

Beyond Boundaries and Making Connections

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Multiple titles listed in Julie Klein’s extensive bibliography contain the word “boundary” as can be seen in her final book, *Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Boundary Work, Communication, and Collaboration* (Klein, 2021). Indeed, boundaries have been addressed in her work often such that their regimenting power are analyzed, their limitations recognized, but also their constructive potential explored. Boundaries create distinctions and separation but also connect domains and groups. For 50 years as a scholar, Julie accepted the invitation of boundaries to engage and explore inter- and transdisciplinarity.

Yet it would not do justice to Julie’s many contributions to these fields broadly conceived just to refer to her as a scholar—even though her 1990 book has proven to be a point of reference for many (Klein, 1990). For her explorations were not just scholarly or academic in nature. Putting theory into practice, she has been not just a prolific author, speaker and teacher, but has also actively engaged with these fields and their communities. Indeed, Julie has been a veritable hub in the network of organizations, associations, societies and communities that to a large extent shape many crossdisciplinary fields. In view of the space limitations of this contribution, let me highlight especially her involvement with both the oldest and the most recent network in these fields.

Perhaps the longest association Julie has had was with the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies. Established already as a membership organization in 1979 as the Association for Integrative Studies, she joined AIS a couple of years later while interviewing interdisciplinary scholars across the United States on behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities. Immediately becoming actively involved in AIS, she helped establish disciplinary groups within the interdisciplinary associations (e.g., on religion, first year experience, assessment). This should be no surprise as she believed in the mutual interdependence of disciplinary specialization and interdisciplinary integration—both at the individual intellectual level and at the organizational level (Klein, 2010, 2021). Her engagement with AIS grew quickly and deeply such that she was elected president only a few years later (1987–1988). Working on the boundaries that separated and connected AIS with other fields and organizations, she helped AIS to gain recognition by these others and she also

enhanced the visibility of the intellectual work on interdisciplinarity that AIS members were doing.

The definition of interdisciplinary research and the analysis of the interdisciplinary research process, as Julie and Bill Newell (Klein & Newell, 1997) developed together within AIS over the years, contains “integration of insights from disciplinary perspectives” as an essential ingredient of the process instead of a mere addition. Through their work with other organizations for and on behalf of AIS, their analysis of the interdisciplinary research process and their definition of interdisciplinarity has influenced many other organizations and their members.

For Julie, her contributions depended both on her numerous publications as much as her personal engagement with these organizations. Although Julie’s active involvement with AIS would soon be followed by her engagement with many other professional and academic organizations, both international and in the United States, by no means did AIS become less important in her rich professional life. On the contrary, she always remained willing to contribute to AIS in a practical or intellectual sense and has sat on many of the committees that are necessary to keep an organization vibrant and relevant. Probably most important is the fact that whenever she would join an AIS conference, write for its journal, or otherwise perform some task for AIS, she was available 100% percent as a scholar and as a person. Long after she had become perhaps the most cited scholar in interdisciplinary studies, and received many awards and recognitions from multiple universities and organizations in the field, she remained very approachable for first-time conference participants, early career researchers, and interested students.

Personally, I have enjoyed and benefitted enormously from her generosity in sharing time and attention from my first AIS conference in Atlanta back in 2006. Being one of the few Europeans joining AIS at the time, Julie helped me during many conversations to navigate the field and also to understand the peculiarities of how the field functions in the United States. From then on, our many personal, online, and written conversations have contributed to my academic work but also to my broader growth as a scholar—which I have articulated in an article explicitly inspired by her work (Keestra, 2019). From the beginning, she has always invited me to comment on her work and presented questions and puzzles that occupied her. Given the scores of colleagues she has worked and networked with, it has always amazed me how she was able to almost perfectly integrate the personal and professional, even asking about my children or extra-academic work on the Keti Koti dialogue table, sending me links to articles that would perhaps interest me as a Dutch Jew and so on.

