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**В. ПЕТРЕНКО. Психосемантика искусства.
М: МАКС Пресс, 2014, 320 с.**

**V. PETRENKO. *Psychosemantics of Art*. Moscow:
MAKS Press, 2014, 320 pp.**

The new book by Viktor Petrenko examines the perception of art works by viewers and readers. The book's twelve chapters grouped into four sections present theoretical and empirical studies carried out by or supervised by the author at various periods of time using poetry, painting and cinema as material. It contains the works of K. Berdnikov, Ye. Korotchenko, V. Kucherenko, T. Menchuk, O. Sapsolve and A. Suprun. Separate chapters are devoted to some earlier articles authored and co-authored by V. Petrenko.

Considering art as one of the most important forms of cognition and self-consciousness, as a form of creative building of possible worlds, ideologems and models of "the desired future," V. Petrenko defines the psychosemantics of art as a form of its reflection that makes more conscious the perception of the content of the works of art by building semantic spaces. The author takes the view that scientific reflection on works of art is possible and necessary because art "is the reflection and construction of the world from symbolic imagery and low-reflexive idioms" (p. 7). Reflection may be supported by the use of sign systems attaining the "level of metalanguage that makes it possible to discuss the problems of the first-level language" (ibid.). The author assumes that "anything that has the level of expression and the level of content, i.e., does not merely present itself, but also carries information about something else" (p. 8). The methodology of psychosemantics fits that definition and therefore corresponds to the task of reflection on art.

The psychosemantics of art is based on the use of a special methodological apparatus that involves the building of subjective semantic spaces describing and modeling the fundamental structures of the consciousness of viewers, listeners and readers of art works. In a brief introduction to the book V. Petrenko highlights the essential role for psychosemantics of the technique of building semantic spaces (Charles Osgood's "semantic differential" and George Kelly's "personal constructs method") as well as the cluster analysis used in psychology by George Miller. The methodological basis of psychosemantics is the school of Lev Vygot-

sky, Aleksey Leontyev and Aleksandr Luriya. The technique of building subjective semantic spaces is determined by the meta-language of experimental psychosemantics which enables the researcher to “see” (to single out) the new in the products of artistic creativity. The cultural-historical and activity-based approaches invest the psychosemantics of art with the ideas of semantic structure of consciousness and the “sign character” of substantive reality, or human practice. The “American technological set of instruments” and the Russian cultural activity-based psychology share the principle of the activity of human consciousness that constructs pictures of the world. Let us stress that the metalanguage of semantic spaces is not just a technique of analysis and interpretation of art works (p. 10), but a general methodology of understanding them addressing the personality, goals, values and meanings of the individual. V. Petrenko does not merely know himself (one feels like saying “through technique”), but enables the reader to “become sensually aware” of the complex structure of human consciousness which is not one, however multidimensional, space, but a multitude of interpenetrating spaces. The method of experimental psychosemantics constructs in-depth structures (exposes sections/layers) of the consciousness of readers, viewers and listeners of a text, ultimately the Text of the World.

The book presents art as creativity and an object of experimental psychosemantic research as being indeterminately complex, hierarchic and vivid. Chapter one presents the psychosemantic approach to the psychology of art, to the definition of the object of art and artistic constructs as forming the meaning of the works of art. The specificity of art, according to the author, consists in that art is at once reality and a description of reality. The creative activity of someone who creates a work of art is a fundamental type of human activity, reality of man’s being marked by numerous features and traits. However, the perception of a product of art is also a fundamental type of activity that taxes the recipient’s intellectual effort, intuition and spirit. How the creative act is performed and how the act of perceiving creative works is performed is as much a mystery for the author as it is for the reader, listener and viewer. This is probably the main (ontological) problem of the book under review. Drawing on diverse empirical material presented in various chapters of the book, the author reveals important aspects of the perception of art works proceeding from the assumption that the process of perception of a work “is mediated by the personality of the viewer and his implicit theory of the world, of himself and others” (p. 16). “Not only the creator of art, but also the viewer is projective,” V. Petrenko maintains, stressing that if “the artist’s view of the world is already reflected in the actual work” the viewer’s perception and attitude to this work can be explicitly revealed using various forms (*ibid.*). Crucially, for the author of the book such explicitness is neither a formality nor utilitarian intellectual game. Reflecting with the help of the psychosemantic method on the products of art, V. Petrenko believes that “in the broad sense the task of art is to change, transform and lend a spiritual dimension to the subject’s picture of the world, to develop his consciousness, to integrate his perception of the world into the semiosphere of human culture and, finally, to create and develop culture itself, to construct possible worlds” (p. 12).

