

Memorial

Tribute to Prof. Emer. Julie Thompson Klein (1944-2023)

Pioneer in Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies

For more than five decades, Professor Emer. Julie Thompson Klein, a world reference in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies, questioned and pushed forward the boundaries of scholarly research in a variety of sectors, including higher education, digital humanities, team science, and many more. Klein's pioneer publications contributed to the development of best practices for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work in education and research. Her influential research on the integration process as the distinctive aspect of interdisciplinarity was a significant contribution to convergence in interdisciplinarity. She understood that one of the fundamental challenges to integrative interdisciplinarity was the growing participation of non-academic stakeholders in transdisciplinary research. Her talent and charisma facilitated the connection between academics and stakeholders from many fields, communities, and countries. She was also a positive role model and a strong advocate for young women in various professional positions. Professor Klein passed away in Ypsilanti, MI on Sunday, January 15, 2023. She was 78 years old.

We present two tributes by Latin American scholars who have worked closely with Julie Thompson Klein: Bianca Vienni-Baptista, lecturer and researcher at the Cultural Studies of Science Group - Transdisciplinarity Lab, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Switzerland, and Luis Carrizo, the Coordinator of the Chair on Complexity and Human Condition University CLAEH, Uruguay.

“JULIE HAD INEXHAUSTIBLE ENERGY AND AN AVID CURIOSITY TO LEARN”

Bianca Vienni-Baptista

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Julie had an unwavering enthusiasm and energy that inspired all of us who had the privilege of knowing her. She was always ready to take on new challenges and explore new horizons. I still remember when I decided to approach Julie at an International Transdisciplinary Conference (ITD Conference) in Basel to kindly ask her for a few minutes to share my ideas. She immediately encouraged me to follow up, and we both embarked on rethinking what the processes of institutionalisation of inter- and transdisciplinarity entail and how to foster them. After that first conversation and other shared publications and conferences, we started designing a book we published together in 2022¹. Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with Julie, and I am honoured to have had her warm friendship and mentorship.

This shows how informal conversations and academic generosity can make a difference in the struggle to transform our institutions. Julie had inexhaustible energy and an avid curiosity to learn. In this tribute, I can only account for a small part of the enormous impact of her work in many sectors

and fields, showing Julie's versatility, changing with the times and integrating new knowledge and perspectives into her academic work.

She was a professor and scholar in interdisciplinary studies at Wayne State University for 40 years. Her work was pioneering in interdisciplinary teaching and research, with a solid link to transdisciplinarity and other communities, such as the "science of team science". Together with William Newell, Julie founded the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS) in the 1970s, now established as an international professional organisation dedicated to interdisciplinary education and research. Since then, Julie has tirelessly brought together individuals, networks and generations, demonstrating her commitment to the advancement of the field.

Her research and teaching were dedicated to crossing borders and mapping what she called "interdisciplinary cultures". In her latest book, "Beyond Interdisciplinarity", Julie highlighted her deep understanding of current inter- and transdisciplinary challenges, redefining collaboration between different sectors.

Despite limitations in institutional support for interdisciplinarity, she gave countless keynote lectures and workshops on inter- and transdisciplinarity in many countries, supporting teams and institutions in Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, Australia, Finland and Iceland, among others. In Latin America, his talks were a milestone in pushing the field forward and rethinking the transformation of inter- and transdisciplinary institutions.

A few months before the sad news of her death, still ill, Julie took the time to support me in an academic conflict that was troubling me. She had the courage to stand up for what she felt was right. It is now my turn to pay it forward and honour her memory by strengthening, as a lecturer and researcher, the values that Julie shared and promoted in those who had the great privilege of knowing her.

