

Roundtable

Multilingual Literature in Conflict Zones 25 February 2025

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Text Group Orbita and its Multimodal/Multilingual Strategies

Orbita is a creative multimedia group based in Riga, Latvia. It was established in 1999 by poets who primarily write in Russian. Their texts move on the border between two or more languages across multiple media expressions. The creative focus is on text and its permutations. The keyword for their artistic experiments is collaboration with artists, musicians and film makers in transferring poetry to other forms of art. This expansion is described as “collective brains” or “collective consciousness”, which also inspired the term used to define the group as “text-group”.

The poets of Orbita highlight that the guiding principle of their artistic expression is “living art”. This stems from the idea that new forms of poetry emerge in marginal and experimental zones. Orbita strives to bring poetry out of these zones, which is clearly demonstrated by their latest initiative: the creation of a cultural hub in the small town of Strenči. Here they are working together and experiencing the spirit of a factory collective, creating contemporary art not so much intended for local consumption, but rather oriented toward broader horizons. They aim for “art to come from Strenči, not go to Strenči”, and propose that art should emerge wherever Orbita is, rather than Orbita relying on the recognition or reputation of a specific place.

Orbita fosters collaboration between Russian and Latvian poets through bilingual poetry collections. The communicative orientation is emphasized by the design: the two books of a bilingual edition are “fused” together with a single cover, while in another edition, the texts are symmetrically “spread” across facing pages like two acts of a performance or informational channels. In the publications, experimental interaction is expressed through the simultaneous belonging of a text to multiple linguistic systems on one hand, and the application of the concept of the untranslatability of specific national codes on the other.

For Orbita language is not an abstract idea but a means of expressing ideas, especially in moments of crisis; crises or conflicts serve as impetus for change and experimentation.