

Editor's Introduction to the Special Section: Julie Thompson Klein (1944–2023)— Beyond Appreciation

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This Special Section of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* is a tribute to a paramount leader of interdisciplinary studies for generations—Julie Thompson Klein—whom we lost on January 15, 2023. The subtitle, “Beyond Appreciation,” draws inspiration from the title of her final, single-authored book, *Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Boundary Work, Communication, and Collaboration* (Klein, 2021a). Scholars and leaders in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies across the globe, including contributors to this Special Section, have followed Julie’s work closely in their careers because it pushes us beyond what we *assumed* were boundaries. Boundaries assumed between interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and other possibilities of crossdisciplinary studies (Klein, 2021a). Boundaries assumed between the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies and newer, often non-U.S. based organizations (Klein, 2021b). Boundaries assumed between our personal, perhaps anxious, estimation of what it is to be an interdisciplinary studies professional, and the genuine value we can bring to teaching, learning, scholarship, and institution building in our working lives (Klein, 2010).

Those who knew Julie also knew that the whole idea of a tribute, or an appreciation that put her in the spotlight, would make her bristle. When one of our contributors, Tanya Augsburg, proposed the idea of a 2019 volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* dedicated to Julie’s work that Tanya would guest-edit, Julie let it be known, to Tanya and the co-editors at the time, that she was grateful but would oppose any sort of *Festschrift* or tribute volume. After all, as Tanya later reported, Julie figured she was an active scholar and such tributes are reserved for scholars not so active. So Tanya and the co-editors honored Julie’s wishes to ensure that the volume was a critical consideration and extension of Klein’s work and ideas. We hope we are honoring that sentiment in an additional meaning of “*Beyond* Appreciation.” In this second sense, “beyond” means that we are not only celebrating the work that Julie has done. We are also nodding towards the *horizons* of her work in crossdisciplinary research, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and integrative mentorship and institution building. This meaning of “beyond” as a way to modify “appreciation”—as a way to mollify an imagined objection from Julie since

we cannot also imagine that she is gone—might not be defensible in Julie’s eyes, but we like to think that our efforts to both celebrate her and honor her genuine humility might have made her smile. And as her friend of many years, Roz Schindler, says in closing her appreciation article below,

And Julie: you never wanted to be the center of attention. But now, my beloved friend, you must be exactly that.

Staying with the “beyond” theme, this Special Section is divided into three four main articles. In the first article, Roslyn “Roz” Abt Schindler, former co-editor of this journal, past president of AIS, and current member of the AIS Board of Directors, composes “Beyond Words: In Loving Memory of Professor Julie Thompson Klein (1944–2023).” The feeling that the loss of Julie is beyond words resonates with everyone who knew her, and Roz is the person in AIS who has known Julie for the longest time, as the reader will witness. Tanya Augsburg, who guest-edited the 2019 volume of *Issues* dedicated to Julie’s work and is currently associate editor, writes “Beyond Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research: Remembering Julie Thompson Klein during the Early Days of Text-Generating AI” to give us a fresh and marvelous perspective on Julie’s impressive scholarship. She calls attention to a significant shift in the use of terminology by the scholar who was eminently associated with the word “interdisciplinary,” and the inability of the non-human to capture the human whom Julie was. Machiel Keestra, also a past president of AIS (the first elected from Europe) and an active participant in this journal, has worked with Julie in a number of ways over the years, especially to encourage the collaboration of AIS with newer scholarly organizations, as he describes in “Beyond Boundaries and Making Connections.” Bianca Vienni-Baptista, an *Issues* Editorial Advisory Board member and previous and current journal author (this volume), and book co-editor with Klein (Vienni-Baptista & Klein, 2022), has worked with Julie to enhance and bring attention to the wonderful work being done by crossdisciplinary scholars internationally, especially in Latin America, as she describes in “Beyond Borders.”

The sorrow of Julie’s passing adds to our recent, prodigious losses in AIS and interdisciplinary studies in general. William H. Newell (1943–2019) founded AIS and retired as Executive Director in 2016 (Klein, 2019). My colleague, Gretchen Schulz (1943–2022), was the longest-running editor of this journal (see “Tribute to Gretchen Schulz,” Arvidson, 2022), and spearheaded as well as facilitated an incredible multitude of superb expressions of interdisciplinary scholarship over the years. And now we have lost Julie. Gretchen and I had the chance to help bring some of Julie’s writings to publication on several occasions. I can tell you from experience that being with Julie was one thing, editing Julie was another! She was “careful” about what she wanted to say and how she wanted to say it. She would not admit it, probably, but she knew her legacy would be inspiring many for years to come, and she wanted

to be careful about every word and comma (most often left out—Gretchen and Julie had tense negotiations over Oxford commas and any other kind!). And this quiet anticipation of her lasting legacy was based, rightly, on her impact on so many scholars over the years.

