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This is an interview with Albert Gillissen for the University of Adelaide History of the School of Architecture on 21st July 2008, interviewer Rob Linn.

Albert, before we actually get to your arriving in Adelaide, could you give me a little bit of your personal background from 1921 till 1963?

Oh, that is ---.

An overview, anyway.

Well, I've lived in seven countries, lived and worked in seven countries. Born in Holland. The War broke out when I matriculated and the next four years was occupied by Germany, Nazi Germany. I was fortunately rejected for the Dutch Army because my body was a miserable one, and four years later I volunteered to fight the Germany armies and I spent a year in the Underground – does that make sense, the Underground?

Yes. Oh, yes.

And a year in the Canadian Dutch, United States and British Army. That made me restless, all that stuff, it all made me restless, so I then went to Indonesia for three years and worked there for the government but got into trouble with my government because they were wanting their colonial empire back whereas I was on the side of Sukarno and Suharto and sided with those characters, to the detriment of my standing in the Dutch Government's Anyway, that was three years. Came back, restless again, went to sea for one and a half years to work on migrant liners, taking migrants to the States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. That gave me a chance to have a good look around and I migrated to New Zealand.

Oh!

So I went to New Zealand, took my architecture degree there as a returned service person, failed in the first year, got the top scholarship of whole New Zealand in architecture in my final year, went to work in London for a year with, the engineers of the Sydney Opera House, and came back and started looking round and

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there was a position in Adelaide. I had a good look on the map, I saw its size, I noticed its wine, its beaches, James Earl[?] was the Lord Mayor, I thought, 'Jeez, an architect as the Lord Mayor, that's good'. I'd seen the work of the Housing Trust in paper, I thought that was good. It was a new faculty and my three professors in Auckland said – I'd already been teaching there – 'You are the teaching type, by all means go for it, we'll back you'. So I applied and I got the job and came here in 1963. Now, that's a very, very, very potted history of thirty years between my matriculation and my starting architectural studies. So I had thirty years between matriculation before I started my study, I was thirty-one, I was an old bugger, but was immediately elected by the young students as their representative and remained that way. So I've always been active and involved in things. I had no intention of being important, chairing, but involvement and commitment to something. So yes, so I came here in October '63.

And, Albert, what was the University like physically in October 1963?

A wholly different structure. We had three god professors, as I call them. They were all-powerful. Later, Harry Medlin was the fellow who helped to defuse that situation. Jordan[?] was one of them, Beckwith I think was another one, I'm not sure, but definitely Jordan. I think there was Beckwith, and Jensen. And Jensen was dean, professor, head of the department, boss,, the whole lot. And so I arrived and that was Jensen.

One of the other reasons that I came, he had brought with him two Englishmen: Derrick Kendrick, who you've met –

Yes.

– and Neville Hoskins[?], who just died –

Yes.

– and that was, These three came out. Shortly after there was two people from South Africa,,, and Wally van Zyl, then there was an Australian, Joe Hemmer[?] and there were two Danes, Taubman[?] and, Scott[?]. And I came actually from New Zealand as a Dutch New Zealander. Jensen knew that I'd had studies in England and he said, 'I like this fellow'. So I came to replace,, as a kind of European Continental fellow.

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But the University was small, benignish, not yet scholarly or, certainly not in Architecture. Architecture was never a place where you did a master's or a PhD. It was an in a way professional degree and in a way perhaps architecture, like medicine in my opinion, don't quite suit the university – not the classical scholarship that you find in the arts and the sciences. So it was small. I think we had eight thousand people. And the departments were very sort of strong in their own little bits and pieces, there was a faculty, but we were a one-department faculty because we were small. We only had, the whole school had, approximately – when I came, approximately a hundred and twenty people.

But the years just before you were very busy years because of the war boom of babies, so the year of this lot was one of about forty people, forty-five. An interesting thing in those years, too, that a third of the students never finished. A third did it in the minimal time and a third in more time. Now, if you failed something, if you failed something twice you were thrown out of the University. Today you can't fail anything. You pass. So it was much more rigorous. And Jensen was a rigour man. You've heard the stories about Jensen: a very bigoted, authoritarian [man].

I remember him well, yes.

Authoritarian and bigoted man. Within weeks of arrival I ran into trouble. I'd written a letter to the paper about something in Architecture. He storms into my office: 'Gillissen' – he never said 'Albert' or 'Mr Gillissen'; 'Gillissen', 'Kendrick' – 'You owe me an apology. You've written and you shouldn't have done it without my permission'. So (laughs) I've never had quite respect for authority.

I've read that letter, Albert.

You read it?

I have. Yes. So I remember that. When I was going through the newspaper cutting books at the University, it actually appears in the newspaper cutting books.

(laughs) So yes, it was And he insisted for three months that I should apologise. I said, 'I'm sorry, I can't. There's nothing to apologise for'. Now, that stance ultimately stood me in good stead. He mistrusted everybody, and Derrick Kendrick and Hoskins remained all their lives shit-scared of Jensen. I've never been, I think,

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never been scared of authority. I treat people for what they're worth. Tremendous respect for Harry Medlin, tremendous respect for Harold Rodda – you remember Harold Rodda?

Yes.

Potts, Professor Potts, a wonderful fellow.

Ren.

Oh, Ren. Wonderful. So high or low, I don't give a stuff. (laughs) But Jensen, I had my misgivings. Now, you know perhaps that Mrs Jensen had her portrait painted in the hope that Jensen would be knighted.

No!

She already had her portrait for 'Well, this is Lady Jensen'. (laughter) So Jensen was quite a character. Anyway, I didn't apologise. That's made him ultimately respect me for who I was. I was consistent, I believed in things; in fact, I've never worked, really. I've been paid for things I love doing, all my life.

So, Albert, when Professor Jensen established the course, he said that he modelled it on what he found at Manchester and other British universities and at Melbourne.

