

Biography: **Dr. Kim H. Veltman**

Kim H. Veltman, Scientific Director of the Virtual Maastricht McLuhan Institute (VMMI) is a scholar, author and consultant on implications of new media for scholarship, culture and society. His focus has been on Leonardo, perspective, new media and alphabets. For the past 40 years, he has lectured in five languages on the five continents on possibilities and dangers of new media with respect to cultural and historical dimensions of knowledge organization, semantics and multiple models of culture. He is author of 4 published books; 12 electronic books; 2 books in press; 82 articles in books; 24 articles in refereed journals; 5 articles; 77 electronic articles, 16 reviews and 10 vision statements.¹

He is a member of the International Who's Who of Professionals and senior advisor to the Kulenovich Collection. In 1996, he was awarded the International Capire Prize for a Creative Future (Kos) in the area of science and art integration. In 1998, he received a Learning Partnership Award (Toronto) and a Prix des Initiatives from Université d'été de la Communication (Hourtin). In November 2009, he was awarded a Silver Order: "Service for the Arts", International Academy of Culture and Art (Moscow).

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He was born in Workum (Friesland, Netherlands). When he was two and half his parents moved to Malton near Toronto in Canada, where he grew up on a farm. Since there no buses he had to walk 2 ½ miles to and from school at Our Lady of the Airways each day, even in winter, when snow drifts were often over a meter deep. When he was six, he learned to drive a tractor. When he was 9, he ploughed, disked and seeded 60 acres on his own. When he was 10 he began visiting the reading room in the Chinese section of the Royal Ontario museum (25 miles away) to learn about Chinese symbolism. In 1961, at age 13, he had a dream of systematic access to knowledge and culture.

For grades 11 to 13 he changed to Streetsville High School, from which he graduated cum laude, with a prize for the best all-round student. During the summer he worked on a farm in order to be independent. When he was 16, he saved enough money to fly to New York for a week on his own, seeing the Empire State Building, two operas at the Old Met, two Broadway plays, visiting the Metropolitan Museum, and the Frick Collection.

An entrance scholarship to York University was renewed for three more years and led to an honours B.A. in history. In his fourth year, he wrote an undergraduate thesis on the concept of infinity (The Escape from Perfection: The Discovery of Man), which earned an A+. In his spare time, he was chairman of cultural affairs at Vanier College, was a passionate attendee at local operas, plays, concerts. In his fourth year, he went to a performance almost every evening, writing essays in transit and during intermissions. The arts opened his horizons to world culture. He was and remains an ardent hiker.

In 1969-1970, he completed a one year M.A. officially in history, with courses in history of science (Professor Stillman Drake) at the Institute for the History of Science and Technology (IHPST), history of art (Professor McAllister-Johnson), and palaeography (Father Leonard Boyle). Professor Natalie Zemon Davis, who was on sabbatical, very generously gave him a private seminar on Renaissance history. His M.A. thesis was on Renaissance theories of light and colour. As a hobby, he was one of 10 organizers of Renaissance 70, the first nationwide exhibition of student culture; with 600 paintings, 500 photographs, 8 plays, 12 symphonies, 2 operas. Toronto was a first milestone to look further.

On graduation, he was awarded a Canada Council Doctoral Fellowship, which enabled him to pursue a Doctorate in the History and Philosophy of Science at the Warburg Institute where his teachers included Professors A.I. Sabra, Charles B. Schmitt, B.A.R. Carter (Slade) and Sir Ernst Gombrich. Thanks to Professor Sabra he studied classical Greek and Arabic at night school. On Tuesdays, he attended Professor Alistair Crombie's seminar at Trinity College, Oxford.

Arriving three hours too early for a garden party led to a life-time friendship with Colonel Harold and Alice Hemming. This also led to a new hobby: the first President of the Canadian Universities Society of Great Britain under the age of 60, helped by a wonderful and selfless Honorary Secretary, Lady Margaret Delacourt-Smith. This entailed various parties for Canadian students, co-hosted with the Canadian High Commissioner, attending the annual Canadian Ball, membership in the Canada Club and being trustee of a scholarship at Peterhouse.