I understand Julie and Bill together as complementary scholars and leaders in the field, and I believe they understood each other that way too. What I mean is that in their professional lives, they complemented each other as leaders of a movement, sprouting in the late 1970s and coming to full bloom in the 21st century—a thriving AIS and field of interdisciplinary studies—which must have been pleasantly evident to them as they neared the end of their lives (Klein, 2019; Newell & Arvidson, 2018). When Bill retired after 24 years as Executive Director of AIS, it was Julie who organized a “Tributes and Testimonials” article for Bill (perhaps ironic given Julie’s own avoidance of any such honors for herself), which was reprinted in this journal upon Bill’s death (Klein, 2019). She closed that appreciation with the following, which confirms the way they historically understood each other and also tells us something about Julie:

My personal sense of the man echoes dual qualities others have identified: steadfast commitment to his vision coupled with generosity towards newcomers. When a former colleague of mine at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal visited the US to learn about interdisciplinary programs, Bill responded graciously to my query about whether he, Shreedhar Lohani, might spend a short time in residence at Miami University. When Shreedhar heard Bill and I had been invited to co-author the chapter on interdisciplinary studies for the 1996 *Handbook on the Undergraduate Curriculum*, he remarked, “How is that possible? The two of you don’t agree on anything.” Bill and I shared a common passion for interdisciplinarity. But we had different trajectories: his centered on activities that advanced AIS as a dedicated professional organization and mine evolving across inter- and trans-disciplinary networks and literatures. We worked together, though, on a number of AIS projects, and the chapter for the *Handbook* reflects the strength that comes of working together on a common goal. Moreover, as vicissitudes of life confronted us personally, our friendship has been a bedrock, even as Shreedhar would have predicted we continue to spar on our intellectual differences. (Klein, 2019, p. 18)

And here is Bill’s account of his first impressions of Julie.

Well into the Ramapo conference [AIS, 1983], I attended a session on interdisciplinary studies in the humanities by a woman new to AIS, and I was blown away. Unlike the tightly reasoned but slightly dry and closely scripted presentations by fellow social scientists, Julie Klein offered up an inspiring pastiche of ideas about interdisciplinary studies, painted seemingly extemporaneously with a broad brush wielded by a master. I actually did not follow much of what she was saying, but she was brilliant, enthusiastic, energetic, and inspiring. That summer, Julie conducted her

own national tour, interviewing interdisciplinarians (including Douglas Hofstadter, author of *Gödel Escher Bach*) for what became *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (1990). We spent a couple days in my study debating the nature and practice of interdisciplinary studies. I realized afterwards that the reason I had not understood what she was saying in her conference presentation was that we had rather different understandings of interdisciplinarity—hers based in the humanities and fine arts, mine in the hard social sciences and the conference at which AIS was founded. By the end of our discussions, however, we had narrowed the gap enormously, and a highly productive long-lasting collaboration on interdisciplinary studies was underway that ended up spanning three joint articles and numerous projects over the next quarter century. (Newell, 2008, pp. 24–25)

When prompted for more on Julie and this account by an interviewer, Bill added “Julie and I are both entrepreneurial networkers” and “We share a similar set of values, sensitivities, and sensibilities. Considering that we respect and like each other, it’s not surprising we became friends, even though we’ve gone off in somewhat different directions” (Newell & Arvidson, 2018, pp. 28–29).

At the 2018 AIS Conference, Bill had quietly invited several people to his suite for a kind of happy hour. Apparently, this was something he did regularly at conferences, but I was surprised to be included and, I’ll admit it, a bit nervous. By evening, I could not remember the room number he had told me in the morning, but I did recall the floor number. I roamed the hallway hoping for some sign that I was in the right place and heard laughing. I found a door ajar with friendly faces inside and bottles of wine on the table. Relaxing on couches, while Bill’s wife Susan welcomed me and a couple of others sat nearby, were Julie and Bill! It was the first time I had been with them together in the same room, and sadly as it turns out, it would be the last such gathering for these two. As we all (including contributors Tanya and Machiel) sat overlooking the Detroit River Walk—and the Canadian border beyond—I restrained myself from saying aloud something similar to Julie’s account of Shreedhar Lohani’s surprise at their conviviality. Here were the co-founders of contemporary interdisciplinary studies, giants to me and no doubt to many others, enjoying their (mere) humanity together. I did not know Julie as well as others did, but working with her on a number of articles for this journal, and sitting with Julie and Bill that afternoon, reaffirmed for me that the spirit of the interdisciplinary attitude is openness, curiosity, and being caring humans with each other.

The contributors to this Special Section of *Issues*, Roz, Tanya, Machiel, Bianca, and myself, and no doubt all those who may have known her, are deeply grateful for the privilege of having Julie Thompson Klein in our lives. The loss we all feel is immense.

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