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Intermedial Strategies in “An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti”: From Soviet Radio Play to 2022 Television Adaptation

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Abstract

The 2022 television adaptation of the Soviet radio play *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* was met with significant criticism and a generally poor reception. This outcome raises questions about the challenges posed by intermedial translation and shifting cultural contexts, as well as about the loss of key elements that made the original radio play successful. The study investigates why the adaptation failed to resonate with contemporary audiences despite its nostalgic appeal. Specifically, it identifies the factors contributing to the adaptation’s failure, focusing on media-specific, cultural, and narrative discrepancies between the original radio play and its televised version. The analysis reveals that the adaptation struggled due to a mismatch with the conventions of New Year’s television programming, an inadequate visual reinterpretation of an audio-based narrative, and a disconnect between Soviet collectivist themes and contemporary individualistic media culture. Additionally, the shift from dynamic vocal performances to static visuals diminished the imaginative engagement fostered by the original. The study concludes that successful adaptations of Soviet-era children’s media require careful consideration of intermedial translation and cultural context. The 2022 version ultimately failed because it prioritized nostalgia over the original’s collective empathy and vocal artistry, highlighting the importance of preserving core imaginative elements in cross-media adaptations.

Keywords

Radio Play; Crossover; Nostalgia; Soviet Culture; Intermediality; Adaptation; Children's Media; Voice of a Friend; TV Adaptation; Media Philosophy

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Интермедиальные решения радиопьесы «Происшествие в стране Мульти-Пульти» и ее экранного воплощения 2022 года

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Аннотация

Телевизионная адаптация советской радиопьесы «Происшествие в стране Мульти-Пульти» (2022) подверглась резкой критике и не получила признания у зрителей. В связи с этим возникает вопрос о сложностях интермедийного перевода, изменении культурного контекста и утрате ключевых элементов, обеспечивших успех оригинальной постановки. Цель исследования — выявить факторы, обусловившие неудачу экранизации, несмотря на её ностальгический потенциал, с акцентом на медийные, культурные и нарративные расхождения между радиопьесой и её телевизионной версией. Анализ показал, что провал адаптации связан с её несоответствием формату новогоднего шоу, неудачной визуализацией аудиопостановки, а также конфликтом между коллективистской эстетикой оригинала и современной индивидуалистической медиакультурой. Кроме того, замена динамического взаимодействия голосов статическим визуальным рядом лишила экранизацию пространства для воображения, присущего радиотеатру. Успешная адаптация советских детских медиа требует учёта специфики интермедийного перевода и культурного контекста. Версия 2022 года потерпела неудачу, поскольку ностальгическая составляющая получила приоритет над коллективной эмпатией и голосовой выразительностью оригинала. Данный пример свидетельствует о важности сохранения механизмов, активизирующих воображение, в кроссмедийных проектах.

Ключевые слова

радиоспектакль; кроссовер; ностальгия; советская культура; интермедиальность; экранизация; детские медиа; голос друга; телеадаптация; медиафилософия

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Introduction

At the end of 2022, a televised adaptation of the Soviet radio play *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* (1973) was produced for Russia's Channel One (Levenbuk & Khaït, 2022). Within days, it was removed from streaming platforms and official video-hosting sites without explanation, prompting public concern. This article focuses on the intermedial potential of the original radio play, examining both the possibilities afforded by its screen adaptation and the limitations of such a crossover, whether conceived as a festive product or as an ironically distanced revival of the distinctive celebratory aesthetics of Soviet media.

However, the public failure of this high-profile adaptation presents a clear research problem: why did a textually faithful and nostalgically charged intermedial translation of a beloved cultural artifact fail to connect with its audience? This case transcends the specifics of a single production and points to a broader theoretical puzzle in intermedial studies: under what conditions does the translation of a narrative from an auditory medium to a visual one succeed or fail, particularly when it involves culturally specific and historically distant media forms? The problem is not merely one of aesthetic preference but one of ontological mismatch—the failure to translate the core medial qualities that constituted the original work's cultural function and affective power.

The radio play *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* brought together popular animated characters in a single narrative. Written by Arkady Khaït and Alexander Levenbuk, who created the *Radio Nanny* program, the play functioned as a crossover featuring Cheburashka, Crocodile Gena, the Wolf and the Hare from *Nu, pogodi!* (*Just You Wait!*), the robbers from *The Bremen Town Musicians*, as well as Karlsson and Shapoklyak. The aural landscape of the original was significantly shaped by the participation of the original cartoon voice actors, who performed most of the roles on the official vinyl record: Klara Rumyanova (Cheburashka and the Hare), Yuri Nikulin, Georgy Vitsin, and Yevgeny Morgunov (the robbers in what became their final collaboration). One notable exception was the Wolf, voiced by entertainer and impersonator Yuri Garin rather than Anatoly Papanov. Nevertheless, the character's recognizable mannerisms were preserved—likely because the Wolf's voice already functioned as a parody of other voices and because the "politics of intermedial configurations" (Pluzhnik, 2021, p. 78) were constrained by the character's deliberately nonstandard speech, in contrast to the Hare's precise, academically inflected delivery. Composer Boris Savelyev created original melodies that accentuated the personalities of the well-known animated characters, particularly in scenes of everyday life rather than moments of dramatic crisis.