Yes.

Now, what was the course structure that you found when you arrived?

Just before that – shall we come back to Walkley's involvement?

Oh, yes.

Later on or now?

No, no, let's do that now. I'm sorry, Albert, that passed my mind.

No, no.

I've got to keep my notes here.

No, no. (laughs)

Now, this is a very important part of it all –

Yes.

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– because I’ve read the correspondence between the University and Professor Bull, who went overseas to interview these people in England.

Yes.

But prior to that I do know that Gavin Walkley was also on the shortlist. I’ve never understood what happened.

Gavin Walkley, I don’t know the details, I have no records so it’s memory, and memory of discussions and stories I’ve heard. It was Gavin Walkley, quite frankly, who initiated the notion that South Australia ought to have a school of architecture. Now, I don’t know how selfish he was, but he had hoped to get a chair. He started getting, I think, fifty thousand bucks together – you might have found that somewhere – he got money together from the profession, and there was what’s-his-name in North Adelaide, a wonderful man – Ken Milne – and lots of people banded together. Mind you, that was still Adelaide of conservatism. In Gavin’s schools conservative architecture was being taught: that was Classical English stuff, and the Modern movement was only just coming to its beginning. So Gavin thought we ought to have a faculty of architecture in the University. He had one in the Institute, but that was an institute, and he saw a respectable university course. And for whatever reason he had hoped that he would be the first chair. He had initiated it, he was the highest professional in the state, education-wise, so he was very disappointed and very embittered and the relationship between Jensen and Walkley was always tense. So that was the beginning.

And on that score somebody at the University listened to Walkley’s approach of getting a thing established and appointed Bull, the newest faculty type at uni and an Englishman – because everything was still British, that was another notion; foreigners came in later, but it was still very British, Australian British – so Bull went to England and there was Jensen with quite a creditable record of Modernity, he’d been involved in Mars, M-A-R-S, he’d been involved in education, had, he’d been a lieutenant colonel in the army in Singapore, very important fellow. His speech was – you remember his speech –

Yes.

– (makes unintelligible sounds to represent ‘plum-in-mouth’ speech), so he was a real authority and Bull fell for him. He has a good, strong persona and that seemed

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good to set up that school, which he did. And he did do it with an enormous gusto and determination and an authority. He stamped his authority. And he brought out two capable people, but subservient to him. He selected them very carefully and they were both shit-scared of him. So Derrick Kendrick and Hoskins came out.

An interesting thing too is that in those days Neville Hoskins got to a senior lectureship on a diploma. He had a diploma. Thirty years later we had to have a PhD to get even a tutorship, so that's an enormous change over these years.

Oh, yes.

Nobody in architecture, or very, very, very few people – you can find the records – did a master or PhD; it was a professionally-based thing, until the schools started in Australia and New Zealand. Actually, you did things like articles, like the lawyers. So the school became a course of five years, and that was modelled on Birmingham and particularly Liverpool. Liverpoolians' power. Melbourne had a 'Liverpool School', as it were. So Liverpool was the model and he knew Manchester and one or two others, but it was Liverpool that they were modelling it on, and on the British system – which was quite creditable, you had to start somewhere. We had actually the same in Auckland, where I used to teach[?], British, Liverpoolians, Rhode Scholars, these kinds of people. So that was the beginning.

Now, how did you find Tex[?] Hoskins and Derrick to work with, Albert?

Excellent. No problem. We got on like a house on fire. After all, Dutch and British are just across the Channel. I had travelled like blazes. But they were both very English, very English; but very committed to what they did. Derrick's stuff is his building science, fantastic commitment. And Tex – interesting you call him 'Tex', that was Tex Hoskins, Neville Hoskins – he was, how shall I say, a wonderfully loving, old-fashioned draftsman.

Yes.

(mimics plum in mouth) Very British and very nice and very beautiful. Had great trouble, really, inside him to adapt to the youngsters, pretty brutal youngsters who had no respect for anybody. The old-fashioned thing [was] that you had respect for your lecturers or your teachers, and these students that Neville and Derrick and I

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came to were postwar characters. The beginning of the 1968 students' revolution in Paris and later on the Vietnam War, these characters, this bunch – – –.

Yes.

Boy, oh boy, oh boy, we had some characters there. Really rough ones and later on – wonderful, I liked it because I liked this spirit of young fellows and girls. In fact, in the early days there were no girls, only one or two; at the present moment I think we've got about fifty per cent are female. An interesting change over that time, you see.

Yes, indeed.

I would have trouble today with sexual harassment. I became the kind of unofficial counsellor. Have you come across Ross Bateup?

Yes. Yes, I know who you mean, the cartoonist.

Yes. Well, he was one of these students and Ross came in in 1964, '5. He had an enormous stammering problem and I got through Dr at the time –

Bob, yes.

– Rob Hezel[?] – to do a course and he has improved enormously. We had coffee together on The Parade not so long ago. So I still see Ross, I still see every now and then dozens of students.

Now, Albert, that first course that Professor Jensen had put together, it seems even at the time was incredibly demanding of the students, and it has to have been demanding of the staff like you, too.

It was demanding. He set a very intelligent, rigorous course for the time that was, he said, 'Okay, there's architectural scientific stuff, there is creative stuff and there is practical stuff'. So he developed these in a number of subjects and one thing he demanded, that the studio was the central bit. That has over the years gone down, but in the early days studio, studio. Any moment that a student was not in a lecture he was supposed to be in the studio. To the extent that he demanded from the staff – which he legally, apparently, couldn't have done, but we all submitted to that – he demanded that we have evening service, and we came in two or three nights per week from six till nine or ten to help students in the studio. So the students, if they weren't in the studio, if they weren't at lectures, he would pounce on them. He

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would things. He was very authoritarian manipulator, but he had perhaps to be that way – – –. No, no, no, he could have been different. But he was capable of introducing a course that was relevant – not at all today any more, but for that day it was a good course. It was respected. We were only the fifth or sixth school, of course, in Australia to start a course.

