

## HOLMQUIST'S FLAGS AND VEXILLOLOGY

This exhibition of several dozen flags by the Swedish artist brings you closer to objects which transcend the formal boundaries of vexillography<sup>1</sup>. Those who study this new discipline frequently neglect such works, thinking that they do not fulfil the flag's basic purpose as a sign of recognition. Therefore they do not devote adequate attention to the study of such works<sup>2</sup>. However, as an active vexillographer, Anders Holmquist deserves much more attention as an all-round phenomenon. He is a flag designer and maker of flags, as well as an artist, exegete and philosopher.

"I work to record the color of the wind" Holmquist said during the Paolo Soleri Arcosanti Festival in Arizona. As a highly respected geovexillographer, he is also capable of, as it were, raising his works off the ground. In his creative approach to flags, he attempts to conduct a correct and innovative synthesis of humanist and cosmic elements.

The author of more than ten books on vexillology, Dr Whitney Smith of Winchester, Mass., in July 1994 in Toronto, praised the activities of the Earth Flag Center noting that the artists and art are united around the flags, thus expanding the scope and prospects of vexillological studies. This statement by the founder of vexillology was the reason why the organizers decided to include Holmquist's exhibition in the research programme of the 16th ICV in Warsaw.

To a Tibetan lama's trick question "Do flags set wind in motion?" Holmquist obtained a philosophically negative reply: "No, because only the human mind is in motion".

Let us thus try to make an intellectual effort to trace the links of Holmquist's fascinating flags with the new sciences - vexillography and vexillology.

Hopi and Navajo Indians still think that the proof that life exists is wind, which they regard as the breath of the spirit. Perhaps Holmquist thinks along the same lines when he offers us his original "Colors of the Wind".

Taking into account all methodological problems, one can state that classical vexillography is a description of orderly creative activities referring to noble signs of recognition and combat signs of recognition.

Thus vexillography remains closely linked with art, but in the sense of similarity rather than interdependence. Introducing fine and easily recognizable flag signs into general circulation contains cognitive elements and the factor of communicating information. In the sphere of values, designing flags itself, which is an art or creation, enters the realm of truth, which is a domain of science. The use of such terms as *simplicity*, *alternation*, *proportion*, *meaning*, *elegance and beauty* in vexillography points to the fact that the aim is not only to expand knowledge, but also to expand knowledge encompassing the elements of order and harmony, i.e. it is linked with art.

The Polish philosopher, phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) detected clearcut differences between the work of art and a scientific work. In official flags, the distinguishing features are color, dimensions and proportions, that is the relation between the width or hoist to its length. Holmquist's flags perceived as works of art are distinguished by the lack of unequivocal proportions, a shape which is not defined

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<sup>1</sup>Part of vexillology (the scientific study of the history, symbolism and usage of flags). The term introduced to contemporary language by Whitney Smith in 1958. An area of study which describes flags, enseigns, banners, standards, pennants and feretories; both in terms of material origin and interpretation of their symbols and meanings. Cf. sources: "Scanorama" nr 2/1983; "Earth Flag Lexicon": op. cit. p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>This view is represented by Alfred Znamierowski of the Flag Design Center.

in terms of the language of vexillology and a frequent disuse of the principle of alternation.

Holmquist's flags for Los Angeles City Hall, for the Pacific Amphitheater in Orange County or these for Leisure Village in Oceanside, CA might be called pennants. There are no other special names yet, for most of the Anders Holmquist's occasional flags represented on this exhibition but in the scientific studies we never know what the effect of Holmquist's neovexilloids<sup>3</sup> may be.

These differences stem from the use of different types of language. In science, only the informative functions of language are justified. Language registers and records the results of cognitive efforts. Apart from questions, scientific statements appear only in the role of logical judgements, or express such judgements themselves.

The French painter Georges Braque (1882-1963) claimed that science uses calming means, while art exists to unsettle and provoke. This view is supported in Holmquist's vexillographic work.

Flags do not convey direct linguistic means. On military standards, such means are basically used to encourage concentration and meditation or to produce aesthetic sensations and to convey informations. The latter function is subjected to the former one. Information written on banners is meant to objectivize it and to offer others aesthetic values. Individual words or expressions do not constitute clear and precise judgements. Words can appear as signs.

