

# *Memories of Kim Veltman*

The spiritual adventure of research

Anna Maria Dell'Agata\*

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*Abstract: The memory of Kim Veltman, the spiritual adventure of research" is not only a tribute to a large researcher , which is in a pregnant center of gravity between art and science, and was killed by the virus at 71 years old, in his home in Maastricht, but it is also the story of an encounter in culture: an encounter of ideality and souls. The "magnetic field" is Aisu, the International Association for Utopia Studies, created by Eugenio Battisti and his family, his wife Giuseppina Saccaro and his son Francesco; the a priori coordinates are to remain outside the niches of a bourgeois social tradition, because you feel you are a member of a large human family, which aims and fights for the values inscribed in the light of the intellect. A humanity for which cosmos and taxis as the ancient and still not outdated Greek wisdom says, that is, the Existing, the Beautiful and the rational order coincide and are the tracks of the survival of human life and the planet. In the end, the thirst for knowledge lives only in the light of Spirituality.*

**Keywords:** utopia, transdisciplinary eclecticism, secular religiosity.

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**Picture 1 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata, Portrait of Kim Veltman. Sanguine sketch made in Pineto in 1997 on the occasion of Veltman's visit after the death of Anna's father: Mario Dell'Agata.**

In 1992, the Fifth International Conference of the AISU (International Association for Utopian Studies)<sup>1</sup> offered the rewarding opportunity to know high-level scholars from different countries and continents. Among these, Kim Veltman, who came from Toronto, stood out as a person endowed with an uncommon intellectual and spiritual vivacity. His own name Keimpe Henricus, which in Dutch means "Horizon", americanized in Kim, as he told me, inscribes it in the destiny of his vocation: to look beyond a visible horizon of research. Our friendship, welded immediately in a growing fraternal cultural sympathy, was born on the occasion of that also extraordinary traveling conference, which from Rome took us to Cassino, Naples,

Monte Vergine and to the Certosa di Padula, (to) ending at the university of Reggio Calabria. I made, with sketches, portraits of many speakers, a sort of visual diary of the conference. Unfortunately on May 23 in Montevergine we suffered on TV the mournful choc of the assassination by the mafia of the great magistrate Giovanni Falcone and I cannot forget the tears of Giusi Rapisarda Tafuri, her friend and companion at the conference.

In the same year a second international conference gave us the

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1 AISU, International Association for Utopian Studies, born from the genius and commitment of Eugenio Battisti, who in the eighties had revived the ancient silk factories of San Leucio di Caserta with a multi-year project, was created and carried out by Eugenio's wife, Giuseppa Saccaro Del Buffa, affectionately known as "la Peppa", then professor at the Sapienza University of Rome in the History of Philosophical Historiography, and by his son Francesco, professor of Sociology at the University of Cassino.

opportunity to meet again: the one for the 500 years since the death of Piero Della Francesca, we went from Rome arrived in Sansepolcro, Arezzo, Urbino, Urbina, according to appointments of a project organized in previous years by Eugenio Battisti. Kim was invited as the highest authority in the international perspective bibliography; among the speakers, we knew the art Japanese historian, Eiko Wakajama, "la grande studiosa", as Claudio Strinati called her, known for her study in the Sistine Chapel, on the close relationship between Michelangelo's ceiling and the underlying fifteenth-century frescoes.



**Fig. 3 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata, *Ritratto di Eiko Wakayama* (1992).**



**Fig. 2 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata, *Portrait of Giuseppina Saccaro Del Buffa*.**

On the Brera altarpiece of Piero, exposed in Urbino, Kim's periscopic eye made an extraordinary discovery: he had noticed something, never identified by anyone: a discovery that, partly because of laziness and partly because of our distance, still awaits disclosure... That year was for me the bearer of new breaths in the dialogue of culture, possible only then, after my resignation from teaching.

The following year I was a guest in his home in Toronto, in the Italian neighborhood and that stay, in the affectionate concern of such a noble friend, marked the first extraordi-



**Fig. 4 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata and Kim Veltman in Villa Adriana (Tivoli).**

nary cultural and existential experience of my life. I met Corinne Mc Luhan, Marshall's widow, of whom Kim had been an assistant, a wonderful person, mother of six children, who gave me a special tarot-like deck made especially for Marshall.