During those conversations Julie’s positions were always motivated by an acute sense of how positions and power dynamics are very much inter-related and an emancipatory or liberating *telos*. Moreover, being a humanities

scholar, she was always sensitive to the subtle ways in which these positions and dynamics have shaped a linguistic and normative landscape that we tend to navigate without noticing its social and political history. Julie was partly engaged in making such histories more visible, enabling those with limited “landscaping power” to retain some power. Her insistence on attending to unheard voices and making sure that these get a seat on the table was testimony to this. Her views have certainly contributed to how I’ve come to increasingly address diversity and inclusion as necessary—if often overlooked—dimensions of inter- and transdisciplinarity: expanding our boundary crossing and integration of perspectives in these domains.

More philosophically, she was interested in the conceptual and methodological pluralism that I’ve increasingly presented as important arguments for these expanded forms of inter- and transdisciplinarity. She was intrigued by the fact that such pluralism is opposed to a foundational monism, often in the form of reductionism. Yet pluralism is not identical with relativism, which is making truth and value merely dependent upon someone’s perspective. Indeed, in the publication that we were still preparing when she died (with Ulli Vilsmaier and Juliana Mercon, to appear in 2023), she agreed to approach the topic of diversity in interdisciplinary communication via this framework of pluralism. Notwithstanding the fact that she must have had many such exchanges, I believe that we were mutually enriching and influencing each other.

Julie’s talent for combining intellectual and personal friendship has also contributed to the development of an international umbrella organization bringing together a wide range of inter- and transdisciplinarians. A first attempt brought several of us together for a small meeting in New York and a few years later for a symposium in Utrecht, establishing the International Network for Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity in 2011 (Klein, 2013). As INIT turned out not to be viable at the time, a second attempt again leaned heavily upon Julie’s personal engagement as we teamed up with Rick Szostak (University of Alberta, Canada), all three of us being past AIS presidents. Taking advantage of the 2017 International Transdisciplinarity Conference hosted by Leuphana University in Germany, we hosted an informal meeting with an international group of friends and colleagues, “representatives and/or members of kindred organizations, such as td-net, Integration and Implementation Sciences (I2S), the Science of Team Science (SciTS) network and the Center for Interdisciplinarity (C4I) Toolbox Dialogue Project,” recounted by Julie, Rick, and I in a 2018 publication of AIS *Integrative Pathways* (Klein et al., 2018). This initiative has led to the Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITDA, <https://itd-alliance.org/>), of which AIS is one of a number of institutional founding members, along with individuals. The list of members is still expanding. Very recently, Julie and other organizers published a chapter describing the early development of the organization (Fiore et al., 2023). Not

only was Julie the “super-hub” that individually formed a personal connection between all ITDA’s founding members and encouraged all of us to overcome multiple practical, organizational as well as conceptual hurdles, her belief in and perspective on the importance of this initiative is seen in the language of its self-presentation quoted below.

Leaving all of us saddened both as friends and as professionals, I am certain that Julie’s academic comradery, academic inspiration and personal motivation will continue to encourage us while joining our forces under the ITDA’s motto that clearly bears her intellectual stamp:

By focusing on boundary-crossing and boundary-spanning research, the ITD Alliance aims to advance capacity for collaborative research, interrelate or integrate diverse perspectives, and foster innovation, while building an international community to address significant societal needs” (<https://itd-alliance.org/about/>)

Biographical Note

Machiel Keestra, PhD, is Central Diversity Officer, philosopher at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, and researcher at the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam. He has published on a.o. human action and tragedy, the history and philosophy of science, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, metacognition and reflection, dialogue and narrative identity. Recently published *An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research* with Amsterdam University Press. Keestra has been president of the international Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, and is founding board member of the global Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Alliance and editorial board member of the journal *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. Keestra co-initiated the Keti Koti Table, a reflection and dialogue method to reflect on the shared history of slavery and its aftermath, with over 30,000 participants so far in the Netherlands and abroad. He may be reached at m.keestra@uva.nl and his homepage is <https://www.uva.nl/en/profile/k/e/m.keestra/m.keestra.html>.

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