

## BOOK REVIEW

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**PERIANOVA, IRINA (2019). A MASHUP WORLD:  
HYBRIDS, CROSS-OVERS AND POST-REALITY.**  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE: CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHERS,  
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This very contemporary book is sure to find a lot of readers because of its three major values: the nature of considered data, their significance for the society, and their impressive scope which exceeds the boundaries of established domains, thus making one think of them as a homogeneous whole.

By their nature, the miscellaneous data thoroughly scrutinized in the book belong to hybrids as “something heterogeneous in origin and composition” (Perianova, 2019, p. 1). As the author puts it, “The main idea of this book is to use the concept of hybrid as a springboard to narrow down or bridge the disciplinary divide”, and to suggest “a holistic approach to the subject” (Perianova, 2019, p. 3). Emphasizing the ubiquity of hybrids, Irina Perianova points out:

*The spread of hybrids is gradually changing the perception of the boundaries of reality as we know it – in terms of what we hear, what we see, what we feel, and even what we taste – for better or the worse. Almost anything may be deconstructed and the fragments subsequently rearranged into a new entity, often located in a different version of reality (Perianova, 2019, p. 292].*

At present, the concept of hybridity, which is inherent to our backstage cognition, has been exteriorized in ‘hybrid warfare’ (Friedman, 2018), ‘hybrid cultures’ (Stockhammer, 2012), ‘hybrid environments’ (AISayyad, 2001), etc., where that which was once separate becomes mashups, or combination of elements from two or more sources. Such mashups penetrate our daily life and happen to escape our attention and thorough investigation, which nowadays is insecure for the community.

The impressive scope of ‘mashups’ presented in the book may be roughly stratified into INDIVIDUALS, SOCIETY, CULTURE, LANGUAGE, SPORTS, SCIENCE, MEDIA, POLITICS, IDEOLOGY, and EDUCATION domains. Therefore, an interested reader will easily highlight his / her particular attractions. However, the latter turn out to exist not in isolation, but within a framework of other contiguous hybrids that seem to possess a shared mechanics which Gregory Bateson, a famous semiotician and cyberneticist, was hopeful to expose (Bateson, 1079, p. 84). In her informative book, Irina Perianova is less ambitious: she accumulates numerous facts, and, rather, leaves the task of discovering their common underpinnings to the reader who does feel that the described phenomena must have some common grounds. This methodological understatement is both a weak and a strong point of this research endeavor. To facilitate navigation in the realm of facts, the author outlines the direction and supplies the reader with a number of useful definitions relevant for a particular topic.

The book is addressed to a wide variety of specialists (politicians, media experts, psychologists, educationalists, linguists among others), who are professionally involved in cognition, communication and discourse studies. Besides, written transparently and comprehensively, this book will also be interesting to non-specialists who want to better understand the hybrid world we live in.

The book has seven chapters, where the topic of ‘hybridity’ extends into more and more complex domains. *The first chapter* considers hybrids in lifestyle (culinary and entertainment) socialization (followers and virtual friends, hybrid families, hybrid home, and hybrid holidays) cultural environment (symbiosis of art, science and nature, hybrid games and sports, musical mashups, and fiction hybrids), media and science facilitated with a variety of gadgets. *The second chapter* acquires psychological complexity, since its focus is an individual’s social identity and ethnicity prone to develop diverse hybrid forms. *The third chapter* deepens the problem: its focus is hybridity in social and political practices that result in hybrid regimes, states, and ideologies. The fourth chapter continues the third one by showing the ‘mechanisms’ of manipulations with information which have enabled the hybrid ideologies to emerge and flourish of late. *Chapter five* loses the stress of its predecessor, being focused on the topic of hybrids in lore and fiction which definitely deserves attention, but, rather, in a separate publication. *Chapter six* thematically returns to Chapter four. Here, the author provides a brief account of the verbal arsenal employed by politicians for shaping ideologies. *Chapter seven* logically concludes the story: it discusses hybridization of education with its positive and negative impacts on the contemporary ‘mashup world’. The obvious highlights of this book are hybridization of identities, political practices, and perceived ‘reality’.

**Hybridization of identities.** The global contemporary world with its penetrable borders inevitably gives rise to ethnic hybrids, which triggers the problem of social identity or “an individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups” (Perianova, 2019, p. 55). Groups are cemented by many factors – similar food, dress, appearance, familiar symbols. Groups offer people both identity (they tell us who we are) and self-esteem (they make us feel good about ourselves). People tend to believe that their own group is better than other groups. The problem of hybrid social identity, faced by individuals, is also faced by states which try to solve it in accordance with their political doctrines. The author provides a number of facts illustrating how totalitarian or authoritarian states attempt to homogenize marginalized groups and thus to eliminate part of their identity by force. A particular case considered in the book is escalating a group out of all proportions via focusing on commonality beyond the group’s physical borders – be it the same language, real or conceived common history or something else. An example is the idea of ‘Russky mir’ (Russian World) pushed through by the Russian leadership and targeted at the speakers of Russian everywhere in the world.