In a convivial dinner with academic scholar friends, Kim had prepared an extremely refined and light menu, introducing me as an artist coming from Rome, Princess, as a direct descendant, as he explained to friends, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, nominated Prince by the Pope and ancestor of my grandmother (father side) Edvige. On a trip to the woods of Caledonia, the shield of the most ancient lands emerged, with his pupil and friend Hasan Murtaza, Afghan prince, we called each other and spoke in the only common language: Ancient Latin!

This and other episodes Kim recounts in his online autobiography, which he gave me in hard copy on his last visit to Pineto, where he also placed a photo of us sitting in the park of Villa Adriana, like in the famous paint *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, remembering that in that place so resonant of the ancient culture and grandeur of Rome, I recited Catullo's poems.

In the story and re-enactment of those happy moments, Kim often uses the adjective "magic" and presents some episodes, in which he seemed to relive the Renaissance, as when in my Pineto atelier, while his friend Enrico Borgatti played Renaissance music on the flute, I was reworking the Greek nude iconography of a youth model on paper:



... And there was an unforgettable visit to Civita di Bagnoregio (fig.77b), the birthplace of Saint Bonaventure with two other friends: Anna and Caterina. Together they were called the Three Graces. It was a saint's day and the path to and aisles of the church were strewn with fresh plucked flowers. There was music and it was as if we had entered heaven. After this we visited a jewel of a Romanesque church. It was sixish and there was hesitation whether we should return to Rome or eat here. As we were driving, we saw a Franciscan monastery that also featured a restaurant. I was sent in to reconnoitre but was quickly rebuffed. We have just had a wedding, announced the monks and we are tired, so no more meals tonight.



**Picture 5 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata, Portrait of Caterina Marrone. (1994)**



**Picture 6- Anna Maria Dell'Agata, Portrait of Anna Ludovico (1992)**

Anna was not convinced, went in herself and turned on her charm. I hear you have had a wedding she noted. How were the avanzi? An Italian wedding needs to have a lot more avanzi than can possibly be eaten. They were splendid admitted the monks. Well then, we are merely poor, wandering scholars and we would be most happy simply to have some avanzi. Politeness forbade the monks from refusing. So, in we went: we had avanzi, antipasti, pastas, main meal, desserts an even some souvenir mini-wine bottles, as well as the usual vino. It was one of the best meals of my life. With Anna, I saw a magic of Italy that is beyond the most enthusiastic tourist guide. But Anna was much more than

a good travel companion. She was a magical portraitist, a painter, a sculptress, a student of comparative religions and gave me one of the greatest compliments of my life: Your spiritual wisdom gives you a higher stature: that of great desires and great souls, which create and draw the only synapses in the universe.

Kim was a trainer of discoveries in science and research for me. While in Toronto, in 1993, we attended a video conference on a huge screen from a college with fellow Vancouver scholars; back in Rome, I had the opportunity to inform Corrado Maltese, the great art historian who had always loved to intertwine art and science, about the realities of CDR. In Rome Kim introduced me to the Prefect of the Vatican Library, his illustrious and beloved master of paleography and medieval studies in Toronto, an Irish Dominican: Leonard Eugene Boyle; I remember his deep and troubled look in his beautiful blue eyes, since Bill Gates, despite his resistance, he had managed to buy a quantity of rights from the huge historical library and in a few centimeters of disk he could have an immense ancient bibliographic patrimony. Leonard is also the author of the guide of the church of San Clemente in Rome (1960).

Still in Rome Kim introduced me to two ENEA engineers, who had studied and applied non-destructive lights to the monuments in Venice, for San Marco and Assisi; we dined at the same table in an event, hearing their research told; the next day, one would leave for Russia and the other for Africa. In the following days Kim, invited, took me with him to the Enea laboratories on via Camilluccia and there I experienced virtual reality with the famous science fiction glasses. In truth, my spirit, forged in philology by my studies of archeology and art history, was almost hurt by the results, since the virtual reality of St. Peter's Square in Vatican City had horribly altered the proportions and Bernini's columns appeared squat and almost halved; in the display devices, a corner of nature was



**Picture 7 - Leonard Eugene Boyle.**

reconstructed with a stream and a self-propelled duck of minimum value from cartoons for children, while for researchers those were results obtained on mathematical models, which marked advanced stages of research.