And was the course respected by the RAIA¹ at that time?

Yes. We had, as it is now, annual or biennial inspections and it was respected. For a couple of reasons. We had good people. Gus Herbert[?] was a phenomenal character.

Now, his real name is Gilbert, is it?

Gilbert Herbert.

Gilbert, yes.

Gus, Gilbert Herbert. He became a professor in Haifa, left here. Now, that was an interesting thing. Jensen couldn't keep staff. He couldn't keep staff. So apart from Derrick and Tex and myself from the early lot nobody stayed, they all went after one, two, three years. They felt the oppression. I argued – first of all, I had a wife and ran into trouble with marriage and all that sort of thing – I argued that he was a challenge. I could cope with Jensen, although difficult. I had my own ethos, Jensen couldn't get on top of me, I was my own person. The others all felt too oppressed and they had to leave. So he lost a lot of good staff, including Gilbert Herbert.

The Department also had some, for want of a better word, Albert, 'experts' brought in to teach certain subjects, like Ivor Francis.

Ah! Ivor is my friend. That's Ivor Francis.

Yes.

I brought him in.

Oh, did you?

Yes. When I came from New Zealand Paul Beadle became the first Australasian professor of fine arts in New Zealand. He'd just come from Adelaide here and I said,

¹ RAIA – Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

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'I'm going to Adelaide'. He said, 'Oh, you must meet Ivor Francis, and he'll put you in touch with John Dowie and Dallwitz, blah, blah, blah', so I did and we became good friends. These are two of his paintings there. So I argued with Prof, and Prof and I were on the same line when it comes to art, I argued that all the arts belong together and that we ought to have a background of what Renaissance painting was *vis-à-vis* Renaissance architecture. And later on I took my students to dancing classes in the hall in North Adelaide by dancing girls to show them how space in dancing – three-dimensional – and space in architecture were related.

So what hall would that have been, the Institute for the Blind hall?

No, the University hall in North Adelaide.

Mackinnon Parade?

Yes, Mackinnon Parade.

Oh yes, the gymnasium there?

Yes.

Okay.

Pardon, the name?

Was it the gymnasium there?

Yes, yes, yes, the gymnasium. And I got the students to dance under the tutelage of Dean Millard[?]. Dean Millard's wife was a dancer and she came out with a couple of girls and showed us things and I said to the students, 'You bloody well go, understand what all this space and everything is about'. (laughs) Yes. So I also brought in – with Jensen, before Ivor Francis we had a teacher who's now the director in Perth Gallery, what was his name? He was a curator – a wonderful fellow who's written books.

Yes.

He was the first teacher. Then we had Brian Seidel, who's now in Melbourne. And then when he left Prof said, 'Well, what do we do?' I said, 'Well, I know Ivor Frances, he's an excellent man', and Ivor was tickled pink. He loved it. He, for six or eight or ten years, gave art history lectures.

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And, Albert, you also had a link with the School of Art in North Adelaide, from memory, with Stanley Street School?

That was a very feeble link. I don't know what you ---.

I recall that, that you knew, through Ivor, knew many of the people there, like Des Bettany.

Oh, Des Bettany. We later on had Des Bettany's son in the class.

Graham?

Graham.

Exactly.

Yes, Graham. So Des Bethany, Dave Dallwitz, Milton Moon.

Lyall?

Lyall, Max Lyall. A whole lot of them. Franz Kempf.

Yes – yes, god, that's right.

And if I had the names there were more. I was often at the School and I think I even gave a talk there. I might have, I'm not sure. I, in my time, gave so many talks
..... organisations to lift, in my feeling, the sort of awareness of people towards the notion of art and architecture, really, and dance and theatre, come out of the soul of the human species, as it were.

Now, just as an aside, Albert, you were also very interested in the wider University than just the Department, weren't you?

Oh, yes.

Now, Harry Medlin has told me that you assisted greatly with the Cellar at the Union Hall.

Oh, yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

So you did have an appreciation of ---.

As I said, I know that I've been on more committees, and I say that with hesitation because I'm actually not a committee man, not at all; but when I felt and where I was asked could I give a hand, like the student housing in North Adelaide – what was the

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doctor who's become a surgeon? He chaired that committee. Wonderful fellow. Tall fellow, PhD, brilliant surgeon. Harry knows him.

Yes. I've read the account of that committee, too.

I see. And I was heavily-involved and arguing this, that and the other. I was chairperson of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music. Badger asked me, again – why? I knew nothing about Aborigines. But he knew that I had cross-cultural experience in Indonesia and South America and everywhere else, so he said, 'Would you mind going there?'. Sister Deirdre Jordan was the first chair. After one year she gave it up and they chose me as the chair and I ran that for ten or twelve years – – –.

That was Cath – – –?

CASM, Cath Ellis.

Yes, Cath Ellis.

Cath Ellis's, yes. So I became heavily involved in CASM. George Mayo, do you remember him?

Yes.

He was involved, too. In CASM and in matric Art, later on – always in adult education with Jim Warburton, and I later chaired the Continuing Education and set up with Colin Lawton the University of the Third Age in 1986 when I left. I left in 1986. Officially, and then they wanted me back for a couple of lectures and bits and pieces till '88 or something.

Albert, you've made reference to the period of the '60s with the student turmoil and all that; how did it affect the Department? I believe there was at least one conflict with the Professor.

Oh, my god. As I said, we had these raucous fellows – I better not mention the names, but there were a couple of characters who were far more rebellious than I was myself, one of them seriously and positively, one a little bit negatively – but they upset the applecart and Jensen was hauled over the knuckles by the Council at the University because they thought he'd overstepped his stuff. But there was quite some friction between the students and Jensen. Jensen was an authoritarian, ultimately not a nice man. I mean he couldn't help himself but he had to be

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dictatorial, fundamentalist, obstinate, rigorous and – well, rigorous not even, that's a positive value; a negative rigorous value he had, in my opinion.