The vinyl record, released in 1981 (Levenbuk & Khaït, 1981), sold over 10 million copies, becoming a cult favorite among Soviet children. It was reissued on CD in the 1990s and later made available on audio platforms. Evoking the atmosphere

of a school holiday pageant—itself rooted in masquerade traditions—*An Incident…* exhibited a complex musical structure that could be summarized not as a contrast between major and minor keys, but between masquerade and sincerity. The work's musical imagery constructs masquerade through the constant parody of interlocutors and through musical "tripping up," whereas sincerity emerges through self-parody—even the villains are sincere, though their sincerity is exposed by the children's chorus, who *love* mischief but value the triumph of good over evil even more.

The 2022 production adhered to the original text and was stylized to resemble Soviet children's programs with their familiar framing device: an entertaining play embedded within a moral-aesthetic dialogue between hosts. The dramatic text remained unchanged (lines that bloggers interpreted as instances of Aesopian language with contemporary political relevance—such as the leaky roof in Karlsson's house—were already Aesopian in 1973). Ivan Urgant (Karlsson), Ksenia Rappoport (Shapoklyak), and Yevgeny Tsyganov (Crocodile Gena) appeared in the opening segment as hosts of *Budilnik*, discussing the merits of various fairy tales and the virtues of old records.

Yevgeny Tsyganov, with his established acting persona of masculine propriety, and Timofey Tribuntsev (Cheburashka), known for his theatrical portrayals of grotesque yet melancholic characters who nevertheless achieve their goals, did not fully align with Eduard Uspensky's more wistful original characterizations. Karlsson, as played by Ivan Urgant, transformed from a team organizer into an ironic showman, while Ksenia Rappoport's Shapoklyak lost her trickster qualities altogether, becoming instead a moralizing master of ceremonies. "*What, have you never seen films with me in them*?"—this line was delivered more coquettishly than in the original recording, where Shapoklyak simply lectured the hapless trio of Coward, Dunce, and Experienced, who lacked cultural literacy not only in literature but also in cinema. Here, the intonations themselves are directed toward an audience that engages with Soviet films and cartoons as cinephiles rather than as subjects of moral instruction.

This article therefore seeks to answer the following research question: What specific intermedial, cultural, and narrative discrepancies caused the 2022 television adaptation of *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* to be perceived as a failure?

Our central hypothesis is that the adaptation failed not because it deviated from the original text, but because it neglected the original's media ontology—specifically, its reliance on the "voice of a friend" (in a Heideggerian sense) and the collective, imaginative engagement inherent in Soviet radio theater. The televised version replaced this participatory, auditory paradigm with a static, visually oriented mode of nostalgia, thereby losing the core of the original's affective appeal and cultural meaning.

Method

Theoretical Framework: Media Theory and the Ontology of the Radio Play

Given that the original radio play *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* was created by Arkady Khaït and Alexander Levenbuk—the writers and performers behind the *Radio Nanny* program—we draw on media theory (S. Zielinski) and media philosophy (V. Savchuk) to analyze the possibilities and constraints of radio theater.

The *medial turn* in philosophy provides an ontological basis for defining the *media image* as a construct of "second-order reality" and a product of mass media. Such an image can be understood as a *construct* formed within individual consciousness and transmitted into the intersubjective field. A *media image*, then, is a product of consciousness disseminated through media environments and reproduced by participants in communication. As Valery Savchuk argues, the ontological status of the image is confirmed by the answer to the question "What is everything?"—"*Everything is an image*" (Savchuk, 2013, p. 22). Not only does "the image see through us," but "media perceive through us" as well; this process creates a media environment in which media no longer merely connect the addresser and the addressee but constitute a unified system. The media image performs a selective function, constructing reality by ignoring, processing, erasing, or silencing elements of the reality it creates. Media cease to be mere tools for representing an external, "authentic" reality; they are not merely shadows on the cave wall cast by the imagination. Mass communication and its participants no longer stand in a dichotomous relationship—they are simultaneously external and internal, immanent and transcendent. This is crucial for understanding the modes of engagement produced by the radio play.

Lotman (1992) identifies two obligatory channels of information transmission within a unified communicative mechanism: verbal and visual. One operates through discrete structures and the other through continuous ones, with a constant exchange of texts and messages between them. Lotman distinguishes between *discrete* and *non-discrete* (*continuous*) texts: the latter cannot be decomposed into individual signs but function as single signs or are isomorphic to signs. Continuous texts correlate with mythological, cyclical time and preliterate consciousness, while discrete texts align with linear, axial time. *What, then, is the radio image?*

Radio theater, like theater more broadly, operates not only on the principle of *alienation* (e.g., the actor's separation from their role) but also on *estrangement* (*ostranenie*), through which the listener assimilates foreign or unfamiliar experiences. This assimilated experience is internalized, becoming part of the individual's inner world. However, certain details of the original object are inevitably lost when a media image is internalized. The version of Pinocchio presented in a radio play does not coincide with the Pinocchio imagined by a child. Radio theater is an exercise in imagination in which the media image is transformed into *self-representa-*

tion. The media images of video-game and radio-play characters are copied and transmitted not only within media but also in everyday life—from behavioral mimicry and decision-making to cosplay and sartorial emulation.

