the hopes that by connecting these two little buildings, that they could create the kind of interaction that we did here.

Linda Arntzenius: So we're talking about C building. Is that right?

Robert Geddes: True.

Linda Arntzenius: And did this have a name?

¹⁶ John Norris Bahcall (1934-2005), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1969-1970; Professor, 1971-2005.

¹⁷ Edward Witten (1950-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1984; Professor, 1987- .

¹⁸ Nathan Seiberg (1951-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1982-1985, 1987-1989, 1994-1995; Visitor, 1993-1994; Professor, 1997- .

Robert Geddes: This one and this one. I don't know, C and D or something like that.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, now this is D, so this must be something else.

Robert Geddes: Whatever. Yes. This was built in '48, and this was built in '53. And the hope was that by connecting the two buildings, making a single unit of the two, that the people working in particle physics and the people working in astrophysics, and also their ideas, could somehow be encouraged, enabled, and so forth. I can't say whether that's happening or not, but that was the intellectual idea. The faculties were very strong and entrenched and they – in a sense that they had their place. They had their corner office or they had this. They liked their offices. They liked the quiet of the little buildings. But they realized that there was no connection between the two.

So the Institute board and leadership chose four architects and wrote a program, a set of requirements, for the four. The four of them were – Bloomberg's people chose two of them, or two or three, and they chose Hillier locally and James Polshek and Kliment & Halsband in New York, who had done comparable work in other universities. I mean, they're all friends. I know them well. And the four of us were given the same set of requirements, and they were also told what the boards would be, the 30-by-40 boards, and what drawings should be on them. I mean, it was *very* specific.

Linda Arntzenius: *Very specific.* From what I read, they challenged you to create a building that would, and here I'm quoting: "communicate a sense of collaboration, warmth, and friendliness while facilitating quiet individual study." And it seems as if they were asking that some people would be able to sort of hang out in the hallways and brainstorm while others were engaged in sort of monastic study.

Robert Geddes: Not in the hallways. That would be unacceptable because it would make noise in the hallways. Well, let's go into it. I know that's what John Bahcall and Ed Witten and Steve and so forth wanted. They wanted privacy.

Linda Arntzenius: There's a tension between those two desires, surely.

Robert Geddes: Yes, but that's what this complex does. There is great privacy, and then there's the interaction and so forth.

The four schemes that were proposed were interesting in this respect. Most of them – and John Bahcall initially thought, and so did others, that the way to unite these two buildings was to do this [indicating joining the two to form an L shaped unit].

Linda Arntzenius: Okay.

Robert Geddes: Right? That lost. That lost. And it lost because it didn't create a place. If I may be somewhat critical of the math building, there's no inner heart to it.

There's no place. You go upstairs to the lounge or whatever it is, but it's a little bit like a resort hotel. There's no place.

Linda Arntzenius: For the recording, the first plan that you're indicating is one that simply joins the two buildings and makes a final L shape of them.

Robert Geddes: That's right. There were some technical issues. For example, did that mean that the person who what is now a corner office, would now have an inside office? But I don't think that's really the only problem. The real problem is that it would result in long corridors and no particular heart.

What I suggested was that, instead of doing that, that we go to the center of each building, which has a stairway, and connect those points. In other words, go – again, in the same principle, using the movement system – from this point to this point to there, and create one courtyard here and an entrance courtyard here. So in that respect, it's like this building [dining hall/west building/birch garden].

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. Tell me, this focus that you have on axes, is this something unique to you?

Robert Geddes: I don't know. Very interesting question. You ought to turn this off. I'm very interested in cognitive maps. In fact, I'm working with Jim Gould at the university, who's done a wonderful course on animal behavior. And I'm trying to – he'll be here next week. I'm trying to find out where the cognitive maps – there are animals who build avenues - I think it's hardwired in us. Now, whether a grid is hardwired or not, but I'm certain that the axis for orientation and navigation is the way we are.

Linda Arntzenius: Because this [dining hall etc] and this [Bloomberg Hall] are worlds apart.

Robert Geddes: That's right.