The basic criterion of defining the value of the flag is not so much its textual truthfulness, but its aesthetic values referring both to form and intentional counterparts. Cognition, understanding and remembering of the subject matter appearing on flags must be validated in a rational manner. From the scientific point of view, it should have a notional and generalizing nature, which cannot be said about cognition, which occurs in the art of designing flags or artistry, where statements are made about the general through the demonstration of the individual. Aiming at a universal message, Holmquist's individual flags only show concrete forms of reality. Art in its message deforms reality instead of informing about it. If the author of the flag avoids deformation and intuitively draws all the elements of a world person represented by flags from reality, during attempts to make generalizations, i.e. to create signs, he is engaged in an act of deformation, for being typical in an individual flag is not the same as being typical in vexillological statistics.

Vexillology and flag design differently relate to different realities. The former relates to an abstract reality perceived in scientific terms, the latter to a concrete reality which causes human sensations. Hence, in vexillological scientific cognition, the contest and the outside world are accentuated, while in art, the author's ego is given prominence. The science of flags is bred by curiosity of an objective world, while individual flags can only draw the vexillologist's attention to the attainments and work of the designer. From the perspective of the work of art, flags result from the designer's interest in the slogan and in himself. His own ego clearly constitutes the expression and perspective<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Whitney Smith describes vexilloid as an object which functions as a flag but differs from it in some respect, usually appearance. Vexilloids are characteristic of traditional societies and often consist of a staff with an emblem. ("Flags through the ages and across the world", Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1975); the modern societies of tomorrow need the *neovexilloids*. (ser).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Stanisław Kamiński - "Nauka i metoda. Pojęcie nauki i klasyfikacja nauk" (Science and Method. The Notion of Science and the Classification of Sciences), TN KUL, Lublin 1992.

In vexillology, just like in any science, the researcher avoids all forms of subjectivity. Progress in the sphere is in a way more visible than in the art of flag design itself. In the former, it happens on the basis of existing cognitive achievements, whereas in the art of flag design, something else happens. Holmquist's greatest, most creative works<sup>5</sup> are not transient. They are not devalued, while at the same time the value of diagnoses and vexillological discoveries is diminished.

Throughout the 20th century art has clearly overtaken science. First flags of the Earth came into being, only followed by geovexillography. First there were flags, banners and ensigns, only then vexillology appeared. One could suggest that at a time when art is dominant, science develops far slower.

***"The body of the artist is intimately tied to the space of canvas. Clothing is an extension of the body. The flag is attire, therefore body, bodyparts".***

***"The French word for flag is 'drapeau' and meant clothing into the 15th century and the word (German) 'Fahne' is from time out of mind related to the Greek word 'penos' clothing".***

**Anders Holmquist**

The empirical material for vexillological studies is constituted by individual flags, legal documents which show their shape and regulations concerning their use, public reception of such signs of recognition and monographic studies. It also encompasses publications concerning authors and individual design. In the form of preface or remarks marking an anniversary, these publications contain various forms of journalism and promotion, which can sometimes so splendidly combine the form of scientific and literary work that they cannot easily be categorized as either form of creative endeavour. The appreciation of truth and beauty and the informative and expressive-evocative function, while essentially different, can be attached to the same creative products of Man taken in different aspects. Moreover, if one assumes that humanities deal with the products of the psyche, vexillological analysis is also linked with the thoughts and statements of the flag's designer, his emotions and aspirations, which transcend the material and the physical. Thus, occasional or anniversary flags must be interpreted in earnest, i.e. in a humanist way through the perspective of the intention of the person sending signals and of the flag designer.

A special aspect in considering flags is their sign or symbol nature, which calls for intuitive understanding. According to German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), culture is full of symbols and myths, whose interpretation should take into account the spirit of the epoch and personal interests.

Personal flags always represent those who use them. They make the cityscape more friendly toward city dwellers. In my view, the flags shown in this exhibition, designed for a variety of occasions, and the vocabulary used to denote and describe them, are an adequate representation of the world of Anders Holmquist and the world of his thoughts he wishes to share with us. They also make important, scientific breakthrough in the vexillological perception and analysis of flag objects produced to mark anniversaries.

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. flags made for personalities and selected clients.