The transmission of voices across distances serves informative, ideological, educational, and entertainment functions, reflecting the history of media's integration into human life.

> "Today, qualitative research welcomes the voice not in isolation, but alongside other practices and techniques of performance, bodily engagement, embodiment, and affectively charged participation" (Orlova, 2017, p. 50).

The dissemination of sound as a ubiquitous carrier of meaning implies the circulation of *response* as affectively charged collective participation. Radio hosts and Djs become our friends, mentors, and teachers, shaping "*structures of feeling*" (Pluzhnik, 2019, p. 159).

Methodology: A Comparative Intermedial Analysis

To test our hypothesis and answer the research question, this study employs a qualitative comparative-intermedial methodology. This approach involves systematically comparing the source material (the 1973 radio play and its 1981 vinyl recording) with the target adaptation (the 2022 television broadcast) across three analytical axes:

Media-Specific Analysis: We operationalize concepts from media philosophy by examining how the transition from an auditory to an audiovisual medium transformed audience engagement. This involves determining whether and how the radio play's "acoustic contagion" (e.g., vocal mimicry, collective noise, and participatory soundscapes) was translated, reconfigured, replaced, or omitted in the audiovisual domain. Heidegger's concept of the "voice of a friend" as interpreted by Fédier is used as an analytical lens through which to evaluate the nature of the listener's or viewer's relationship with the characters in each version.

Narrative and Performative Analysis: We conduct a close reading of both works, focusing not only on script fidelity but also on the performative qualities of the actors' voices in the radio play and on their physical and vocal presence in the television adaptation. This includes analyzing tone, irony, pacing, and the construction of character identity through performance.

Cultural and Contextual Analysis: We situate both works within their respective media ecologies—the late Soviet culture of collective listening and matinee performances and the contemporary post-Soviet media landscape of individualistic consumption and nostalgic reference. This axis investigates how shifts in the "structures of feeling" between eras affected the reception of the same narrative.

By systematically applying this tripartite framework, we move beyond impressionistic comparison and systematically identify points of intermedial breakdown.

Radio Theater in Late Soviet Children's Culture: Escape and Cunning

To analyze the role of radio theater within the Soviet radio educational project (Lovell, 2011, 2013) in late Soviet children's culture, we draw on the concept of the *visual-acoustic space* of the small-sized apartment" (Kaspé, 2017, p. 200), which, according to Kaspé, fostered a "*specific symbiosis of practices of cunning and practices of escape—which are not as distant from one another as they may seem*." Here, estrangement manifests in the rejection of cunning and its transformation into a means of escaping from mundane reality through the festive anticipation of watching a cartoon. The radio play's sole advantage over cartoons—its on-demand availability on vinyl records, unlike televised cartoons broadcast according to fixed schedules—lay in its ability to facilitate the *self-representation* of cartoon narratives, incorporating media images into escapist practices. It transmuted cunning—the absence of visuals, replaced by an auditory landscape—into a form of collective creativity reminiscent of the *social imaginary* of children's holiday performances.

The Legitimization of "Multi-Pulti" and the Soviet Child's Imaginary

The term "*Multi-Pulti*" was given cultural legitimacy by Kornei Chukovsky in his book *From Two to Five* (Chukovsky, 2001, p. 268), in which he interpreted it as a child's adaptation of the word "*multiplikatsiya*" (animation)—though this interpretation is debatable because the term was rarely used colloquially. Chukovsky, emphasizing the spontaneity of children's naïve art, framed this spontaneity within a pedagogical rather than an artistic project. The reasons why naïve literature is sustained by heterogeneous, non-artistic agendas are explored elsewhere (Davydov, 2025, pp. 276–280). As a pedagogue and critic, Chukovsky overlooked the crude directness often inherent in such linguistic models (e.g., Solzhenitsyn's "*butter-schmutter*" in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*) or pejorative labels such as "*Culture Vulture*"—a term for dilettantes.

Notably, "*Multi-Pulti*" appears in Vasily Shukshin's story *How the Bunny Flew on Balloons* (Shukshin, 1972) as a marker of the entry of fairy tales into modernity. Here, an adult comforts a sick child with a tale in which good triumphs with the aid of a *multitude* of magical helpers: a bunny holding balloons is carried away but is rescued by birds who pop the excess balloons. In the closing dialogue, adults contrast old fairy tales with this new narrative of "*progressive multitude*," thereby implying a concern with managing the aftermath of disaster. Thus, "*Multi-Pulti*" reflects the *matinee audience* as a *multitude* summoned by a voice, always ready to rescue heroes from mishaps. The child's social imaginary thus excludes the possibility of error, and the internalization of the radio image ultimately normalizes everyday life.

Post-Soviet Nostalgia and the 2022 Adaptation

In 1999, amid a wave of Soviet nostalgia (Boym, 1995) epitomized by *Old Songs About the Main Thing*—with its simplified renditions of Soviet ideological voices (Zhurkova, 2021)—the computer game *Multi-Pulti* (BASI, Media House) was released. Players could combine character templates, costumes, and animated backdrops to create films within a virtual dollhouse-like environment. Technical constraints prevented users from exporting their creations and instead required them to refine their films by staging unlikely encounters between incompatible characters. This aesthetic of collision, arising from the limited range of anecdotal plots and the discrete possibilities afforded by the radio voice, resurfaced in Urgant's 2022 adaptation. It reflects not the *multitude* of children's matinees but the individualism of early prenetwork gaming.