Linda Arntzenius: And anyone thinking about how to join these two buildings [would suggest] – making an L shape out of them. It's the first thing you would think of. This [Geddes ultimate plan] is not so straightforward, and yet the result is straightforward in the way that it allows the movement in the building.

Robert Geddes: Yes. But now you get to the situation with the donor and his advisors.

Linda Arntzenius: And the donor was Mike Bloomberg?

Robert Geddes: Bloomberg and Patricia Harris and a whole group of people, and they had advisors and so forth. And I think that they liked this. This was their choice also, so to that respect, it was, I think, quite acceptable to them. But the real key to it is that we created a heart, a common room. I asked Michelle Sage the other day about it, and it still really works even though I don't know to what extent particle physics and astrophysics has come

together. I admire Martin Rees¹⁹ who, when he – one of the directors spoke at the opening of the building, when he said, "Well, the reason space-time exists – time exists so that not everything happens at once, and space exists so that not everything happens in Princeton." Now, that was what the point of this all is. And the common room is the one big contribution I really made here.

Now, where this presents a problem for me is that it doesn't have the architectural spatial interest that these buildings have. And I have to say, I think it really comes out of the technology. Those buildings [those joined to make Bloomberg Hall] were built in a really old, conventional way. They could've been built in the Middle Ages. I mean, they're just solid walls and then horizontal planks. There are no columns, and there's just no sense of the struggle of making a building, space and structure and so forth. So it's very limiting.

Linda Arntzenius: But you must get a sense of accomplishment in realizing the demands of the people who work in the building.

Robert Geddes: Yes, I give them hugs, and they give me hugs. Really – I had lunch with Nati Seiberg the other day, and yes, sure, absolutely, and Ed, they're all very happy, and it does work. It works well, not just functionally, but symbolically, that the building has a heart, which, in comparison, the math building doesn't. And these other little buildings don't. That's why I said initially, I don't think that the original conception was good enough.

Linda Arntzenius: It was restricting.

Robert Geddes: Yes. What I did then, and this is really the difference between 1965-'70 and 19 when was the –

Linda Arntzenius: '97.

Robert Geddes: '97. Thirty years later, I suppose. The existing buildings had a rhythm of windows, and these windows worked both externally and internally. They're very much liked by the inhabitants, the users. The windows in the math building are not liked by the users, but these windows were liked very much, and they pretty much wanted to have the same kind of window. So how do you put that kind of a window in a building which has to do with our time? So I, in a sense, expressed a structure that doesn't exist. I put limestone, or perhaps cast stone, pieces on the exterior to create the framework which isn't there.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, really?

Robert Geddes: Well, I mean, it's just a wall.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes.

¹⁹ Martin Rees (1942-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1969-1970, 1973, 1975, 1982, 1992-1993, 1996.

- Robert Geddes:* And so I drew something on the wall that isn't there, and that bothers me, because in this building there's nothing that isn't authentically itself, I mean, the concrete, the slate, the wood, everything is itself. And this building [Bloomberg] –
- Linda Arntzenius:* You have a façade.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And that makes you uneasy as an architect.
- Robert Geddes:* No, it makes many people happy. *[Laughter]* It just doesn't make me happy. And it wouldn't have made Frank Lloyd Wright happy.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right. But the difference here, though, is that the faculty were much more involved, it seems to me, than in the earlier [building] 30 years earlier.
- Robert Geddes:* Very involved. Yes, wonderfully involved. I really have to say, we interviewed them all. Nati was the faculty representative, but Steve was very much – and John. This was a wonderful experience, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Yes. And maybe that's a real achievement in a much more usual situation. Actually, this building, very unusual to do a building without any faculty, although I must say, Richard Stockton College, we had no faculty there either. So you have to rely on previous knowledge.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Whose idea was it to have the chalkboards so strategically placed throughout the building?
- Robert Geddes:* Mine. Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Excellent. Yes. And does that go for Bloomberg Hall also, or was that another obvious thing to do?
- Robert Geddes:* I think – yes, yes. What's unusual is you carry the chalkboard down to the floor. That's just purely visual.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That's aesthetic. Yes.
- Robert Geddes:* It just looks – yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* How did working with Phillip Griffiths differ from working with Carl Kaysen?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, they're different people, and one can like different people. Phillip had a much more powerful faculty and board to work with. He was not the leader that Carl was. He was also not as engaged. Hmm. It was just a different situation. I mean, I think he navigated it very well, and we managed to get it done, and to get it done on time and on budget. But he also had help that Carl didn't. I mean, he had Allen Rowe, and he had Jim Barbour, and he worked very well with them. In fact, Alan and Jim were –