When you first came in in 1963, where was the Department housed at that point? Engineering?

The old Engineering Building, on the top floor of the Engineering Building. Interesting. Bull was the man and Bull was a very, very strong man in the University at large. Harry Medlin, Bull, Harold Rodda, a couple of these characters, Professor Cox from Medicine –

Stretton.

– Stretton – they were powerful characters. Bull was a strong manipulator, very strong, an organiser, had an influence, had a credibility, and him having appointed Jensen he retained a sort of overview of the Department, and when it came to Engineering in Architecture Bull had to say, as it were – often to the resentment of Jensen. He felt that his authority was of a But we were physically located on the top floor of the Engineering Building. Then in 1970 the link was made – 1969/70, the new building of the Barr Smith was built –

Library Stage II.

– and there was a little bridge over there and it linked us. For a little while we had a little bit of the old Mathematics Building and a bit in the new building, and then later we moved wholly into the new building. That was around about 1970, I think.

Yes. I think '69 it was still being planned.

Yes.

'70 the building –

Yes, I think it was 1970.

– yes, began about that time.

Yes.

I found out, Albert, that one of the students or a number of the students complained about the proposed accommodation.

Yes.

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Did you know this? John Byrne[?], I think his name was.

Ah, John Byrne! He's now Adjunct Professor in the Brisbane University.

Oh, true?

Either Brisbane or University of Technology in Brisbane. Yes. John Byrne was a wonderful fellow. I unfortunately had to fail him but not because he was dumb, but because he was a wonderful fellow. He'd done a BA together with Architecture and later Master of Planning. He had a wonderful mind. Was not a – I think he would know that – a design natural, but an organising man and there was a mind and that sort of thing. So John was – what did you expect John to have done?

Well, he wrote on behalf of the students to say that they'd only just seen the plans for Stage II and they thought things could be done better.

Yes.

And Badger listened.

And?

Badger listened!

Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes.

And asked – – –.

Well, John was a very creditable fellow – came from a medical background – and was a respected student. Had a wonderful mind, I liked him very much indeed. Took him some time to get through the School of Architecture, but of course he was doing the BA in Philosophy, all sort of things, and he was an active student participant. Many students, 'Let me get through', but John didn't get through, not because he was dumb but because of his stance and because of his political and social involvement and took these things very seriously and wrote letters and complained, yes.

It interested me, though, how did you find the new accommodation in time, Albert?

I found it ultimately very minimal. Minimal, that is both conceptually, suitable to Architecture, in an architectural way it was just a very straightforward, straitjacket building, as it were. Not very creative at all, it could have been much, much better.

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Was the space enough or only *just* enough?

Only just enough. But then of course we couldn't quite foresee how the course would evolve. By that time the course in Town Planning had been established and we had enormous numbers. John Brine, I don't know whether you've interviewed him or Judith Brine –

No, not yet. Judith is overseas.

– and John, half his year is in France with his new woman, and Judith is half the time here. Judith, John and I had a bit of friction. I felt the John Brine era in the School is quite a traumatic one, actually. Have you heard about all that?

Yes, I have, Albert.

You've heard about it, so let me not comment on that.

'Very disappointing' is the way to describe it.

Very disappointing, very disappointing. That was in my opinion a blunder of Jensen by appointing these two, husband and wife, on a relatively false basis, in my opinion. Anyway, that's history; these things happen. So you've heard about the – – –?

I have, yes.

Yes, it's a very, in my opinion, very sad story. Now, before John we had Harry Parsons, you might remember him, and he left in great turmoil with Jensen and went to Melbourne. You bring up all these things – – –!

Well, Albert, you also had some really talented people you were teaching with, and I think of the longevity of staff, there was John Hipper, who you've mentioned before.

Yes.

John taught for many years.

Yes. John Derek Tack[?] and John were the three original people and they saw their time out in the Department. Now, John was an administrator. He was not a favoured teacher. He was dullish – cut, I've got to be careful, please –

Yes. I understand what you're saying. Subdued.

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– subdued. He was a good mate; in fact, we did practical work together. John Hipper picked me up when I first arrived from Glenelg every morning. Good mate. Later he ran into trouble, his marriage broke up and he married one of the secretaries and that went haywire again. But John was a long-term teacher and was solid in his building construction. He was a building construction man. So these three went from coming here to leaving for retirement, the only three. All the others came later and I'm the only one of the later comers who stayed; most of the later comers went again.

Now, Brian Claridge is an interesting person, Albert –

Very interesting person.

– who died very young.

Too young. Brian was one of the people I met with Ivor Francis, the early ones, because he was a Modernist, a thinker, a compassionate, wonderful man. Came later to teach, because he was a turner and pretty late in life decided – we often met together and drank together, a committee, it was a fascinating committee, with Don Dunstan.

Ah!

Don Dunstan, Roder –

John Roder.

– John Roder. Don Dunstan, Wally van Zyl, Bob Dickson, Newell Platten, Doug Michelmore, Ian McDonald and myself, and that was a committee with Don Dunstan to spearhead town planning, environmental issues, the MATS² Plan, all that sort of thing, so we were very early – it was a fascinating time. We met every two or three weeks and, 'Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah', and sorted out letter-writing and reporting. Wonderful stuff, yeah. So John Hipper, yes, he was a teacher of construction and practical experience, spec writing and all that sort of thing, that was John Hipper. We had our – obviously, over time, Jensen saw where our strengths were. I've taught just about every subject until he realised that I was much better-employed in

² MATS – Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study.

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the art and history and conceptual design things than in construction and spec writing. That's not my strength and not my interest. I love the philosophical aspects of architecture.