Theoretical Implications and Novelty of the Research

This case study contributes to intermedial theory by demonstrating that successful adaptation requires more than narrative fidelity; it demands sustained attention to the source medium's affective ontology. Our analysis introduces and operationalizes the concept of the "voice of a friend" as a key heuristic for understanding the affective efficacy of Soviet auditory media, particularly children's radio theater. By framing the adaptation's failure as a case of "nostalgic deafness"—the replacement of a participatory auditory imaginary with a static visual archive—we propose a conceptual framework for analyzing the pitfalls of cross-media translation, especially in adaptations involving culturally resonant, historically situated artifacts.

Practical Significance

In practical terms, this research provides a critical framework for media producers and cultural practitioners engaged in adapting historical media. It demonstrates that the uncritical reproduction of aesthetic surfaces (e.g., Soviet-era set design) is insufficient. Instead, adaptors must identify and creatively transpose the core medial principles—such as collective participation, acoustic imagination, and the specific mode of address—that defined the original work's cultural function and emotional impact. The failure of the 2022 *Multi-Pulti* offers both a cautionary example and a point of reference for future projects seeking to revitalize, rather than merely replicate, media from the past.

Results

Radio Crossover as a Component of Radio Media Theory

An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti was not the only crossover created for Soviet children. From December 1945 to 1982, Soviet radio broadcast *The Club of Famous Captains*, a crossover bringing together adventure-story captains

familiar to Soviet readers. At the same time, the historical and sociopolitical contexts of these literary works were bracketed out. Soviet readers could recognize the satirical content of Swift's works, but other contexts remained outside the listeners' field of vision. These included the connections between Jules Verne's Dick Sand and colonial exhibitions and the taming of savagery; between Alphonse Daudet's Tartarin of Tarascon and the trauma experienced by French society after its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, when the character came to represent the indefatigable French provincial; and between Captain Nemo's motives as a "progressor-avenger" and positivist-era scientific debates. What remained was the pure capacity of subjugating space, supported by the phenomenology of radio as an omnipresent medium that symbolically and informationally conquered distant lands. *The Club of Famous Captains* consisted largely of geographical and ethnographic information and accounts of the history of seafaring.

This allowed children to identify with pioneers and romantics of distant voyages, using both modern technology and familiar technical skills to exert control over objects and space, while drawing inspiration from fragmentary knowledge of inaccessible countries and regions that functioned as a specific form of acoustic sublimity—a voice from afar. Another crossover was *The Club of Merry Little Men*, which appeared in the magazine *Veselye Kartinki* (*Merry Pictures*) beginning in 1966. The club's leader was Karandash (Pencil), the protagonist of a story by Yuri Druzhnikov published two years before the club's founding. With his pencil-shaped nose and ability to bring drawings to life, Karandash represented an evolution of the Buratino archetype, now endowed from the outset with the full authority of a demiurge. The anthropomorphism of the "merry little men" was conditional—Samodelkin (The Handy Man) was closer to an android—but this anthropomorphism was sustained precisely through visuality: the primacy of the gaze ensured that their actions remained legible as human. This visual logic helps explain why the leader of the crossover *An Incident* in the Land of Multi-Pulti was Karlsson—Astrid Lindgren's character was perceived in the USSR not so much as a trickster as a demiurge, a creator and destroyer of worlds. The imaginary friend from the Swedish story thus became an implicit normalizing force within the radio play, in which every clever solution shifted from provocation to a means of advancing the plot and rendering it vivid in the radio medium.

The difference between Soviet crossover characters and American superheroes lies in the restricted functions of all participants except the demiurge. *The Club of Famous Captains* lacked a clearly defined demiurge: in some episodes, Baron Munchhausen claimed this role simply because he was able to say anything at all, while in others, the role was assumed by unequivocally positive captains, such as Alexander Ivanovich (Sanya) Grigoriev from Veniamin Kaverin's novel. *The Club of Famous Captains* was an open-ended work, a text continually produced by the captains themselves—who established norms for writing and narrating adventure—and by the librarian Maria Petrovna, who would promptly retrieve

the books needed for the children's education. This performative production of the text corresponded both to the collective imaginary fostered by Soviet radio and to the suppression of the sociopolitical issues associated with the heroes' real-world contexts. It thereby transformed them into subjects of scientific and educational discourse and reduced their adventures to a pure mode of colonization, extending the connection between radio and geographical imagination discussed in detail by Galina A. Orlova (2009). Orlova demonstrated that although radio generated collective affect, direct reporting alone could not compensate for a lack of geographical knowledge—hence, *The Club of Famous Captains* can be understood as an attempt to create a self-reproducing system of geographical knowledge, rendering the demiurgic principle irrelevant. *Veselye Kartinki* established its club precisely during the curtailment of Khrushchev's reforms, which subordinated administrative decision-making to the logic of technocratic management. Thus, the club's artistry stood in opposition to Khrushchev's technological differentiation and created precisely the space of "practices of cunning and practices of escape" described by Kaspé (2017, p. 187).