The author is convinced that a great work of art “stimulates the generation of meanings, the search for God, of the highest meanings of being, transcending the personality both of the art creator and the viewer who spiritually resonates with him” (p. 18). The book prompts the conclusion that psychosemantics of art also serves these purposes although the author does not say so explicitly: he writes that “psychosemantics (or the theory of personal constructs) as a science of the forms and processes of categorization, seeks to describe the semantics and syntax of the language of generalizations of the in-depth level of categorization, which is the universal language of art” (p. 15). The psychosemantic scholar who turns to the art work through a mediator, the recipient, “sets out to see, hear, understand and experience the work from the standpoint of the viewer, reader or listener, to describe the work as it is transformed into an event and spiritual experience of another person.” (p. 28).

Psychosemantics is treated in the book as a methodology of the study of forms of categorization and implicit models through whose prism the viewer perceives the works of art. This contributes to the development of culturological thinking. The psychosemantic method offers an instrument of reflecting on a work of art (a verse, poem, still life, landscape, film, etc.) as a specific type of reality and—what is also very important—introduces new substantive artistic abstractions (concepts, categories) that unfold and give an insight into the work’s artistic world. For this reason V. Petrenko’s book may be of interest to very diverse types of readers: psychologists, philosophers, students of culture, linguists, media specialists and art scholars.

The method of psychosemantics is aimed at analyzing the depths and highs of the perception of the reality of specific art works by the viewer. Viktor Petrenko believes that “the work of art is the mediator between its author and the viewer, who carries in a transmuted form the author’s spiritual quests” (p. 23). Psychosemantic spaces as the main language of describing the perception of a work by the reader, reveal many “mysteries” not only of the audience’s perception of a work of art, but of the work itself. The implementation of this methodological approach is the main achievement of V. Petrenko’s book. But there are also other merits not to be overlooked. The author defines the development of art as “humanity’s ascent up the spiritual vertical” (p. 18). The art of psychosemantics applied to the analysis of the perception of the reality of art, at the metalevel is also “an ascent up the spiritual vertical.” The reality of culture is here “cultivated” on the soil of the psychosemantic paradigm and is reflected in the results of numerous empirical studies that provide an ontological foundation for interpretations.

The range of themes and problems of empirical studies presented in the book is sure to interest readers and merits attention. These include: “the poetic metaphor” (in Section 1, *Verbal Psychosemantics*); “symbolism of color in the work of S. Yesenin, A. Blok and N. Gumilyov (in Section 2, *Psychosemantics of Color*); “the metaphor in visual art,” “landscape as the projection of the artist’s soul,” “still life as visual aphorism,” “energetics of the visual image” (in Section 3, *Psychosemantics of Painting*); “understanding a film and the attitude to it”

(with reference to the film *Stalker*), “viewer’s perception of the motivational structure of a film character” (based on the film *Cruel Romance*), “artistic constructs of a film,” “viewer’s attribution of the motives of characters’ acts” (based on the film *The Barber of Siberia* in section 4, *The Psychosemantics of Film Art*). The design and the results of empirical studies are described in separate chapters of the book to give the reader an exhaustive idea of each of them. It is impossible to enumerate all the empirical studies presented in the book. By way of an illustration, a study is devoted to the energetic and emotional state of the environment.

The high spiritual and ideological potential of the book is illustrated by one of its key questions: how can the viewer derive from a work of diverse meanings an idea or principle that is relevant both to the present day and to “eternal life”? This question is particularly important in the current sociocultural situation when high art is becoming mass-produced and mass-consumed and is often distorted and simplified. How to prevent art from losing its lofty mission of transmitting the multiplicity of visions in a single system of coordinates (civilization)? One way to solve this task is to try to build a matrix of a work’s perception with many coordinates. The author is looking for answers to the questions: how can a subject find (create) new coordinates of viewing the work of art and what can psychosemantics offer to facilitate the process.

The book is spiritually responsive and deserves high appraisal. But we missed generalizations linking individual chapters and sections; the abundance of empirical material sometimes overshadows the analysis *per se*; the book could do with an author’s conclusion without which there is a sense that the author has left something unsaid. True, there is room for varying interpretations.

V. Petrenko chose as an epigraph to his book the words of Hegel to the effect that any human creation, be it literature, music or painting, is always a self-portrait. It would be fair enough to see the book on psychosemantics as the author’s self-portrait. Reading the book we see an image of a thinker and poet, a romantic and a constructivist, a bold explorer and a painstaking worker. The important thing is that V. Petrenko’s book is a piece of research that prompts the reader to reflect on the being of culture based on enlightenment and doing and thinking. Both, in the author’s opinion, should be multidimensional, polyphonic and should be guided by schemes and benchmarks. If the humankind has learned to build and use the spatial coordinates of the world, for example in building a house, perhaps the time has come for using technology to build “an abode of the spirit”? What are its coordinate axes? We believe that the search of answers to these questions is the key task of the book under review which describes the heady perspectives of the psychosemantic method for a new constructivist (active, synthesizing and worldview-related) view of a piece of work. Above all the piece of work that is Man.

Yu. Saurov, N. Nizovskikh
Translated by Yevgeny Filippov