Did he have an expectation, Albert, that as a teacher you could basically and should be able to teach anything, do you think?

Yes. Yes. Ah, that's an interesting question, though: yes and no. I think primary school teaching, yes. Already in high school you are either a scientist or an art teacher or a historian. So in architecture, too, although you ought to have a fairly broad thing – and I did teach everything, and I steeled myself to do that – my interests and therefore my strengths were in the ones that you love. I mean, if you love something –

Of course, of course.

– then you are much better than if you have to do it because you've got to do it. But I think that actually we must differentiate a bit and don't let everybody teach everything. However, a little bit of a broader thing is okay. Now, later on, Brian Atkinson – do you remember him?

Yes, I do.

He had absolutely nothing else outside his bloody computers. There was nothing else. Very, very capable, he knew the tiniest bit about all the things that you can do with computers and had quite an education, but he couldn't teach anything else.

My question was more related to Professor Jensen's view of all of you as staff. Did he feel that *you* should be able to – – –?

Ah! He had that subconscious notion that we ought to be able to teach everything.

Yes, that's what I was wondering.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, he had that. And I think over the time we managed to convince him by example that we each had our strengths. I mean, to put Derrick Kendrick automatically in charge of art history would be an agony for Derrick Kendrick, for the students, for the staff, for everything.

Of course.

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So we have our strengths; but it takes some time to find your bearings. I mean, I didn't know when I graduated from Auckland University where I was going to go, although I did know that it would be in the design/philosophy/history kind of stuff, yes.

Sure. Albert, those years with the student turmoil happened to also be the last years of Professor Jensen's time, in a sense –

Yes.

– because I think he finishes at the end of '74 or '5?

Yes, '74. So from 1958 when he came – '56, '57 – till 1974, he had been the Dean, no other Deans. He appointed me the first post-Jensonian Dean. He couldn't see anybody else that he trusted. (laughs) Strange, because I was open with him and contradicted him, and he accepted that.

But he only ever appointed 'Acting', I notice, is that correct?

Yes, he appointed me as Acting Dean, because he couldn't appoint the Dean. He appointed an Acting Dean and then the Faculty, in their either wisdom or stupidity, appointed me Dean. To be telling the truth, now, I'm not a dean person at all and I made light of it. Who was the previous Governor General, what was his name, the man who died at a hundred? Nice fellow.

Walter Crocker.

Yes, Walter Crocker. He was on faculty, too.

Yes, he was – and so was John Roder, was he not?

John Roder, Walter Crocker, Ken Milne, John Morphet.

Was Keith Neighbour[?] ever on?

Maybe later, possible, I don't know. It was Ken Milne was the main Now, he'd given a hell of a lot of dough to establish the thing, so he wielded power, although Jensen didn't like him very much on the Faculty because of his strange, wonderful attitudes. (laughs) Jensen didn't mind him, but he didn't quite trust his intellect. And Ken was, of course, a pragmatic fellow. A wonderful, (laughs) wonderful, bit of a beast of a fellow but a wonderful fellow, and he helped me a lot when I took honours. I took my honours at the end of the year to a session with Ken in North

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Adelaide, and he'd bring out the bubbly, we'd booze and we'd discuss the pragmatics of architecture. And I remember a case where he told the story in his early days of architecture he would go to the site and there was a painter and he hadn't done the right thing and the painter sort of argued so he grabbed him by the bloody scruff of the neck through all the scaffold. 'And', he said, 'you couldn't do that anymore.' So little stories like that. But that was an insight by students into the history of the profession. So we had the small party of five or six students in turn in his house, but Ken was on Faculty for all his years that he lived.

But later on Walter Crocker, John Morphett – who did the Festival Theatre, of course; and one of our students, Bruce Harry, was the supervising architect of the Festival Centre – – –.

I didn't know that.

Yes.

I've worked with Bruce. Oh, I didn't know that.

You know [him]?

I do know Bruce, I've worked with him in the past.

He was thrown in the deep end. He relished it. He was the right man. But beautifully From north, as it were, (snores) to being a good man. So John Morphett was on. Never Jack McCall[?]. Jack McCall and Jensen were enemies.

Oh, I did not know that.

Jack came to my retirement party – and Jack was a good mate of mine, I still see his widow – but Jack and – – –. (exclaims) Because Jack was perhaps *the* South Australian architect of Modernity, with lots of buildings that were in the beginning of Modern architecture, and Jensen couldn't – and he couldn't stand Jensen and Jensen couldn't stand him.

I believe from what I've read, Albert, that Professor Jensen had had – I don't know if 'enemies' is too strong a word, but certainly protagonists in the UK as well who didn't like his thinking on high-rise in particular. I believe this is so.

That's a very one, too. Jensen had few supporters, really very few heartfelt supporters; many, many enemies. He made enemies. He made enemies. And one of

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the enemies he made, he was a high-rise protagonist: everything high-rise. Living – not for himself, but for you and me (laughter) – high-rise. Do you know England at all of the 1960s?

Yes.

Roehampton and that sort of thing?

Yes.

Which was quite powerful, in a way.

Council housing.

Yes. Some of it was good. Roehampton in particular was very good. And Jensen was a protagonist with that, then he was going to introduce that and always argued about high-rise. Letters to the paper and to committees, high-rise, high-rise. But he had always – that difference between debating and sharing ideas *versus* opinionatedness, he was very opinionated. High-rise: if you were against him, then you were a stupid arse. He was always right. He couldn't stand any debate, discussion; if you were against him, you were against him.

Actually, as an aside, Albert, it makes me think that the year you arrived the Napier Tower was being finished.

Yes.

And he was the one who actually recommended that that go ahead in that form.

Yes.

And I think he had a number of people who did not agree with him.

Oh, yes. But he was the new professor and had some clout from that position, as it were, you see.

Of course.