Like telegraphy before it, radio broadcasting emerged from the strategic demands of multi-front warfare as it replaced localized military operations (Tsilinsky, 2019, p. 264). In 1792, Claude Chappe proposed to the Parisian Constituent Assembly a machine he called the "Tachygraphe." On January 3, 1796, an opera with the then-utopian title *The Telegraph, or The Distance-Writing Machine* by Joseph Chudy premiered in present-day Budapest. Napoleon used an optical telegraph between Paris and Strasbourg, thereby gaining a tactical advantage over his enemies through rapid decision-making. In 1805, Samuel von Sömmering constructed a telegraph described as follows: "Sömmering's voice-transmission apparatus consists of a voltaic pile, as well as a transmitter and receiver" (Tsilinsky, 2019, p. 262). Twenty years later, Baron Schilling von Canstadt, a friend and creditor of Pushkin's, proposed an "electromagnetic needle telegraph" for military use. The telegraph enabled a form of multitasking that coincided with the emergence of stereoscopic characterization in literature, exemplified by the "superfluous man": a figure who carries his problem within himself and is therefore capable of universal communication unconstrained by his immediate social circle. In this sense, radio inevitably produced a gallery of stereoscopic characters, among whom a leader could emerge only situationally, as a demiurgic destroyer; Marconi exemplified such a figure. This also explains Karlsson's role in the radio play by Khaït and Levenbuk.

A fragment from Mazzolari's 1776 hymn, cited by Siegfried Zielinski (2019, p. 237), encapsulates the essence of radio:

> "A single element, forming a word,
>
> Opens the spirit's thoughts and grounds meaningful speech.
>
> Through these signs and well-mediated tools,
>
> The absent person speaks to the absent friend."

The radio program *Radio Nanny*, whose authors also created *An Incident…*, ran for two decades and is notable for its systematic encoding of festive models during the late Soviet era, when intimacy and infantilization accompanied social normalization (Sirotinina & Kelly, 2008, p. 273). As its theme song declared, the radio theater compelled the "kids"—already friends with each other—to befriend it, revealing not only the interweaving of official and friendly discourse, as M. Litovskaya (2017, p. 146) identifies in her exhaustive analysis of the program's ideological parameters, but also the emergence of a third, autocommunicative discourse. By calling them "trulyalyata (tweedledeedles)," the radio theater implied an infantilizing normalization of friendship among the children while simultaneously demanding that they construct, on the walls of their own consciousness, mental images drawn from films or cartoons. A child's consciousness is active and mutable, and the radio program itself was a dynamic narrative (a story, a lesson). A lesson, of course, requires substantial effort to process images. An image cannot be entirely determined by the external world—it is always slightly larger or deeper, and thus it is drawn both on the wall of consciousness and on the wall of the unconscious. The image in the self's consciousness is the primary constitutive moment of Dasein, in Heidegger's terms. Thus, the images were often drawn not from cinema but from the artistic milieu itself.

For instance, Episode 108 of *Radio Nanny* (1980) included a radio quiz titled "When I Was a Boy," in which celebrities, including the clown Oleg Popov and the director Rolan Bykov, shared childhood memories or described their ideal image of the listener. In their imaginations, the children saw Buratino, Harlequin, the Hunter, and the Owl—figures they had constructed mentally, even though the virtues of bravery, loyalty, and courage were articulated by actors, not the characters themselves. Cartoon images would have been too predictable; this also explains the central conflict of *An Incident…*: the characters are not the animated figures themselves but their images. In reality, Carlsson is the least suitable leader of the forces of good, just as Shapoklyak is more of a conspirator than a petty saboteur. The adult voices, however, transcended their roles and transformed the radio play into a full-fledged dramatic performance that could then be staged in children's theaters across the USSR, thereby creating a normalizing standard of conventionalized animated adventure—a universal substitute for cartoons, a surrogate that constituted the Dasein of the Soviet child.

Friendship with *Radio Nanny* requires some commentary. In the Heideggerian tradition, as noted above, radio can be understood as a specific mode of presence. "Hearing is constitutive for discourse… Hearing even constitutes the primary and authentic openness of Dasein for its own ability-to-be," Heidegger states (as cited in Fédier, 2018, p. 7). In this sense, the voice of a friend is a "door flung open to the metaphysical experience of man" (Fédier, 2018, p. 7)—such a voice constitutes the self here and now; it is not merely a call but a manifestation of the call of being within me, with an intimacy closer to me than I had realized. The friend's voice "lets

me understand what I lack in order to be what I ought to be" (Fédier, 2018, p. 14). Radio is the voice of a friend suddenly heard—we do not merely hear; we comprehend and receive something: "We do not say we 'did not hear correctly' but that we 'did not understand.' The friend's voice is a new manifestation of the call of being—of presence, or 'being-here.'" Friendship is thus placed at the heart of the existential structure of Dasein. To be present is to hold oneself (to with-hold oneself) in openness to one's own potential being as authentically singular—"proper to the alone" (Fédier, 2018, p. 22).

Thus, the heroes of radio crossover plays can be understood as specific individuations of friendship: they are friends within the club's framework, but only because they had first been interpellated by other virtual-artistic clubs (for example, Buratino was a semi-amateur, semi-professional theatergoer, Cipollino a revolutionary, and Gena the Crocodile a zoo employee). Their friendship is a secondary effect of primary club affiliation, and it must be sustained by continually renewed episodes of club interaction, in which the club constantly opens itself to new knowledge and actions while enclosing itself within a structure of continual evaluation—as though each episode were a club meeting. The uniqueness of *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* lies in the fact that none of its positive heroes belonged to clubs associated with creative or political transgression. Instead, the Bremen Town Musicians, Gena, and Cheburashka, although inventive, consistently bracketed transgression. In the 1973 sequel to the original 1969 cartoon, the Bremen Town Musicians parodied rock musicians, while the bohemian pretentiousness of Old Woman Shapoklyak was equally comic from the perspectives of the worldly-wise Gena and the utterly naive Cheburashka. This is why, unlike other crossovers, this one could not be serialized, remaining instead a satirical and ironic artifact—an examination of satirical images through vocal irony, modeled on children's matinee scripts.

The attempt to create a sequel, *Sports Passions in the Land of Multi-Pulti* (1975), which expanded the "team of good" by adding Winnie-the-Pooh and Boniface the Lion—from the Soviet animated film about his journey from the zoo to his African homeland—failed: athletic teamwork and healthy living provided no advantage against the villains. Carlsson remains the team leader, but the victory of good over evil becomes ambiguous, the result of a mere accumulation of gags, including the villains' cheating, and culminates in the villains punishing themselves—a resolution that is least convincing in terms of Heideggerian-Fédierian radio friendship. Here, the existential closeness among friends becomes entirely secondary, dependent entirely on the infrastructure of organized sports—a form of organization that neither radio drama nor children's theater can adequately convey.

Meanwhile, *An Incident…* follows the structure of friendship typical of children's matinee performances, in which:

- the forces of good outnumber those of evil;
- evil temporarily triumphs through cunning machinations; and

- the children's collective drives out the villains through vocal unity.

In *An Incident…*, the third point reaches its culmination: the children must shout, make noise, and, at Carlsson's command, imitate various frightening sounds to induce panic among the villains. This is a technique for inducing panic, consistent with radio's nature as a panic medium. As Marshall McLuhan (2003, p. 353) wrote, "Radio is a medium for madness!" This deployment of panic is necessitated by the possibility that the characters may die (we do not know if all the villains' captives survive—though, of course, a children's play implies no fatalities). Here, the tight link between the friend's voice and the question of posthumous existence becomes apparent. Fédier recalls the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie. They met when Montaigne was 23 and La Boétie 27. The latter's sudden death did not end Montaigne's dialogue with him. Montaigne notes that friendship is about being near, close, beside—whereas among others, we are merely among them. The friend's voice is not merely an audible message or transmitted sound. It begins with listening and defines and articulates "being-with": "Man acquires a readiness to accept the experience of his own finitude, where what is at stake for each is the discovery of himself" (Fédier, 2018, p. 43). The friend's voice reminds us that freedom lies at the heart of events. In *An Incident…*, of course, everyone is saved—on radio, this could only be conveyed by their voices returning to the airwaves. In a film adaptation, they would remain visible even in captivity, as dramatis personae and masks, already immortal.

This brings us to the distribution of voices: Shapoklyak, as the villains' leader, operates precisely through her voice—she modulates intonations, even attempting to make the bumbling trio (Coward, Dunce, and Experienced) work efficiently (though they fail spectacularly). At the same time, she serves as the primary commentator, an antihero and the creator of an inverted world where slackers and underachievers must triumph over the good characters. This fusion of vocal manipulator and moralizing conférencière is unusual for theater and marks radio drama as the site of vocal friendship. In principle, Shapoklyak should deal with hooligans in the Soviet sense—figures drawn from disreputable crowds. Yet the villains' temporary victory over the virtuous cartoon heroes is enabled by the Wolf—the archetypal hooligan from *Nu, Pogodi!* (*Just You Wait!*)—who combines aggression with total ignorance of the situation. He does not understand who Cheburashka is or why the Bremen Town Musicians are so strange. He obeys Shapoklyak's voice precisely because of this epistemic deadlock, but his victory over Gena the Crocodile produces silence: Gena cannot explain that Cheburashka is a friend; the Wolf is deaf to the philosophy of friendship; and the cessation of the broadcast would signify the villains' triumph. But listeners demand continuation; the show cannot end in existential failure, so the Hare becomes the new speaking subject, thereby creating the "voice of friendship." He makes himself heard despite the Wolf's constant threat to devour him the moment he lets his guard down. Thus, the speech in which the Hare manages to declare that "friendship has won" is the voice of radio

itself— a voice that never lets its guard down and against which even the furious Wolf appears sluggish and prone to yawning.

Another feature of *An Incident…* is that some participants had already appeared in crossovers: the comic trio Coward, Dunce, and Experienced appeared not only in Leonid Gaidai's films (since 1961) but also in *The Bremen Town Musicians* (1969). Here, the trio's bandit archetype shifted across perceptual frames: they could appear as modern poachers, shadow-economy operators, or representatives of a "medieval" mindset in *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966), where they played authentic inhabitants of the Greater Caucasus, or as enterprising highwaymen in the pseudo-medieval setting of *The Bremen Town Musicians*. In all cases, the pseudo-medieval grotesquery of their bodies merged with their involvement in modern political-economic relations, resulting in reframing, in Goffman's (2003) sense, through the implied transparency of Soviet economic structures, within which any shady operator would inevitably be exposed. This exceeded the scope of Gaidai's films, which, as shown in a recent collective study (Levchenko, 2023), confined themselves to expressing solidarity with the viewer amid collapsing utopias, but it aligned with the musical and animated carnivalesque utopia of *The Bremen Town Musicians*.