The thesis was on the two main methods of Renaissance linear perspective. The standard view by Erwin Panofsky (1927) claimed that one method was Italian and theoretical (*costruzione legittima*), while a second method was German and practical (*Diztanzpunktverfahren*). The young scholar showed that both systems came from Italy, but that the so-called legitimate method was based on surveying practice, whereas the distance-point construction was based on theoretical principles of geometry. As he was finishing the thesis, the Harvard journal, *Daedalus*, invited him to review Panofsky's contribution to art history. He replied that he could at most write on Panofsky's contribution to perspective. When submitted, the editor complained the article was too complex. When simplified, it was still considered too complex, so the author withdrew his first invited article.

Preparing the thesis brought him in contact with experts in the field. Among them was Professor Eugenio Battisti (Rome, Penn State), who sent Professor Marisa Dalai-Emiliani to meet London experts and himself, when they were organizing the first world conference on perspective. She had already heard of the Panofsky article and asked to publish it as an appendix to the conference. There was also a desire to have a new standard bibliography on perspective. The young student now found himself honoured and daunted by a new hobby that was to be a secondary theme in his studies for the next decades and led in 1986 to his becoming the first Canadian to be invited as a Getty Scholar.

In his first weeks in London, colleagues at the Warburg had made him aware of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. This soon became his regular place for having lunch. It was at the Wellcome that he was first introduced to Dr. Kenneth D. Keele, the world expert on Leonardo's medicine and science. The student was aware that Leonardo had written on perspective but was frightened by the mirror-writing. He hoped the expert could offer some quick answers. The matter was complex, said the master. It would take at least two years. Soon he found himself engaged in experiments with the new mentor, reconstructing what Leonardo had described. London was a second milestone into being international.

The Wellcome Trust offered a senior research fellowship so there were an additional two years in London (1975-1977). In the very week that he was due to begin, Dr. Keele was invited by Her Majesty to do a first complete edition of the anatomical manuscripts in her collection. So the would be assistant suddenly found himself working mainly on his own with weekly visits by the mentor. At the end of two years the 6,500 pages of Leonardo's notebooks had been read, but the task was far from finished.

A stipend from the Volkswagen Foundation at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel allowed him to continue. Further support from the Alexander von Humboldt, Thyssen and Gerda Henkel Foundation made it possible to spend the next seven years there (1977-1984). Here a three volume book on Leonardo's perspective, optics and astronomy was written. Tuesdays there was drive to Göttingen to work on the bibliography on perspective, which grew to 15,000 titles. In the last two years, there was also a course (Lehrauftrag) on Leonardo at University of Göttingen. Wolfenbüttel became a third milestone into scholarly life.

In 1979, at the wedding party of a Cologne friend (Andreas Vorster), from his London days, he was introduced to Rolf Gerling (Chief), a young businessman. A friendship ensued and led to a series of meetings called the Wolfenbüttel Conversations, which brought together young scholars and businessmen to discuss the active and contemplative life. It also renewed contact with a London friend, Father John Orme Mills, O.P. which led to visits to Retz, the monastery of Meister Eckhart, to discuss the reflective life and the possibility of electronic monasteries.

There were also visions of a trip to India. There were problems in Afghanistan. The chief's girlfriend would not allow a trip more than 3 months, so in 1981 there was a 90 day tour of the Mediterranean by jeep. Chief drove, the student acted as informal tour guide. The journey went from Cologne to the South of Spain, crossed to Morocco, where there were visa mixups, so they returned to Seville for Easter festivities, travelled North via Aranguez, Madrid, Burgos, the Pyrenees, past Carcassonne to Arles and Marseilles, by ship to Tunis, visiting Roman sites, then by boat to Palermo to see Sicily, by boat to Reggio Calabria, by boat to Greece, to Athens, Delphi, Meteora, Mount Olympus, Mount Athos, Edirne, Istanbul, the West and South Coast of Turkey to Tarsus, then back inland via Cappadocia, and home via the Alps.

This journey was a fourth milestone in experiencing the world. School had taught about one colosseum in Rome. The trip revealed that Rome was actually a model: e.g. El Djem, and Arles. Seen narrowly there are at least 26. Seen broadly as amphitheatres there are over 200. The vision of the 1961 dream was rekindled in the form of an article about a reorganization of knowledge. Directly after came a leave taking with mother in the last weeks of her life.