He was the new professor. And architecture people said, 'Gee, this must be something. We've for the first time got a real professor of architecture; this man must have credibility'. And he took that and was the authority. When you saw – well, you remember him – the way he walked, authoritative; and, as I said, 'Lady Jensen' had already her portrait painted. She would *order* us to a morning tea

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with our wives. Oh, my god. The power of the Jensen Dynasty. When his son graduated, he insisted that he share the scholarship that Stefan Pikusa earned. You've heard of that one too, I suppose?

Yes. Well, Stefan, of course, immensely talented and a wonderful teacher and a wonderful architect.

Wonderful. And very, very committed. Very committed. And so he came back to teach. But he came through in the very early years of Jensen and Jensen insisted that his son share it. So he actually manipulated marks. And I remember fellows I had to argue in the last of the projects they had to make with the thesis – that used to be a vast project, the thesis – and if Jensen was against it, boy oh boy oh boy, you had to struggle. Now, I recall a couple of cases of a fellow – I've forgotten his name, but he did a thesis on an oilwell in the Seychelles. Jensen was totally against it and I had to argue like blazes that, 'You mightn't be for it but can't you see that there's an intellectual and professional life and rigour that this fellow has displayed?' And he got through, ultimately. Often they had battles.

So, Albert, in that period at the end of the '60s as well, the University as you've told me was being rebuilt in a sense –

Yes.

– because the new Architecture Building was built. Did you have anything to do with the rebuilding of the Union at all, with Bob Dickson and – – –?

No. Physically, nothing. I was on these committees with Bob and Newell – and Newell was actually a good mate of mine, I went to his eightieth birthday party and I see him, we have coffee here or at his home – and they were the people, Dickson and Platten, whom I felt affinity with. See, Jensen, took me on because I was Dutch, and the housing situation in Europe was spearheaded by the Dutch in the 1920s and '30s. So he said, 'This is a Dutch fellow who's had experience, blah-blah-blah, and has been working in London. We like this fellow, he's got internationals[?]'. So when I came here I felt that the Dickson and Platten kind of people, who'd been overseas and working with these people whom I later brought out in 1976 – the man that Bob Dickson worked for in Milan, Angelo Mangiarotti, Bob Dickson worked for Angelo Mangiarotti, a contemporary architect, engineer and designer in Milan, left-wing fellow, a communist, wonderful fellow whom I still visit and see (laughs) – Bob

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Dickson and the Institute and I helped to bring them out for a couple of months of teaching here. So in the late '60s both the Student Movement, the Vietnam War, the restructuring of tertiary education over the whole of Australia – we now have thirty-nine universities – the expansion of the actual number of people who went to university through the Baby Boomers, really – all these people were conceived when all these soldiers came home and went boom, boom, boom and produced all these kids – so the '68 intake and '69 intake and '70 perhaps, even, were between thirty-five and fifty-five, whereas we'd had before twenty-two and later on again twenty-two.

Very large intakes.

Very large intake. But the interesting thing, as I said earlier, only a third passed. It's a whole different picture today, everybody passes. You don't dare to fail – whatever that means.

Now, how did you respond to the end of the Jensen era, Albert?

With great delight, great freedom. And I actually applied for a chair. I wanted a chair, not to be a professor, but I felt tremendously motivated in an educational system. And I applied for a chair and I know a couple of other people – I don't know that you want to know that – but David Saunders and I both applied. So David came, and we immediately hit it off.

Well, that's exactly what I wanted to know, how you responded to David.

David knew that I had applied and that I'd lost. But this is life, and David was a good man, a very good man. In fact, I was one of his pallbearers when he died.

Yes. I think Derrick was too, wasn't he?

Derrick was, and I. Yes, Derrick and I were pallbearers for David.

That's very moving.

And his wife, Doreen, we kept in touch with. So David and I were wonderfully at loggerheads in an intellectual way about course structure and the subjects and this, that and the other; but it was positive. It was loving, it was caring. I was committed to fucking education, (bangs table) I had images – not necessarily right, but I had thoughts in my mind that I shared with David, and whether he'd take it on board I

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don't know – but we got on. In a positive frictional way. Which is always how I've lived. I love friction. Creative, positive friction is far better than niceties. See, the Jensen era was you either went against him openly and took the brunt or Derrick or Neville, who were too gentle to fight him, so they listened to him.

Now, Albert, how did you respond when David restructured that five-year course?

Didn't like it. No, I didn't like it. I still don't see quite that that is the right structure to go. But that's my private view of architectural education –

That's fine.

– and David had a different one. It was modelled from the east, they have started, three and two, and what I have wanted, so my vision was, a BA before you do Architecture so that you have a general education. I see architecture as such an important thing that you need a humanistic education of some history, geography, philosophy, and then do the profession. Now, David's three-two course did a little bit of that but not quite in my line. But I had to accept it, and it was again a frictional situation, ultimately positive but ultimately I couldn't believe in it and still do not quite believe in it.

Did you teach in the first three years at all, Albert, do you remember?

Yes, because the first three years had History. I taught in the first three years History, Art, kind of philosophy – design, that sort of thing – and then the second year, when Gus Herbert left, who was the Associate Professor with Paul then, and Prof had put them in charge of the thesis year, that's the final year, but he left in '68, he put me in charge, and I've been all the years in charge of the final year which meant that I knew all the students very, very closely because we had personal interaction on a one-to-one basis. So I was in charge of the final year of the final course and the first couple of years in design and history and that sort of thing.

And, Albert, unlike Professor Jensen where research was very little seen in the Department, David Saunders appeared to encourage you all to be involved.