"JULIE WAS NEVER AN ACADEMIC LOCKED IN HER IVORY TOWER"

Luis Carrizo

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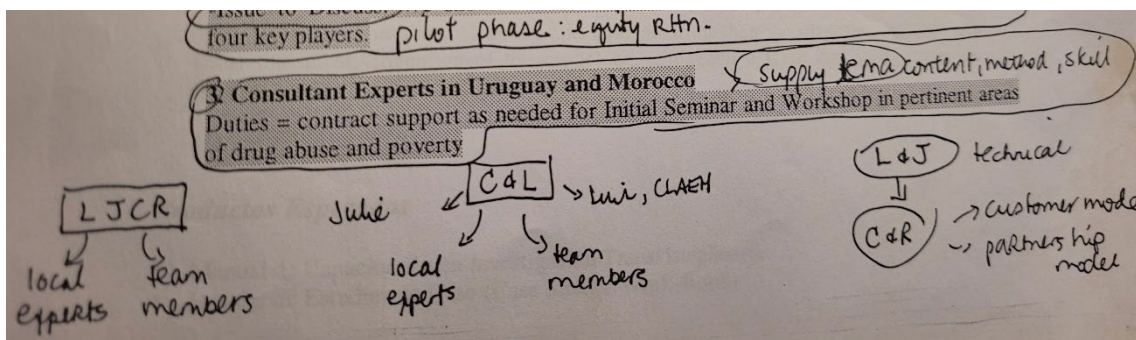
When, in the late 1990s, I sent an introductory email to Prof. Julie T. Klein, sharing the impact of my reading of her "Interdisciplinarity. History, Theory and Practice", I did not expect a response from this distinguished Professor at Wayne State University. A few days later, however, a kind email arrived in my inbox with a personal message from Prof. Klein, thanking me for my note and making herself available for a conversation on interdisciplinarity. I do not forget that inaugural moment of exchange with someone who has become a reference for me over the last 25 years. She was like that: close and authentic, wise and generous, intelligent in her work and humour, sensitive to all the arts and cultures, always building bridges and crossing borders to learn.

My need and vocation for interdisciplinarity and knowledge integration were forged in my academic and personal life from an early age. The world of encyclopaedias, which my father used to sell door-to-door in the 1960s, had nurtured my curiosity for the different fields of knowledge, cultural diversity and the necessary dialogues in a turbulent era. From there, my university passage through law, then anthropology, psychology and the field of social development challenged frontiers and paradigms, building bridges and overcoming gaps. Julie nurtured that personal empirical experience of wild interdisciplinarity with a theoretical framework, history and perspectives, systematisation of

challenges, proposals for models, trials of processes and institutional cultures. She gave understanding to my experience and light to the path, nourishing my vocation to this day.

Julie was easy to talk to: she was never an academic locked in her ivory tower. She knew how to reach everyone with affection and understanding without losing rigour or argumentative quality, singularly combining ethics and aesthetics. Julie always showed a sensitive spirit, an overflowing curiosity, fine humour, lucidity and independence of thought - without decoration or glitter. "My weapons", she would say with a smile, referring to her pencils.

He was a bulwark for many projects we carried out in Latin America. In the framework of Unesco, with Julie and our dear Mayra Espina (from the Centro de Investigaciones Psicológicas y Sociales, Cuba), we wrote a Discussion Paper on "Transdisciplinarity and Complexity in Social Analysis"². Julie was our special guest in Uruguay for the 1st Regional Summer School of Unesco's Management of Social Transformations Programme (Most), organised by the Latin American Centre for Human Economy (CLAEH), in 2003. Later, in a relevant experience with Latin American impact, the International Observatory of University Reforms and the Iteso University of Guadalajara organised a seminar, "Dialogues on Interdisciplinarity", where Julie presented the state of the theoretical and methodological discussion in the field of interdisciplinarity. Well into the new century, Julie joined us in an international capacity-building project for transdisciplinary research designed by CLAEH for the Social Development Agency of Morocco (see image with Julie's notes).



Her works have been the source of countless papers and presentations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her trajectory has been an inspiration to cultivate transdisciplinary institutional environments with solid criteria and a transformative spirit for education and research.

With her beloved husband George, she loved Jazz as she loved the human condition, and in all forums, she put her knowledge and sensitivity on behalf of the people. Science loses a bastion; humanity gains a legend. Julie lives on in the ideas she bequeathed to us and which we honour in action.

NOTES

1| VIENNI-BAPTISTA, B.; KLEIN, J. T. **Institutionalizing Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity**. Collaboration across Cultures and Communities. Routledge. 2022.

2| CARRIZO, L.; PRIETO, M. E.; KLEIN, J. T. **Transdisciplinarietà y complejidad en el análisis social**. Unesco, 2004.