In the coming years Kim involved me in two other important events: in 1997 in Vienna, in the first World Congress on the theme *The Global Village* and years later in Rome in 2002, in dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Culture, in Piazza San Callisto in Trastevere, on the *Open Monastery* theme. In this time it was a conference with a limited number of speakers. Those events were designed and organized by the sociologist and philosopher Franz Nahrada,<sup>2</sup> from Vienna, who, at the forefront of research on new telematic media,



**Picture 8 - Franz Nahrada.**

had called Kim from Toronto in synergy. He had been inspired, as a focus, on the ultimate meaning of Global Village as inspired by Corinne Mc Luhan.

My participation in Vienna, in the Rathaus, was limited to an intervention in a seminar, entitled: *Culture and Utopia*, for Corinne Mc

Luhan. For the first time I was making public a social heritage project, conceived by my father Mario and recommended to me for its realization, that is, to set up a House Museum to protect, preserve and disseminate the family's artistic, archival and bibliographic heritage.

On my return, I asked to my father to read my seminar intervention: he was deeply affected and moved by it. What suppressed his way of critical thinking upon my choices of "utopista".

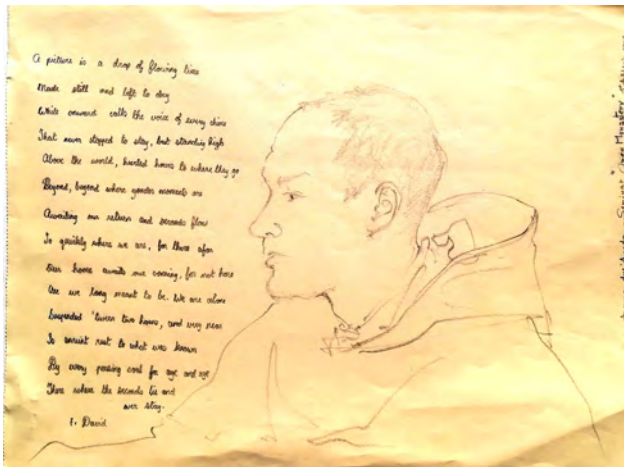
I left Vienna and those beautiful people, who came from all the

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<sup>2</sup> Franz Nahrada explains: Corinne has revealed the ultimate meaning of the Global Village, a physical place where the forces of environmental sustainability meet and mingle with the spiritual and cultural currents of the free exchange of information. "The ultimate goal of the Global Village is the health and integrity of our places of life" as said another speaker at the 1995 conference, Tony Gwilliam.

capitals of Europe and also from Alexandria of Egypt, with a slight sense of isolation, since to the critical question with which I had concluded my intervention, that is: who will control the contents from put on the net, I had not heard any resonance; Was it possible that none of those people, architects, futurologists, ignited by happy hope and enthusiasm for a future of societies, different and enhanced by new communication technologies, had posed the problem?

At the seminar of Rome *Open Monastery*, Kim, whose name resonated among those present in the common regret for his absence, was not been able to participate. The project to revitalize the large



**Picture 9 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata, Pencil portrait of Fra 'David Jons (Rome, 2002).**

spaces of abandoned monasteries, especially in the Balkans, had been rising for some time in the Vienna environment of Franz Nahrada and in Croatia; in particular a pilot project identified in the Benedictine convent of Mljet in Dalmatia, project inspired by Father John Orme Mills<sup>3</sup> the construction of an IT center linked to the ancient humanistic and Christian roots of a western civilization, whose facies at the end of the twentieth century was overshadowing, a project that was especially close to the heart of the Cardinal of Vienna von Strölborg ....

<sup>3</sup> Father Mill's Project aimed at aggregating currents of thought in all different cultural areas and far from directives which came from the Catholic heart of the Vatican in Rome.



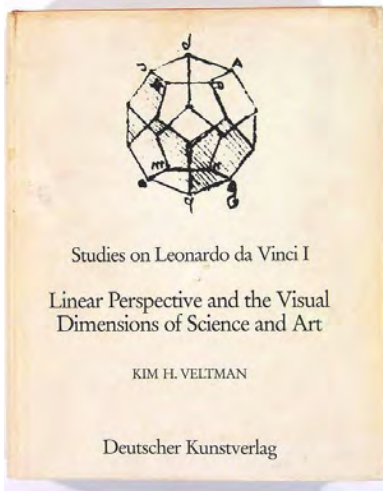
I remember the vitality of the Slovenian architects, especially Saša Ostan and the historical intervention of Father David Jons, an Irish Dominican from the abbey of Sant' Antimo, for whom, while he spoke, I made a pencil in portrait and then he, grateful, in the middle of the free sheet, wrote one of his poems in English: *Candlemas* (Oh light, harmonic light); this poem was then rewarded and printed in the booklet of the second international biennial competition of unpublished themed poems, (*the Light*), entitled to my father Mario Dell'Agata, in Pineto.