Yes. That was almost a time factor. In the years with Jensen quite frankly neither in England or in New Zealand or in other places – in Europe was a slightly different European architectural education, it's somewhat different – but in all the English-speaking countries research in architecture was almost not on the map. In fact, even

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in other faculties, not many, many people in BAs. The PhD was mostly in the sciences. In law you had very few PhDs, they were lawyers and they went out, and they were doctors, they went out, and there were architects who went out into practice. But David Saunders came, as it were, in an era – that was '76 he came – by that time universities had evolved post-Second World War into research institutions and the whole notion of refereed papers and research and promotion became established. Now, David meant well but, in my opinion, again where he went – not wrong, but where his attitude my attitude, what I thought we needed in architectural education was people who were not necessarily research-minded; research in a broader way.

Now, when I did my research it was – – –. (walks away from microphone, returns) Good that you mentioned that. This was my first study leave report. I went on study leave in '69 and went all over the world. Came back and I was told that I had to write a report. I wrote a report of seventy pages, which went to the University, and the feedback was from fellows like Harry Medlin, he said, 'Albert, it is magnificent, but you should have published it'. 'Well, that's not ready for [publication], this is my experiences that I've gained so that I'm going to be a better bloody teacher'. So in the early days my opinion of stuff is that you need scholarly people to teach architecture and creative people who don't necessarily write; and David argued that everybody ought to be able to research. Not only David argued that, he argued that because the University wanted him to argue that. So it wasn't quite David's – – –.

More the era, Albert?

That is the era, it is the era, which has gone even further today. As you would know, you can't get a *tutorship* without a PhD. You've met Peter Scriver in the Department?

Know the name, yes.

He's a Canadian fellow who came to the Department. Young fellow, who's just had a baby a couple of years ago with a heart defect. Peter, I think he came as a tutor, working for a PhD. And Susan Shannon, PhD. Everybody's got a PhD today. And even the notion of PhD has shifted over the years: I mean, a PhD was a pretty sophisticated thing; today, it's not too difficult. You don't need extraordinary

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intelligence to write a PhD. You've got one, haven't you? (laughter, break in recording, resumes after approximately thirty seconds)

This is the second session of an interview with Albert Gillissen on the 21st July 2008 for the School of Architecture History at the University of Adelaide. Well, Albert, we've spoken about David Saunders arriving at the Department –

Yes.

– and the fact that, while you got on particularly well with him on a personal and social level, there was an intellectual friction there.

Yes.

How did that evolve as the course that he planned evolved? Did you still feel that sense of it wasn't quite you?

I kept on feeling that. However, I saw his integrity and his commitment and within the things that he asked me to do I had really no trouble. He allowed me totally to do in Architectural History what I did, and I often discussed things with him and we were totally on-line. So I had no real difficulty. In fact, it was a godsend to be rid of Jensen and to have a liberal man with a mind and intellect and a wonderful attitude to life that I shared. So these minor differences ultimately were not important. But have you heard about these differences, you've heard about them?

Well, only that I know that you had an intellectual problem, as you've just described to me.

Yes, yes, yes.

But that it certainly was not personal.

No.

What about the quality of students at that time, Albert? Were they different students from that earlier era?

No. Well, it was a gradual change. The early students were still people whose parents and whose environment had been in that architectural ethos of the 1940s, '50s. By this time, when David came – that was in the mid-'70s – the whole world had changed and the whole world of architecture. The first rumblings had already started of Postmodernism, so when Jensen came Modernism had just come to Australia because we were always about ten years behind, fifteen years behind,

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Europe in those times. So Modernism was Jensen's era; the beginning of Postmodernism was Foucault, Umberto Eco, all these characters, was David's era. Not only David's era, also the era of a change in university training. So it was an organic shift, a normal change over time. So your student intake, we had more girls, we had a wider bunch of characters who said, 'I'm not going to be a professional architect but I'm interested in that first little course of three', and that is I think where David Saunders has in a way perhaps not quite foreseen the thing: most people wanted ultimately to be an architect. So they reluctantly took the three years, quite a number in the early years reluctantly took these three years, and then went on – three years. Now, I think that might have changed by now. Now the new structure is so in place that the three-year course has been modelled into a course that you can deal with besides in planning and landscape architecture, so it has evolved. Courses do evolve. Just as I started in New Zealand in '53, that was an old-fashioned English course, slowly into Modernism and then into Postmodernism. So both architecturally and conceptually and university-organisationally, things have evolved and changed.

Did you still find you got the same joy out of the teaching?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Being with young minds was what I loved. Young minds [are teased?] and some of the students have brought tears to my eyes for their difficult attitudes, but if they had good minds I loved it. I just loved the notion of being myself involved in that in order to be a better teacher and to share that with them and to enthuse their own little ethos in their own way. Wonderful. Had some wonderful characters from all over the world.

Now, Albert, when David Saunders died it was obviously a great tragedy for the Department –

Yes, yes.

– and at the time you wrote that it was more or less a crossroads for the Department.

Yes.

Now, why did you feel that, that it was such a pivotal time for the Department, do you remember that?

When he died or when he came in?

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After he died – no, after he died.

Well, that was obviously another sort of time By that time, the computer had arrived and it was almost the computer that changed the direction of the Department. It would have changed anyway, but he just died at that time. So the new Professor was Tony Radford, a computer expert, Atkinson was already there, from then on everybody had a computer and everything was done by computer. So again I think we merely drifted and, more perhaps than in other departments, all that new technology had to be implemented. So nobody had heard of CAD, computer-aided design. At the time, I think it was, one of the big firms, had the biggest computer-aided situation in the whole of Australia. What was the firm's name? Somewhere in Chesser Street.

Woodhead?

Woodhead Hall.

Next door to where Rob Williams was there?

Yes. Rob Williams was a student, I remember Rob, and of course all these Woodhead people were students of us. I'm so fortunate I've known all these buggers, you see. (laughter) And they're now retiring, before I retire. (laughs)

Exactly.

I still did a house in straw bales for the Eco Village in Aldinga last year, so I'm still involved in designing if they want me.

That's great.