Thus, in the radio play, Coward, Dunce, and Experienced could not drive the plot—they generated pure noise, making the villains seem more dangerous than they were (in reality, they devised no clever schemes). The only way to make them interesting was to medically reframe them within the crossover: they were depicted as gluttons, singing a jolly song about overeating. Following Ganzha's (2008, p. 32) distinction between two types of mass medical knowledge, their gluttony belonged to the client-mode of knowledge (awareness that one eats excessively and harmfully), as opposed to the patient mode embodied by the rational hedonist Carlsson, who knows only what is empirically observable. The trio, meanwhile, conducted an involuntary experiment: what would happen if one ate an entire cake? Thus, crossover heroes within a crossover become clients, and develop narrative arcs linked to the impossibility of legal business in the USSR. In a crossover of crossovers, business is possible but self-destructive: the characters listen to themselves and enact radio's acoustic function, while the young listeners ultimately perform the interpellative call of friendship that saves all the heroes.

The Challenges of Adaptation: The 2022 Screen Version

The 2022 screen adaptation immediately faced a fundamental problem in its production design: its sets closely imitated the aesthetic of the Soviet TV program *Budilnik* (*Alarm Clock*). This resemblance was particularly striking in comparison with a 1977 episode of *Budilnik*, "*The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats: A New Take*" (*Budilnik*, 1977), in which actors performed a similar narrative of evil's temporary triumph while blending traditional fairy-tale cautionary lessons with the normalizing routines of the Brezhnev era. In that episode, standardized living conditions, work routines, and leisure activities ultimately enabled the rescue

of the goats (notably reduced from seven to four, which allowed for more dynamic circus-style stunts). However, while *Budilnik*'s setting reflected the high-rise apartments that defined Brezhnev-era normality, the 2022 adaptation of *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti* opted for a retro-Romanesque aesthetic, evoking a *nostalgic*, almost vanished Moscow—either the cozy suburban backstreets or the cinematic lanes depicted in *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* or *The Adventures of Vasya Kurolesov*.

This idealized Moscow, paired with an enchanted forest in which the villains, led by Shapoklyak, operate, aligns with the broader perception of Soviet children's literature as a literature of *survivorship*—scout- and pioneer-like in its emphasis on the ability to endure the wilderness while achieving success within the snug world of alleyways—a landscape inherently at odds with the very notion of success. In the original radio play, this idea had already shifted toward an individualizing hyper-normalization: Gena the Crocodile and Cheburashka are also survivors, but each within a distinct sociocultural niche, while the collective experience becomes one of pure productivity. This is a distinctly post-Soviet reinterpretation of Soviet literature.

Yet, in the 2022 version, even the simplest circus tricks—such as somersaults—are absent. Strangely, the most eccentric techniques of Soviet-era television editing, including composite shots and other period-specific analog montage methods, are juxtaposed with the actors' static performances, which remain confined to a rigid dramatic frame that accentuates the survivalist theme. Although *An Incident…* shares traits with a musical (as do most children's matinee performances), it lacks the genre's essential *eccentricity*— namely, the transition from speech to song through exaggerated gestures. Carlsson's very presence further disrupts the possibility of such theatrical excess: he appears against archival footage of Nikitskaya Square (part of Moscow's Boulevard Ring, which represents the city's "quiet" side), complains about roof repairs, sighs, and only gradually recalls his heroic identity. His behavior here seems more reminiscent of Superman/Clark Kent —an alien who must repeatedly break free from his meek, earthbound persona— than of the Soviet reception of Carlsson as a cheerful hedonist and universal imaginary friend, embodying the standard desires of Soviet children: to fly, to misbehave, to eat jam straight from the jar, and to gorge themselves on ice cream.

In the adaptation, the fact that a minority of villains temporarily triumphs over a majority of positive heroes no longer hinges on schoolroom morality. Ksenia Rappoport (Shapoklyak) deliberately overacts, creating a dissonance that would be impossible within a children's matinee, where empathy arises precisely from the children's uncertainty—will the bunny be eaten, or will it survive? Emotional engagement develops alongside language acquisition: by learning to rescue the bunny through words, children learn to empathize with it. Here, the "voice of a friend" operates at full strength. Meanwhile, Alexei Serebryakov's Wolf, who serves as the jailer of the positive characters, also knows less than

the audience. Viewers are accustomed to seeing Serebryakov play diverse roles—officers, detectives, even drug dealers and criminals—so every gesture, vocal or physical, creates in viewers the impression that they know more than the Wolf. This assurance that good will inevitably triumph and that all the prisoners will be freed may have been the adaptation's fatal flaw.

Discussion: The Theoretical and Practical Dilemmas of Adaptation

The failure of the 2022 adaptation is not merely a matter of poor execution but a symptom of deeper theoretical and practical dilemmas in intermedial translation. Our analysis reveals several contentious points that warrant further discussion and help situate this case study within broader academic debates.