The proposal that I presented in my speech was to place laboratories for the restoration of sacred and other works of art in the convent spaces available, many abandoned in churches and in degradation. So I had seen restorers working in Xanià, on the island of Crete, applying the *rigatino* technique on the fresco, a technique devised by Cesare Brandi, a fine scholar of art and aesthetics, then Director of the European Central Institute for Restoration in Rome; technique that aimed, by integrating the image, to distinguish the original parts. Other laboratory spaces I hoped would be destined for artists interested in studying a new iconography and iconology, underlying the intrareligious dialogue in the third millennium, whose maturity and necessity felt an extreme need.

In Rome, in addition to the various conferences held at the Sapienza University of Rome, organized by Peppa Battisti, by Caterina Marrone for Philosophy of Language, today Semiotics, and by Anna Ludovico for Philosophy of science, today epistemology, there was a special one and suggestive, since in the park of the Villa Poniatowski on the Via Flaminia. The protagonists were gigantic instruments that had properties to give body to the sound, simulating modalities of



**Picture 10 - Abdelahmid Ibrahim Sabra.**



the human ear: the Holophones.

Kim was a brilliant speaker, who fascinated the large audience, already fascinated by that special sound of large records, in the enchantment of the park. That appointment was an opportunity to meet with Alberto Macchi, a playwright who lives and works between Rome and Warsaw, whose companion Angela Soltys, art historian, has devoted years of research on the Polish royal house Poniatowski and its related collection of fine art. Another Polish friend, theater actress,

Elvira Romanciuk, was the mediator of the event; since then Alberto Macchi has joined fraternal friendships in a shared utopia.

Kim spoke to me with great esteem and affection for his teachers, who had guided his training: Leonard Boyle and A. Ibrahim Sabra. That philological rigor of research in the osmosis of fields between history of science and history of art has marked the scientific and ethical vocation of Kim's commitment.

Kim told me about his nine years dedicated to Leonardo's manuscripts in the Warburg Institute in London directed by Ernst Gombrich. The prestigious German publishing house, Deutscher Kunstverlag, in fact published a first full-bodied volume of these studies by Kim: *Linear Perspective and the visual dimensions of science and art*. They are However, due to the disappearance of its director, three other expected volumes remained in the drawers of the author. Kim was still talking to me passionately about his research in the great historical Library of Wolfenbüttel, where, leafing through Euclid's *Elements of Geometry and Mathematics* one day, he found at the bottom of the book a handwritten note by Albrecht Durer, which memorized the day and the year when artist had bought it in Venice; it was probably the Venetian edition of 1485.

Amazement and enchantment in this infinite dialogue with the creativity of man remained written in history, in all its forms and

manifestations, from Euclid's theorems, to Romanesque capitals from Leonardo's perspective and from the shocking Renaissance masterpieces to the patterns woven into the rugs. Once Kim, arrived in Pineto. Our guest in the Agathé Center, noticed at the entrance on the ground carpet, which I had bought at the market and, identifying on it oriental figures and iconography that I don't remember, exactly he strongly recommended me to change the destination of use: from walkable carpet to work to look at and keep. In fact, at that time Kim was developing his book on the Alphabets: Alphabet of Life - History of Alphabet, concluded in 2014.



**Picture 11 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata,  
*Jesus among the Doctors* (2020).  
Bas-relief.**

This will extend research far beyond fenced academic fields Kim complained to me about the widespread academic sclerosis, so his transdisciplinary eclecticism did not identify him as an art historian or a science historian not only was a test of being a person at the forefront of culture, but it revealed a profound ethical structure and a high spirituality. Kim told me his displeasure at being able to converse only in fifteen languages, aware of how much human wealth he had lost for this linguistic limit. With Abdelhamid Ibrahim Sabra, Egyptian, former professor of History of Arab science at Harvard, then professor of History

and Philosophy of Science in London, he had learned Arabic and once in Egypt he saved himself from a threatened arrest, perfectly reciting verses from the Koran.