I love domestic design. Space and light, these are the two things that I love: the notion of shadows and light and the differential, and My house in Aldinga Beach was a crazy, three-level house without any internal walls. Space and lowness and highness and vista through excited me.

That's great. Now, did you know Tony Radford well at all?

Yes.

How did you see the beginning of his time there?

Well, a totally different character, of course.

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Yes, of course.

Totally different character. But a very easygoing, benign fellow, and now he's the Chairperson of the London Institute of Landscape Architects and heavily-involved – in fact, he invited me to coffee about two weeks ago, we meet every now and then, yes. But a wholly different era, and he virtually came in a year before I left, so I haven't followed his And he too – professors or whoever, we've got two forces in life: one is from behind – I mean even your work, forty years ago, wasn't valued. Who was the early oral investigator? A little fellow. He did his oral history of the Department and of Architecture, I've forgotten his name, but he went around with all this equipment.

Yes.

He was one of the first ones to do oral history, and he also visited the Department. But forty years ago you wouldn't have had a job, if you know what I mean.

Yes, I do, I know exactly what you mean, yes.

It was just not on. And the Paul Starks, there was no preservation, conservation wasn't on – it still isn't on in many people's mind, but – – –. So life has changed. So I see life as a force from behind, and then within the force from behind which are macro forces you've got a professor who models within that force, and Tony and both Jensen, David and Tony were products of that time, as it were.

Yes. Now, Albert, did you see the need even in the mid-1980s after David's death for at least two professors in the Department, is that right?

I would have, yes, I would have thought so, yes, yes, yes. I think it's good to have intellectual interaction between two at the same sort of level. That one professor, I find it a bit dicey, as it were. It creates that rather than that, and I think in education – in life, and in education – the more you can responsibly do *that* the richer you are. I think that is a dangerous one. Jensen was that.

Yes. So this is a broader experience you're talking about.

Yes. Working with David was fantastic. So, although we had friction, I much more enjoyed being in David's We had wonderful little discussions. You couldn't have discussions with Jensen, but David – if anybody has suggested that there was friction between David and me that is definitely not on.

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No, no, not in that sense, not at all.

No, no, no. I mean there was an intellectual friction –

Yes, exactly.

– and I loved that, and I respected David and he respected me.

No, no, that's all, Albert, that's it in a nutshell, as you put it.

Yes.

Was it in David's time, too, that the Department began having retreats, the staff, was that right?

Yes.

How did they work, Albert?

Oh, wonderful. This was again that, you see, because Jensen was always that. It sinks straight from the top. Nothing But David said, 'Hey, we must do that and come together', and so we went for a weekend to and we got, for one weekend, David out. Do you remember him? And we had some other people, wonderful talks and experiences and opening up and dialogue and disagreements. David accepted fully the vigour of disagreement and searching. He wasn't a black-and-white man. Jensen was black-and-white. David was not grey in a weakness; grey in strength, as it were.

So had project-based learning begun at that stage, Albert, the stage that you were retiring, or did that come in later under Tony?

How do you mean, project – – –?

What Susan's been doing, Susan Shannon's been involved in.

Well, the thesis was an abstract. Today there is so much finance that they can afford to go for a month to Vietnam. So that again has changed. First of all conceptually it wasn't done in university courses; the mobility of people and the financial availability was just not on, that came later. So today every year goes to either Vietnam or Cambodia or somewhere, or to India. Now, when you say 'project-based', a real project base or a theoretical project base?

No, this is a real project base.

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Yes. But even that – well, the thesis was supposed to be hypothesised real project, so they were asked to justify building a new town hall for Woop Woop. That thesis would be approved and then I would go through with, I liked to say, ‘Well, intellectually, how have you justified this and that?’ So there was an intellectual stage, and then an architectural building up stage. So a typical thesis: a hypothesis, an analysis and a synthesis, that was all. But they were never real project-based, they were hypothetical project-based; but they were nevertheless projects, hypothetical projects.

Of course, yes.

But real project, no.

The one thing that comes to me again and again all through the years that you taught was your ability to get alongside the students and to inspire them, and whether you knew you did that or not you certainly did, very much so. And it’s obvious from the way you talk you’ve kept up with a lot of the past students.

It’s wonderful. Adrian Evans of – what is his firm? – it was Jackson Goodman at the time, Adrian has now taken over – – –. Adrian was a ’68 graduate, very good intellect, and I got him a scholarship to go to Hong Kong to do a master’s, which he never finished. I stayed with him in Hong Kong, we came back, he never finished it. But he designed the Children’s Court in Gouger Street, a couple of towers, and the Gouger Street one is actually the one – I introduced him to Aalto and he became wrapped up with Aalto’s design of space and light. You know Aalto’s designs?

I only have vague memory of this, Albert.

He was the man with space and light and form, but not full form but human form. I mean, Finnish design is fantastic. Anyway, Adrian became infatuated with him and the Children’s Court is based on that. We remain friends and he’s now put me on for a permanent list, he every year sponsors me a hundred-and-forty-bucks dinner at the annual awards, which I can’t afford anymore, I’m on a pension, so I’m
..... .. David Gilbert I see every now and then, we have luncheon in his home in the Hills; Ros Bateup. Oh, you might have met Iris Iwanicki, have you met her?

Of course, yes.

I knew her from Willunga and she and I are good mates. She came here not so long ago. So I’ve remained involved because I remained interested. For me there is no

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nostalgia. There's excitement of the past, I love the past, because it's a breeding ground for the present, not nostalgically. So the changes David and Tony brought I had to accept because that's the nature of that force that's behind us, you see. So I remained involved and interested; but no longer capable of working in this climate with CAG, I've no bloody clue myself. But my conceptual notions of architectural design and environment have remained, I think.

Well, Albert, thank you so much for making yourself available to do this. It's just a real privilege.

It's a pleasure, mate.

Oh, for me, too. For me, too. Thank you very much, Albert.

You're welcome, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW.