






# In Memoriam: Julie Thompson Klein

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## IN MEMORIAM

Julie Thompson Klein December 8, 1944 to January 15, 2023

During the preparation of the Special Focus *Creating spaces and cultivating mindsets for TD* in this issue, we faced the sad news that Julie Thompson Klein passed away on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Julie's unwavering enthusiasm and energy proved infectious throughout the two decades we had the privilege of working with her. She was always ready to take on new challenges and explore new horizons. One of Julie's most outstanding qualities was her pioneering spirit. We collaborated in research projects, held classes together, wrote papers, co-organized conferences, connected and consolidated networks, and shared and sharpened ideas and contrasting perspectives on inter- and transdisciplinarity. Julie would always answer e-mails, happily visit us in Switzerland, with an endless energy and avid curiosity to learn. In this tribute, we highlight how her work impacted many sectors and domains, showing how versatile Julie was, by changing at the pace of the times and integrating new knowledge and perspectives into her scholarship. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that our tribute only scratches the surface of the profound impact Julie had on us as a caring mentor and friend.

Julie's ideas have played a crucial role in our scientific growth. She was a professor and scholar in the field of interdisciplinary studies at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI for 40 years. She gave classes on Rap or the virtual world, always connecting to what interested her students. Her work pioneered interdisciplinary teaching and research, with a strong liaison to the transdisciplinary and the science of team science communities. Together with William Newell, Julie founded in the 1970's the Association of Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS), which is currently consolidated as an international professional organization devoted to interdisciplinary education and research. Since then, she has tirelessly brought together individuals, networks, and generations, and most recently co-

founded with us the *Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD Alliance)*, demonstrating her commitment to advancing the field.

Her research and teaching were dedicated to crossing boundaries and mapping what she called "interdisciplinary campus cultures". Julie read everything and knew anything about interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Her hallmark was embodying boundary-crossing collaborative efforts. Julie will find the inner connections of different strands in inter- and transdisciplinary research and thrive to enlarge those intersections by highlighting the relevance for the field. For instance, she quickly absorbed the discussion of boundaries and boundary work in the Science and Technology Studies and discussed how it is relevant for interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in her 1996 book *Crossing Boundaries. Knowledge, Disciplinarity, and Interdisciplinarity*. Fortunately, Julie left many inspiring books, papers and chapters that offer pathways to navigate the field and are insightful for newcomers and experienced researchers alike (figure 1).

Her latest book, *Beyond Interdisciplinarity* (2021) signals Julie's deep understanding of inter- and transdisciplinary current challenges, re-signifying the collaboration among different sectors. Her book examines inter- and transdisciplinary boundary work across sectors of the academy, government, industry, and communities, providing examples from a world-wide perspective. She studied the complexities of the field in different regions, offering guidelines for a wide audience of scholars, educators, students, administrators, and members of professional organizations, policy bodies, and funding agencies.

Although constrained in institutional support to interdisciplinarity, Julie received local, national, and international recognition, while having represented the United States at Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) symposia in Sweden, Portugal, and France. In addition, she offered countless keynotes and workshops on inter- and transdisciplinarity in many countries, having supported teams and institutions in Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, Australia, Finland, and Iceland, among others. In Latin America, her talks constituted a milestone to push the field forward. Scholars fostering the professionalization of inter- and transdisciplinarity found in Julie an advocate for the institutionalization of cross-disciplinary initiatives. It takes courage to rethink established ways of collaborating, accounting for the role of power asymmetries and imbalance. Julie was fearless in that respect.

Julie played a significant role in enriching and supporting various scientific communities, particularly in Switzerland. She actively participated in the Swiss National Science Foundation's *Swiss Priority Programmes* and its interdisciplinary research projects from 1996 to 2000. Her involvement ultimately led to the organization of the first *International Transdisciplinarity Conference (ITD)* in Zurich in 2000. Julie's commitment has also helped to establish the *Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net)* and consolidate collaborations at both national and international levels. She became a regular presence at the *ITD* conferences and served as a member of the scientific committee. We could always count on Julie's contributions and insights, as she participated in numerous panels and workshops, making connections between sessions and themes with her characteristic notetaking. The contribution included in this issue is her unfinished final work, presenting her insights from a panel at the *2021 ITD Conference*. Besides the time difference, Julie participated in many panels and workshops. One could observe her on the screen taking verbatim notes and quick-

ly elaborating connections between sessions and topics.