In 1984, Professor Ian Hacking invited him to apply for a position at IHPST, where he had done his M.A. This brought a new phase of teaching undergraduates and graduates on 16th century science, science and responsibility and a course on perspective. In 1985, there was an invitation to become one of the first 10 Getty scholars. The invitation was delayed for a year, so 1986-1987 were spent in idyllic conditions in Santa Monica, where the 15,000 titles were entered into electronic form, and progress was made on a 2 volume introduction. Getty was a short term heaven, but had no interest in long term projects.

The autumn of 1987 brought a return to regular teaching in a changed atmosphere. He was now seen more as a researcher than a teacher. A hoped for chair in Renaissance Science went to another candidate. The Social Science and Humanities Council generously provided a Canada Research Fellowship, which allowed another five years of post-doctoral research. The two volume introduction to the perspective bibliography was written. There were connections with Technology for Enhanced Learning (TEL) Centre and later with the Faculty of Information Sciences and the Ontario Library Association. There were visiting professorships in Ottawa (Carleton), Siena, Rome I and III.

In 1990, a keynote at the annual museums conference, led to an invitation by Professor Derrick de Kerckhove to join the McLuhan Programme. A Perspective Unit was developed. The database on perspective grew in complexity. The earlier dream now evolved as a plan for a System for Universal Media Searching (SUMS) and by 1995 led to a corporation. High school and university students came in the evenings and weekends to do programming. The results were shown as demos at conferences. The prototype became one of 18 Canadian contributions to the G7 Conference and Exhibition on the Information Society (Brussels, 1995) and again at Halifax (1995). It was chosen as one of 3 projects for the G7 Pilot Project 5: Multimedia access to World Cultural Heritage shown at the G8 Information Society and Developing Countries (ISAD) Conference (Midrand, 1996).

On the home front, these activities led to consulting with the head of advanced networks, Nortel Networks (1995-1998) and the CEO of Bell Media Linx (1996-1998). In Europe, it led to giving an opening lecture for the European Commission on their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Multimedia Access to Europe's Cultural Heritage; a keynote to open the MEDICI Framework (Vienna, 1998) and plans for a network of excellence of universities to address scholarly implications of digital culture: E-Culture Net, informally from 1998-2002, and as a thematic network in 2003-2004. He was asked to join the EC's delegations to Japan, Egypt and China. Later he was an advisor for initial planning of the 7th Framework programme.

In the Netherlands, these activities led to founding a Maastricht McLuhan Institute as Scientific Director (1998). This entailed numerous lectures and papers, including, *Augmented Books, Knowledge and Culture*, presented as a paper at the Internet Society Conference (Yokohama, 2000) and published as a book, *Understanding New Media* (2006). In 2004, a change in policy closed the physical institute and it continued as the Virtual Maastricht McLuhan Institute (2004-present).

In 2000, an encounter with two Smolensk students, Vasily and Alexander Churanov, at EVA Moscow, led to reciprocal visits, a commitment to develop SUMS and a friendship. SUMS demos on Perspective, New Media and New Models of Culture were developed. Between 2006 and 2013 a series of Thoughts outlined a vision of future OPEN SUMS.

In preparation for a planned European University of Culture, a series of 32 lectures were recorded at the National Institute for Informatics (Tokyo, 2004) and a set of courses was drafted.² A central challenge is to go beyond a narrow euro-centric view of the world. Plans for a major book on alphabets evolved. There was an initial draft of *Stories of the Sky: Astronomy, Myth, Religion and World Cultures* (2005), then a series of keynotes, including *Alphabets, Elements and Cosmologies* (Mirandola, 2009), which presented a new draft. See articles section.

From 2010 to 2013, there was patient work in writing *Alphabets of Life* which has 866 pages of text and 815 pages of illustrations, with an abridged version of c. 240 pages. The book is complemented by a database on New Models of Culture with over 300,000 terms. In 2014, the book is being put online by Twinscorp. New kinds of links and omnilinks between physical book, electronic book, databases and internet resources are being explored. Alphabets is becoming a life work.

Notes

¹ For a full list see the author's online cv.

² Roadmaps: http://sumscorp.com/new_models_of_culture/