*Creating a new overarching identity, no matter where the people live, is the intended goal, which involves cultivating conformity, compliance and obedience of the members of the groups – because they will be easy to control from the center* (Perianova, 2019, p. 55).

The conception of ‘Russky mir’ is rooted in the history of the former Soviet empire, after disintegration of which this history obtained different interpretations demonstrated, for instance, by its Russian and Ukrainian versions. The author’s emphasis is on the insecurity of historical disputes for both the states and nations: “When different ethnicities live in peace their historical past is not questioned. Looking for legitimacy in the past does not bode well for the future” (Perianova, 2019, p. 58).

Another issue concerned with the social identity is its being a construct dependent on one’s own self-perception and the perception of ‘others’, or ‘the gaze of an onlooker’, i. e., the society. Discussion of this issue hosts numerous examples of racial attitudes demonstrated throughout contemporary history of Europe, Asia and America. A particular attention is paid to racial and ethnic violence, with genocide as its extreme form grounded on dehumanization achieved via hate

language. Dehumanized groups are compared to vermin, animals, insects, diseases, and the like. Extermination of such ‘dangerous’ groups is euphemistically called ‘ethnic cleansing’, ‘purification’, or ‘final solution’.

One more point which bares on the hybrid identity is the admired leaders whose personalities are partially or completely mythologized. The key figure under consideration is Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator whose positive image is being revived in contemporary Russia. Describing “the new trend of the Stalin worship”, the author notes:

*In his interviews with Oliver Stone, in order to play down Stalin’s crimes Putin compares Stalin to another ambiguous historical figure, Cromwell <...> and points out that despite his faults Cromwell does not appear to be demonized by the English. This collage substitution creates an institutionalized excuse for the revival of the evil dictator. Just imagine the public response to a similar description of Hitler in Germany: Hitler is part of the German history and is famous for having built many excellent motorways! (Perianova, 2019, p. 70).*

As a construct, Stalin’s hybrid identity breeds a hybrid attitude: he is called both a ‘cruel tyrant’ and a ‘wise leader’, or a ‘father figure’ for his nation. Like Stalin, Putin also has a mythical multiple identity as a ‘wise leader’ blended with a Christian angel and a bear that symbolizes Russia.

**Hybridization of political practices.** This topic mostly subsumes hybrid political systems where there is no sharp line between political and non-political, between ‘right’ and ‘left’, between East and West, between terrorism and democracy. The pivot is hybrid regimes as a relatively new political structure spreading globally, and thus representing an insecure trend. Such regimes are called hybrid because they combine democratic trends (for example, frequent and direct elections) with autocratic ones (for example, political repression). Therefore, along with full democracies, there are flawed democracies whose particulars are detailed in the book. Flawed democracies overlap with hybrid regimes distinguished by such traits: (1) they imitate democratic institutions but they are not democratic, (2) similar to totalitarian regimes of the old type, they try to survive at all costs, (3) their motto is cult and stability, (4) they are drawbridge-up, (5) they cherish predictability, (6) when threatened, they easily adapt, (7) they have downgraded education: they embrace hybrid priorities in education compatible with the regime values (Perianova, 2019, p. 96). In order to give credibility to what they have in mind for the future of their countries, the leaders of hybrid regimes consider it to be especially important to “improve” the past (Perianova, 2019, p. 296). The main difference between hybrid regimes and dictatorships is that the latter comprise 80% of violence and 20% of propaganda whereas the former is the other way around: 80% of propaganda and 20% of violence (Perianova, 2019, p. 99). Since Russia is unanimously agreed to exemplify a hybrid regime, the author provides a further comprehensive analysis of how Russia employs the three mainstays – those of ‘predictability’, ‘stability’, and ‘tradition’. Another set of examples concerned with ‘traditional values’ comes from Hungary and Poland. ‘Traditional values’ tend to be ritualized and represented with ready-made linguistic formulas targeted at the mind control. The illustrations originate from North Korea and Russia.