The New Year's wishes that Kim sent out to dozens of people from his large emotional and cultural family were the minute news of what he had done and accomplished during the year, considering

that he had lived an offer of himself to friends and to the world. In fact there is no ego deprived of Kim; all his energies are for the Common House, the Ecumène; and Kim transmitted with amusing and reciting irony the royal jelly of his resolute research, sometimes with extreme freedom, with semantic jumps and verbal acrobatics, as a polyglot artist.



**Picture 12 - Kim between Anna Dell'Agata (right) and Cinzia De Vecchis (left) ceramist, guest in the Centro Agathe ', now home museum, in Pineto in 1997.**

Important was, besides the philology, the communication of knowledge.

While I write, I am hearing the words of Romano Madera, who leads, for the historical transmission of radio 3, Men and Prophets, the episode on the wild Mystique. He quotes Francesco Papa for the mystical brotherhood in everyday life, the mystical Jewish religiosity of Ety Illesum, who studied oriental languages and was killed in Auchwitz at the age of 29, the mystic atheist Rosa Luxemburg and the thought of the great Raimon Panikkar, professor of comparative philosophy of religions at the University of California, for the impetus of thought and research in life beyond all borders. He quotes the thought of San Pier Damiani, through the words of his Camaldolese friend, Lorenzo Saraceno: Solitudo pluralis, Multitudo singularis. At the beginning he remembered a phrase attributed to André Malraux: the 21st century will either be spiritual or it will not be!

This yearning desire of Kim, in the thirst for knowledge, to project himself with the soul into the infinite worlds of time and the infinite universe, this desire for communion represents the mystical essence

of man; the mystique that characterizes the human being, which is not cultural tradition, but is its natural essence, freely quoting Panikkar.

Metaphorically we can compare Kim's not long life with a Leibnitz Theorem: the One that contains the Universe. The adventure of life in the cosmos and the awareness of its uniqueness: this is the sense of the sacred. Kim left us to enter this Golden Chain as a vibration of the thought of the ocean, a vibration that will never go out.

Keimpe Henricus Veltman was born in Workum in the Netherlands on September 5, 1948, but his family moved to Toronto when he was two years old. The family was originally from Friesland, the northernmost part of Holland, where you can walk on the frozen sea for months; the mother was the only European in personal relationship with Mao Tze Tung, as a trader of paintings, furniture and furnishings, like beautiful fake flowers. In fact, Kim's house in Maastricht is furnished with these refined products of the Chinese aesthetic tradition. Called to the Netherlands as Scientific Director

of the first McLuhan Institute in Europe, in Maastricht, in 1998, Kim purchased, with a heavy loan, half of the villa on 3 levels, which the hydraulic engineer of the whole city had had built over the '50s; in front of the veranda there is a small circular swimming pool, which opens the view onto a long and narrow park. Inside, an immense patrimony of images and documentation of his research and teaching in various universities around the



**Picture 13 - Anna Maria Dell'Agata and Kim Veltman (1993).**

world. The tragic news of his death on April 1, 2020, in the solitude of his home, after 15 days of illness, in the torpor of the Dutch institutions for prevention, broke my soul, while I had started a complex program of seven bas-reliefs on evangelical themes, destined for the



external walls of our House Museum. The first relief, Jesus among the Doctors, was put in place yesterday 16 May at the entrance, while three others, in the drying phase, await cooking and the last three are still to be modeled. This future educational path for visitors I dedicate it to the memory and to the religiously laic soul of Kim, to whom I sent this last greeting from Pineto:

*My Dear Kim,*

*from these terrestrial dimensions , too soon you are gone, carried away by the tremendous virus. You left to us the light of your intellect and the warmth of your soul. An extraordinary Spirit, refined and elegant, plenty of great culture and humor. We hope today, as in the past, that your cultural heritage is preserved in a creative continuity and not dispersed. Together with all the members of the Agathé Center, Mario Dell'Agata House Museum, of which you were an honorary consultant, I send a hug in tears to you, your family and all the friends of your great cultural family with brotherly love and goodbye, until we meet again in God.*

Anna Dell'Agata

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