The Dilemma of Fidelity: Text vs Medium

A central, and arguably flawed, assumption guiding the adaptation was that faithfulness to the original text would guarantee success. This approach, however, neglected the core medial qualities of the source material. The adaptation's failure challenges the primacy of narrative fidelity in adaptation studies, suggesting that, for works deeply embedded in a specific media ecology (such as Soviet radio theater), the ontology of the medium is more consequential than textual accuracy. The 2022 version became a "zombie adaptation"—a body without a soul—precisely because it replicated the words but lost the "voice," the collective acoustic space, and the participatory imaginary that constituted the original. This raises a provocative question: can certain media artifacts, especially those reliant on auditory imagination and collective reception, be truly adapted for a visual, individualized medium without fundamental loss?

Nostalgia as a Double-Edged Sword

The producers' strategy relied heavily on nostalgia as a vehicle for connection. However, our case demonstrates that nostalgia is a highly unstable foundation for adaptation. The adaptation presented nostalgia as a static, visual archive (*Budilnik* aesthetics, retro-Moscow) rather than as a dynamic, participatory feeling. It catered to a memory of its form but failed to reactivate the original's affective structure. This creates a discursive tension: while audiences crave familiar cultural touchstones, they reject mere replication that feels hollow. The adaptation's nostalgia was "deaf" to the original's acoustic and existential dimensions, highlighting a potential pitfall for any project seeking to revive historical media—the risk of creating a museum exhibit rather than a living cultural product.

The Actor as a Site of Discursive Conflict

The casting of well-known contemporary actors introduced a layer of intertextual meaning that clashed with the original's intent. As our analysis showed,

Alexei Serebryakov's Wolf carried the baggage of his tough, dramatic roles, while Ivan Urgant's Carlsson was imbued with his television persona of ironic showmanship. This created a discursive short-circuit. Instead of embodying the archetypal, "pure" voices of friendship, the actors became self-conscious commentators on their own roles. This shift from a Heideggerian "voice of a friend" to a postmodern, self-referential performance underscores a fundamental conflict between the Soviet ethos of collective identification and the contemporary culture of individual star personas and ironic distance. The question remains: in adapting culturally sacred works, should actors strive to embody vocal and behavioral archetypes, or is some degree of reinterpretation inevitable and even necessary?

The (Im)possibility of Translating "Collective Acoustics"

Perhaps the most significant theoretical implication of this study is the difficulty of translating a collective acoustic experience into a private, visual experience. The radio play's "acoustic contagion"—the mimicry, the collective shouting, and noise-as-salvation—was not merely a stylistic feature but the work's central mechanism for building community. Television, by its nature, individualizes and pacifies the viewer. The adaptation attempted to compensate for this loss by showing the "rescue," but in doing so, it made the audience spectators to a rescue rather than participants in it. This case suggests that the most profound losses in intermedial translation may occur not at the level of narrative or character, but at the level of audience agency and embodied participation.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify the specific intermedial, cultural, and narrative discrepancies that contributed to the failure of the 2022 television adaptation of *An Incident in the Land of Multi-Pulti*. Our central hypothesis—that this failure resulted from the adaptation's neglect of the original's media ontology— was supported by systematic comparative analysis.

The key factors contributing to the adaptation's failure are:

- Ontological Mismatch: The transition from an auditory to a visual medium stripped the narrative of its core imaginative mechanism. Replacing the "voice of a friend" and participatory *acoustic contagion* with static visual representation produced a profound loss of affective engagement.
- Cultural and Contextual Disconnect: The adaptation misjudged the shift in *structures of feeling* from late Soviet collectivism to contemporary individualism. It presented the collectivist ethos of the original as a nostalgic artifact rather than a living principle, creating a moral and emotional disconnect between the work and the audience.
- Nostalgic Deafness: The production prioritized superficial visual nostalgia—the imitation of Soviet television aesthetics—over a deeper auditory and exis-

tential attachment to a specific mode of friendly engagement and collective co-creation.

- Performative Dissonance: The casting and performances, despite involving prominent actors, introduced contemporary irony and intertextual baggage that clashed with the sincere, archetypal nature of the original characters.

In conclusion, the case of *Multi-Pulti* offers an instructive case for intermedial theory and practice. It demonstrates that a successful adaptation requires more than replicating a text or its aesthetic surface; it demands a deep understanding and creative transposition of the source medium's affective core and cultural function. For future projects seeking to revitalize Soviet-era works or media artifacts from other historically specific contexts, this study underscores the necessity of moving beyond archival nostalgia. The task is not to rebuild the museum of Soviet childhood but to find a new medial language capable of reactivating the original's capacity for collective empathy, imaginative participation, and, ultimately, friendship. The failure of the 2022 adaptation lies not in a lack of affection for the original but in its inability to hear the original's most important message.

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All authors confirm that the manuscript is original, has not been published previously either in whole or in part, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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Alexander V. Markov contributed to conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing, visualization, supervision, and project administration. Oksana A. Shtayn contributed to conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing, visualization, supervision, and project administration. Both authors contributed equally to all stages of the research. No external funding was received. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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