**Hybridization of ‘reality’.** Irina Perianova can be credited with delivering substantially on providing a well-argued account of shifting distinction between facts and falsehood, truth and lie. As she observes, now “lies, half-truths, alternative facts, fake news, hybrid truth, indeed the entire post-truth family, are winning the competition with facts and reality, which are often regarded as an endangered species” (Perianova, 2019, p. 9). Reality *sensu strictu* transforms into augmented reality (AR) as a variant of virtual reality, virtual environment (VE), or Presence, Mixed (hybrid) reality, and Mediated reality.

*Presence <...> is defined as subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even if one is situated in another. VE technologies completely immerse a user inside a synthetic*

*environment. While immersed, the user cannot see the real worlds around him. In contrast, AR allows the user to see the real world, with virtual objects superimposed upon or composited with the real world. <...>. Thus, ‘virtual reality’ creates a completely computer-generated environment, ‘augmented reality’ uses an existing, real life environment, and adds computer-generated information (virtual objects) hereto, ‘diminished reality’ filters the environment (that is, alters real objects, replaces them with virtual ones, or renders them imperceptible). <...> Mixed reality describes a mixture of real and virtual. Mediated reality refers to one’s perception of reality through the use of a wearable computer or hand-held-device such as smart phone (Perianova, 2019, p. 14-15) (underlinings are mine – S.Z.).*

The author’s key point – “It is not facts that convince people. It is people who convince people” – extends St. Thomas Aquinas’s quote “Whatever is perceived, is perceived in accordance with the perceiver’s way of perceiving” (Perianova, 2019, p. 136-137). This key point entails the further discussion of the ways in which public perception is manipulated by politicians and mass media who use particular techniques employed in creating hybrid ‘eality. Among such techniques are selective exposure to information, creating fakes, the use of false equivalence, creating information noise, putting a (different) spin on the news, and targeting human affects.

Selective exposure to information is exhibited by echo chambers, tunnel vision, the domino principle of information amplification, and Tinkerbell effect. An *echo chamber*, typical of new social media, is analogous to an acoustic eco-chamber, where sounds reverberate in a hollow enclosure. Understood metaphorically, an eco-chamber is a situation when the media users tend to shape and reinforce their beliefs through their repetition, with different or competing views being censored or altogether disallowed. Echo chambers dovetail with *tunnel vision* that rules out openness to other ideas and opportunities. According to the *domino principle of information amplification*, social media, such as Facebook, provide an entire system of links which lead to sites corroborating and validating people's beliefs rather than contradictory facts (like is drawn to like). In such a way social media contribute to creating polarized camps with slim possibilities for a constructive dialogue. The *Tinkerbell effect* means that something exists only because and when we believe in it. (Tinkerbell is the name of the fairy in Walter Disney’s cartoon “Peter Pan”. She revived from near death due to the audience’s faith in it). The Tinkerbell effect, widely used by politicians, is exemplified by sociological surveys that act as a self-fulfilling prediction because many people want them to or believe they are likely to happen.

Creating fakes has been enhanced of late by automated algorithms, or bots. The mechanics of visual fakes is based on collage or layover. The mechanics of verbal fakes, more typical of mass media human ‘bots’, employs the 4-D approach – *Deny, Distract, Distort, and Dismay*. That means, if you don’t like what your opponents say, insult them and *deny* the fact even in the face of the obvious. When proof is provided the tactic is that it does not prove anything. A milder version is ‘reductionism’: the claims are not dismissed outright but minimized. If you are accused of something, accuse the opponent of the same thing. This is *distraction* and diversion. A subcategory of distraction is arguments addressed to personality, also known as ‘whataboutism’. It is assumed that the argument is wrong if its author has faults. If you don’t like the facts, *distort* them. The facts most distorted in politics and economics are concerned with numbers. If you do not like what your opponents say, try to scare them off and thus *dismay*. To scare the audience, the distorted news prioritizes suffering children and old people. The usual source of distorted information is rumor and hearsay. In the book, every constituent of the 4-D approach is illustrated with a number of data samples, most of which come from political discourses of Russia.

False equivalence is the technique which exposes an assumed shared trait between the two subjects, even though the comparison is not logical. The pattern of the fallacy is “If A is the set of c and d, and B is the set of d and a, then, since both a and B contain d, A and B are equal”. An illustration of false equivalence is the Russian media’s suggestion that Alex Goldfarb, a London-

based journalist and a vocal critic of Vladimir Putin, may be suspected of poisoning both his friend Litvinenko and the Skripals, since Goldfarb is a biochemist by training (Perianova, 2019, p. 158).