As an associate scholar of the Transdisciplinarity Lab (TdLab, ETH Zurich, CH), Julie was always curious and eager to learn about projects and initiatives from colleagues at any career stage. We could see her sitting in K 77, our meeting room, asking questions with genuine interest, making comments to expand our vision of our own research topics. Julie also actively engaged with younger generations, sharing her thoughts and experiences generously. Together with colleagues at the TdLab, Julie co-authored many papers and chapters, provided essential advice for projects and programs, took notes of countless meetings, and contributed to proposals and advisory boards.

Julie brought encyclopaedic knowledge and expertise on interdisciplinary process-

es and the challenges of intersectoral collaborations. She inspired many of us to rethink the future of transdisciplinarity through building strong links to previous scholarship and the newest contributions from the younger generation of transdisciplinary scholars. Throughout, she also championed diversity and inclusion, valuing the contributions of different knowledge systems and cultures.

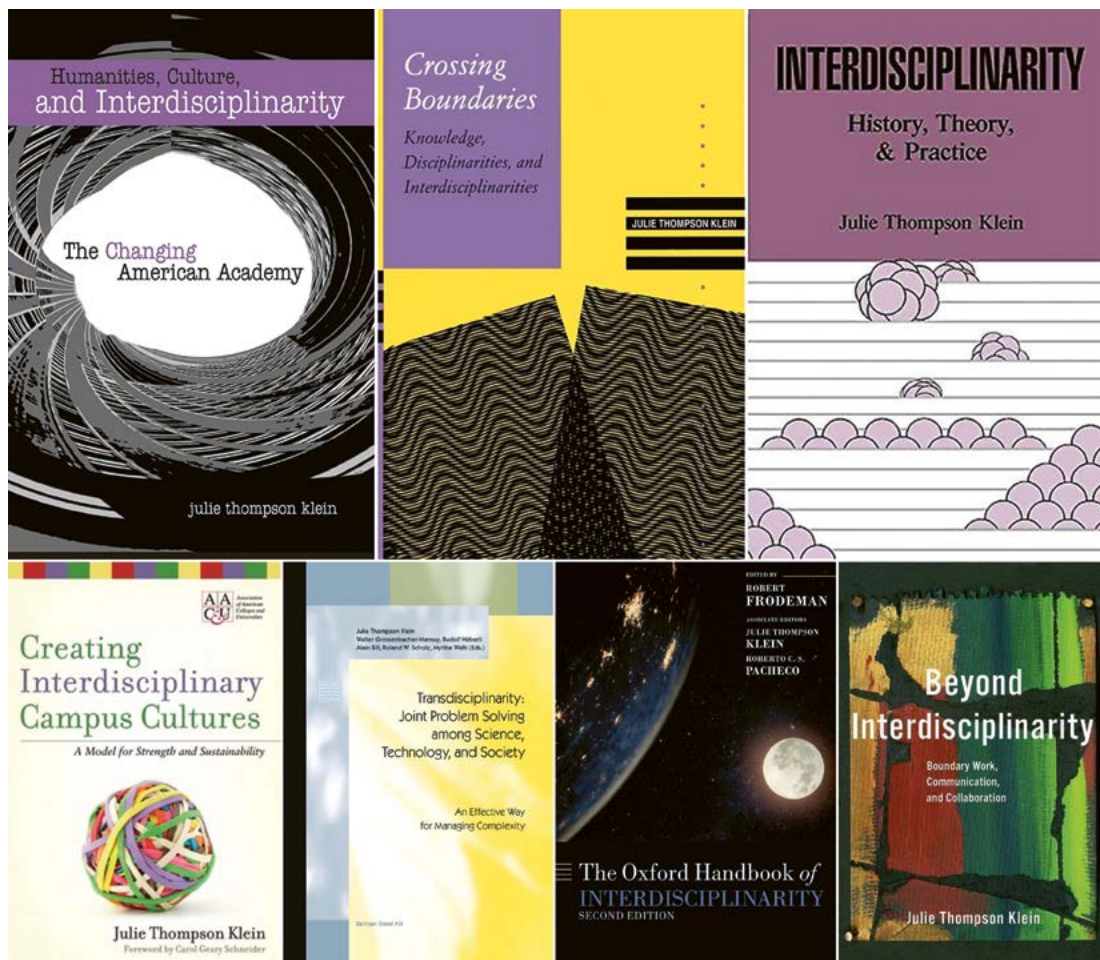
Julie mentored most of us by patiently listening, generously sharing her time, being attentive or asking questions. Her laughter, deep thinking and warm friendship are to be missed in our scientific community. Who should we ask for advice now?

*Thank you, Julie,* for your unbreakable support and the endless enthusiasm to work together!

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**FIGURE 1:**  
A selection of  
Julie Thompson  
Klein's books.