generally, it would be the four of us. Phillip's personality is much quieter and very thoughtful and supportive.

So I think it's a real achievement for him to have gotten that done, and the faculty, I think, is pleased with it. I have a sense that they use it – the library – what we did is we created two libraries – one in astrophysics and one in physics – and one common room, so that both the two groups had their own seminar rooms – libraries, but they also have a common room, and I think that's really very good.

I'm a John Dewey guy, really. I mean, I really believe that the judgment of a work of architecture is in the experience of it and not just in the form or aesthetic of it.

Linda Arntzenius: So you weren't looking to create that landmark building for the architectural forum!

Robert Geddes: It would've been a disaster. No. I mean, there's a slight tip – I mean, the roof of the library in copper, which is the same slope as the roof of Fuld Hall, that's a bit of postmodernism. I don't know. If I were to do it again, I'd do it in a more aggressively – the form would've been more assertive, but it certainly works very nicely inside, though. The quantity of light - it's a little bit like an Alvar Aalto, Scandinavian place, with the light coming in from one side. I would probably make that more assertive visually now.

Linda Arntzenius: What did your work on – especially this building [dining hall and West building] - what did that mean to you and the prominence of your firm? I mean, it won a big award. I guess what I'm asking is, you affected the institute. How did the institute affect you?

Robert Geddes: Well, as I said, it was part of a group of buildings. The building that won the biggest awards is like this one [West Building], only four times as long. It's 900 feet long, and it's like this one, a series of courtyards, double line, in Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. And it won all the awards, gold medals, –

Linda Arntzenius: And is it concrete also?

Robert Geddes: Yes. Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So did that Carbondale commission come as a result of this?

Robert Geddes: I think so. I think so. And it was the real winner. I mean, this is in the Museum of Modern Art, and it's in Ada Louise Huxtable and so forth. And I think this is the best of that group, although – I better not say that. It's like having five children. There's one at Rutgers-Newark campus that is across the street from the architecture school, and the architects there like it very much. And it differs. It doesn't have a tree courtyard. But I don't think – we weren't thinking about one building. There was actually a time in which artists, painters, and so forth, were doing serial work. That is,

what they did was a progression, and we were thinking like that, of both pieces that affected each other.

Linda Arntzenius: Right. Interesting. Although for the second commission, you have a different group. It was Geddes Demshak?

Robert Geddes: Well, that was my daughter and son-in-law and a local firm, KSS Architects. By that time I had retired from GBQC, I retired in 1990. I left Princeton in 1990 and went to New York, and then I worked for a bit with my daughter. She did the library for John Bahcall in astrophysics. In fact, and she also interviewed all of the faculty: Ed Witten and Steve and so forth.

Linda Arntzenius: And is she still working in architecture?

Robert Geddes: No, she's not. No, she's mothering. She did anthropology as an undergraduate and then did architecture at Penn.

Linda Arntzenius: So the faculty were heavily involved.

Robert Geddes: Very, very, very heavily involved. For example, Ed Witten's office was rebuilt, but essentially the same office.

Linda Arntzenius: Can you share your thoughts on some of the other buildings on campus? You have done that to some extent, but you described Fuld Hall as a "significant building to which more is owed than is given credit for," and I wondered if you could expand a little bit on that. What do you mean?

Robert Geddes: The image of the Institute is the green space and the tower and the red building. Yes, I think it also has held up – the Common Room is still used after lectures and in the afternoons and so forth. But it has held up.