Creating information noise means proposing numerous versions discussed simultaneously, which masks the real fact and thus disorients the public. For instance, the Russian media released about 17 simultaneous versions of the Skripals' poisoning (Perianova, 2019, p. 158). Putting a (different) spin on the news is producing legitimized fakes by means of scrambling the news, organizing and managing perception through their restructuring and creating smokescreen-type diversions. This technique employs a number of strategies known as rotten herring, big lie, 40% to 60%, common knowledge, and upside-down pyramid. The *rotten herring* strategy is presenting an allegation that accuses the opponent of something scandalous and scurrilous to the utmost degree. The goal is not to substantiate or disapprove the allegation, but rather trigger its public discussion with an emphasis on the rumors being unfair. Anyway, some mud will sure stick. The *big lie* strategy, attributed to Hitler, is similar to the rotten herring, but it has a different effect. The aim is to release such a global and horrendous lie with the maximum confidence that it is impossible for the public to believe that such a monstrosity, which usually inflicts an emotional trauma, can be false. The *40% to 60%* strategy, invented by Goebbels, is realized in a mass media source which provides 60% of the information in support of the opponent, and when the public trust is established the remaining 40% will be used for very effective disinformation. *Common knowledge*, or *absolute certainty* strategy implies that, instead of proving something and convincing the audience, one presents a putative fact as something that goes without saying and has an overwhelming support. A complementary strategy is *posing questions*: what 'we' say is absolute certainty; what 'they' (the enemies or opponents) say is rumor, hearsay, and groundless claim. The *upside-down pyramid*, a psychologically viable method of journalism, means that the information is prioritized through its place in the news item: the most important information comes first and in big print, while that which should be diminished is in fine print read by few.

The topic of targeting human affects along with human cognition contributes to agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Stroud, 2014) consonant with the framing theory initiated by Goffman [1974 / 1986] who studied media frames as the forms of agenda-setting which both tell the public what to think about an event, and how to think about it. One of the ways to frame an event is to provide a value or judgment (positive or negative), or to create an inherent bias (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). According to Irina Perianova, different manipulative techniques targeted at cognitive and affective domains are intended for creating "fellow feelings as a result of shared outrage" within a particular social group (Perianova, 2019, p. 166). The "dismay and distort" methods "trigger the ingrained fear and abhorrence of atrocities committed by the 'other', and, in a way, maybe even expected from 'the other'. Playing on common fear generates shared outrage and fellow feeling" (Perianova, 2019). The atrocities of 'the other', who are opposed to 'self', serve as bogeys – gender bogeys (human sexuality), racism (phobias as bogeys), fear of the horrible past to be back, which entails psychologically archetypal and therefore scary matches. In this manner, the Russian leadership and its tame media recreate and follow the ideological model of WWII. In the Russian hybrid political discourse all Ukrainians are described as 'fascists' or 'Nazis'. The explanatory force of this match is nothing but a function of its form: in the collective unconscious, fascism is an object of inherent hate and a sort of archetype (Perianova, 2019, p. 172). Another device, preferred in the comments of social media, is reiterating the theme of excrements employed in scatological stylistic devices (*shitty liberals*, as the most neutral term). The target is people's natural squeamishness and revulsion to dirt.

The discussion of manipulative techniques is concluded with the author's Case Study, where she demonstrates all such techniques at work in the Russian TV talk shows, especially The 1<sup>st</sup> Channel (ORT) *TimeWillShow 1* and 2.

In the book, there are other interesting vistas which deserve their own analysis that exceeds the technical boundaries of this review. The most conspicuous among such vistas is hybridisation of EDUCATION illustrated by Bulgarian data. The considered facts are also quite familiar to the

readers from other post-Soviet countries, Ukraine in particular. Irina Perianova demonstrates educational hybrids in their different aspects – both positive (hybrid approaches to teaching and learning that result from an advent of new technologies capable of updating the content of education, its strategies and techniques), and negative (substitution of the content by the form, which is retained in student enrolment and assessment, in empty paper work, in academic plagiarism and providing empty academic titles).

The materials of this book present a valuable dataset for those cognitive scholars who employ and elaborate the framework of conceptual integration (blending) theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). This theory accounts for particulars of conceptual mechanics underpinning different hybrids, and therefore may suggest more substantial academic grounds for “bridging the interdisciplinary divide”. Among the numerous and miscellaneous examples provided in the book, there is quite a number of those which demonstrate different kinds of conceptual blends: simplex networks, single- and double-scope networks of various kinds. The author, Irina Perianova, does not make theoretical references to the blending theory, which, in this case, may be for the better, since the study avoids theoretical sophistication. The book’s objective is somewhat different. It attracts attention to the problem of hybrids represented in many contemporary social domains and created through communicative semiotic means targeted at human cognition and emotion. This problem is timely and properly posed and exposed, therefore it is expected to get a feedback from specialists in the respective fields. I believe, this book will obligatory get it.

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