Linda Arntzenius: I listened to the talk that you gave to the Friends in 2005, a recording of that talk. And at that point, I don't know if you recall, but you said the Institute was, quote, "just holding on by its fingernails." What did you mean by that?

Robert Geddes: Did I say that?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. What did you mean by that?

Robert Geddes: Architecturally?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, just holding on by its fingernails.

Robert Geddes: I said that when?

Linda Arntzenius: 2005. You were talking to the Friends –

Robert Geddes: I think the math building and Wolfensohn Hall are in the wrong place, and I think they are architecturally problematic.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Why?
- Robert Geddes:* Why they are, I can't tell you. How they are, I can tell you.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Okay. You should have been a scientist or a logician.
- Robert Geddes:* [Laughter] Well, if you had a campus in which you knew you were going to have a major hall, would you put it where you can't get to it?
- Linda Arntzenius:* But the parking structure – the parking lot is right there, close by.
- Robert Geddes:* [It is a] very difficult walk at night. And also, I think it should have been thought of as part of that cross axis, and I think it is intrusive, architecturally, when seen from Fuld Hall or from the campus. I think also that it's – I think windows are very important, and if you go to the back of the side of –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Simonyi?
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, Simonyi. I think it's really grim, and I think it's just not a building of friendliness.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It's much used and it's –
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, Wolfensohn is. Oh, yeah, I'm talking about Simonyi. No, Wolfensohn – hmm.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What would you have done differently?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, I certainly would have done the lighting differently. I think the lighting is very bad. I think the acoustics are very dry. I think that it is – there are a tremendous number of reasons why it's much better to have seating curved, because you see other people. It's much too rigid.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So you think that's what you were referring to when you said that the Institute was just holding on by its fingernails? You meant the coherence?
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, because you realize that originally they were going to build the math building further out. I mean, if they were to come along and build where they would destroy the best aspects of the Institute landscape, which are these two spaces, and the math building almost does. I think that's really very problematic.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You've received a lot of awards, and your group received the highest professional honor of the American Institute for Architects. I wanted to ask you, of all your awards, which has given you most pleasure?
- Robert Geddes:* Of the awards?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Of all of the awards that you've received.

Robert Geddes: I suppose that the Firm Award in 1979, although it's hard to – I've been living this double life of a teacher and a practicing architect. In '79, we won the Firm Award, which was really the end of the firm, believe it or not. I mean, as a result of that, we changed and evolved, and it was sort of the high point, and within a few years, I'd really essentially left it. But it was a recognition of the value of collaborative practice, which is not given any recognition today. I mean, we are living in a time of celebrity and –

Linda Arntzenius: *Auteurs.*

Robert Geddes: Yes. And it seems so dated now, but I think it was the right approach for architecture. Still is, I think. So the Firm Award probably, but in a way, the Topaz Medal for education in 1984 was also wonderful to receive because it was right – I'd retired as dean and was moving on to other things; eventually, in a few years, going on to New York University for ten years. Those two seem to me the – if I could amend your question, they're a kind of pair. I like the Firm Award for collaboration, and the teaching award.

From the point of view of – maybe you didn't ask me – what building do I think is the best building? I think this is. And I think, partially, it's been taken – it has such tender loving care. Even like what we saw this morning when we went over to get coffee – that kind of activity. It's quite wonderful.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. Tell me about Princeton Future, of which you are the co-founder. How did that come about?

Robert Geddes: I'm co-founder, and I'm now emeritus. Well, when I came back from New York, it was apparent that there were very many dysfunctional aspects of the town in terms of its governance, its economy, and its social development. And Bob Goheen, in particular, was very concerned and felt that we were not – that the relationship between the Borough and the Township, which might be affected now by consolidation, and the relationship between the university and the town, and also the problems of the black community now, the Hispanic community as well, as minorities, that the town wasn't paying much attention and didn't have much communication. So we organized Princeton Future as a series of public forums and then interventions. And I think the major success was an idea that I proposed for plazas and walkways in the town, and that affected the way the library was designed, the way the garage, the apartment house, and the plaza.

But that's success. Where we have not succeeded is making the kinds of structural changes in the way in which the governance is done. We don't have neighborhood groups, neighborhood boards, and we don't have a parking authority. We don't have a redevelopment authority. We don't have the instruments of government that we need in order to sustain the town.

Linda Arntzenius: Do you think that might come as a result of consolidation?

Robert Geddes: I do. Yes, I do.

Linda Arntzenius: Does the Institute have a role to play in this?

Robert Geddes: It's done very well. I mean –

Linda Arntzenius: What, for example?

Robert Geddes: Well, Mike has been supportive.

Linda Arntzenius: Mike Gehret?

Robert Geddes: Yes, and recently. Allen Rowe was supportive before.

Linda Arntzenius: What do you mean "supportive"?

Robert Geddes: Well, I mean, it's very hard to know how an institution becomes engaged. But what we're thinking about is the possibility of a partnership of institutions, business, government, and civic associations that might cooperate and collaborate. I think the institute has been a very passive citizen, but at least supportive.

Linda Arntzenius: What is your relationship with the Institute now?

Robert Geddes: *[Laughter]* Well, we're friends, at least. I mean, we're Friends. Literally. Capital "F" Friends.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, you are in the Friends.

Robert Geddes: Oh, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So you come to all of the events.

Robert Geddes: Come to all, and we come to lunch.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. When you say "we"?

Robert Geddes: Evelyn and I.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, your wife of a good number of years.

Robert Geddes: Yes, almost 62. Evelyn and I were married in 1947.

Linda Arntzenius: Wow.

Robert Geddes: We were married in 1947. So 62 years.

Linda Arntzenius: A long time.

- Robert Geddes:* Let's see. We have many lower-case friends, and I come to lunch here often to meet with people. For example, the relationship now is really quite collegial. I love to talk about art and art history with Oleg Grabar.²⁰ I like to talk about science and knowledge with Nati Seiberg. Next week, for example, I will bring as a guest Jim Gould, the biologist from Princeton, for lunch on Monday. It's the best intellectual experience in Princeton.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Even with the university, you say that? Because there are many events at the university.
- Robert Geddes:* Oh, I'm not talking about the events. I mean the lunches and the –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Social interactions.
- Robert Geddes:* – the small-scale talks. I think the lectures in Wolfensohn are not different from the lectures at the university.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, is there a question that you expected me to ask you that I haven't, or an issue that we haven't touched on that you would like to address?
- Robert Geddes:* No. If I think of it, I'll send you – I think you've covered it very, very well. Hmm.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There's one thing I haven't asked you about, which I have to ask you about, and that's your glasses. You're the only other person I know besides Glen Bowersock²¹ – he gets his from Italy, I believe.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Where do you get yours?
- Robert Geddes:* These are made by a company called Anglo-American, and you buy them at the Princeton Optical Shop. And they're sort of T.S. Eliot glasses, but you see, mine are better than – mine are the purest ones. The line goes right through there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That's right, yes. Mine are graded. And mine are invisible, attempting to be invisible, and yours are not.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes. Well, I guess I have great joy about this institution and this morning.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What are your hopes for its future?
- Robert Geddes:* For this one?

²⁰ Oleg Grabar (1929-2011), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1990-1998; Emeritus Professor, 1998-2011.

²¹ Glen W. Bowersock (1936-), Visitor in the School of Historical Studies, 1975; Professor, 1980-2006; Emeritus Professor, 2006- .

- Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm.
- Robert Geddes:* I think this is going to happen. I think there will be institutions – if you look at the Flexner thought about the institute, he thought that – by the way, his conception of what the institute might be was of concentric rings, rings that would that there would be other institutions....
- Linda Arntzenius:* But don't you think that was just an abstraction? I mean, he didn't think of that as a physical manifestation of the Institute.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, that's the problem.
- Linda Arntzenius:* [Laughter] Right.
- Robert Geddes:* In the end, the cross axis may be my major contribution to the Institute. I remember when Phillip Griffiths became director, and I walked in and – it didn't exist. And I said, "Phillip, this is the way it might happen." And that's why – oh, I meant – oh, yeah. When Harry Woolf²² built the canopy connection, which was really ugly and unnecessary, and then it was taken down. But there's a trace of that left.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Ah, yes. Just for the record, the canopy that was built over the walkway from West building to the dining hall.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, right, right, right.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And you can still see the shadow of the curve, the arc that was the canopy.
- Robert Geddes:* That's right. Anyway, I think the future will occur – for example, at one point the university and the institute – this is my –
- Linda Arntzenius:* This is your speculation. That's fine.
- Robert Geddes:* Right. At one point the university and the Institute were collaborating and trying to get the Space Telescope Institute, which eventually went to Johns Hopkins because it was near the space – whatever it is there. If that had come – and if it had come here, it would've gone to the university, but if it had come here, it would've gone – it could go there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* On the space behind Bloomberg.
- Robert Geddes:* Yeah. I think that there is the possibility of other kinds of institutions.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, we didn't talk about biology.
- Robert Geddes:* Well, the biology wing fits very much the model that I had set up for this.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Who was the architect for that?

²² Harry Woolf (1923-2003), IAS Director, 1976-1987; Professor-At-Large, 1987-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994-2003.

Robert Geddes: I think Cesar Pelli.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay.

Robert Geddes: But you see, there are a series of pavilions, and the biology wing is kind of like this, right? A series of – it continues the same idea of that. However, that idea has come to an end. I mean, the way it's done, I don't think – well, you could possibly – I don't believe it will. It could grow this way. But if biology should grow, and another large institution get built over here, I could imagine that happening. I could also imagine a parking garage of necessity happening. I mean, this is such an attractive, literally attractive, intellectual place. I could imagine other institutions occurring.

Linda Arntzenius: So when you say that, you think of not other schools but other institutes of–

Robert Geddes: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: – like the telescope or something like that coming to join the intellectual community.

Robert Geddes: Yes. Yes, the moon institute on Earth. But there is that possibility because of the crosswalk.

Linda Arntzenius: Interesting. I have to say, thank you very much for spending your time with me and giving me your thoughts on the Institute, and we appreciate it very much.

Robert Geddes: Thank you.

Linda Arntzenius: This will be transcribed, and I will come back to you with it because there's bound to be some misspellings and so forth.

Robert Geddes: Thank you.

Linda Arntzenius: You're welcome.

[End of Original Audio; Start of Added Audio]

Robert Geddes: I meant to point out, what people don't realize about these buildings, and I think it's the reason why they're so successful, is that in terms of the fundamental experience of architecture and of art, it has to do with rhythm. And the rhythm of these buildings is very human. It's approximately ten-foot scale and quite organized in a kind of constant beat. And then there are variations: the way the sun shades, the way the windows are set, the way the trees are set. So that to me the most important aspect of architecture is this human-scaled rhythm. And I hope that if – and I think if there are future buildings, that it's really important to continue that as a goal.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Is there a master plan for the campus?
- Robert Geddes:* No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No. Should there be a master plan for the campus?
- Robert Geddes:* Yes. Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Have you designed a master plan for the campus?
- Robert Geddes:* No, but I've talked to Peter²³ and also to Allen Rowe and others about having a master plan, but –
- Linda Arntzenius:* I mean, it's difficult to think of that, because you don't know how or what may be in the future.
- Robert Geddes:* Yes. But a master plan need only be a movement system. And a set of zones of possibility. But it'd be very difficult to get someone to do a good master plan now.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Why?
- Robert Geddes:* Well, the architects who did the master plan for the university are very good, but there's not a large understanding of what a master plan might be. But I think one would be – even if it was only for purposes of guidance, of discussion.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Is that because – I mean, has architecture changed? I mean, are architects more individualistic now?
- Robert Geddes:* Yes, and so are the clients, they want celebrity signature buildings, and yes, it's been an age of excess and exuberance. I don't know whether that will change, but I hope it does.
- [End of Audio]*

²³ Peter Goddard (1945-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1972-1974; Member in the School of Mathematics, 1988; IAS Director, 2004-2012; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 2012-2016; Emeritus Professor, 2016- .