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Dancing Across Borders: Ukrainian Ballet in Belgrade as a Transnational Cultural Practice

Abstract: This paper examines performances by the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade in 2024 and 2025 as a case of transnational cultural collaboration. It analyzes how ballet is recontextualized through local venues, organizers, media discourse, and audience-oriented presentation. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that the presence of the Ukrainian ballet artists in Belgrade should not be understood solely as a consequence of the war-induced migration, but as a complex process of transnational cultural collaboration that generates new forms of professional networks and cultural visibility. The theoretical framework draws on cultural and media studies, with particular emphasis on transnationalism, cultural mobility, and artistic networks. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach based on performances of *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, venue and promotional materials, and selected Serbian and regional media coverage. Special attention is paid to how media narratives position Ukrainian ballet within the framework of solidarity, professionalism, and cultural value. The analysis shows that canonical repertoire, cooperation with local venues, and media framing centered on professionalism and prestige enable Ukrainian ballet to become visible in Belgrade not only as a displaced art but as a legitimate transnational cultural presence.

Keywords: transnational; collaboration; Ukrainian Classical Ballet; cultural mobility; contemporary performing arts; displacement; symbolic visibility.

Introduction and methodology

Transnational artistic collaboration has long been a defining feature of cultural production, particularly in the fields of performing arts. In recent years, however, transnational collaboration has increasingly been influenced by global crises, including armed conflicts, forced migration, and political instability. These conditions have reshaped the ways in which artists move, collaborate, and sustain their practices beyond national boundaries. At the beginning of 2022, the war in Ukraine profoundly disrupted the country's cultural life and artistic production, forcing many artists to leave their home institutions and seek opportunities elsewhere. Within this context, the mobility of artists is often framed primarily through narratives of displacement, exile, or cultural loss. Even though such perspectives are necessary, they can obscure other dimensions of artistic mobility, particularly the emergence of new artistic

networks and institutional collaborations. These practices cannot be fully understood through the lens of migration but should also be examined as dynamic processes of cultural negotiation and transformation.

Scholarship on migration and the arts has increasingly emphasized that artistic mobility should not be understood only through the lenses of rupture, loss, or exile, but also through changing forms of circulation, mediation, and institutional embedding. Dance studies have begun to engage more directly with migration and mobility, while subsequent work has shown how transnational dancers negotiate mobility through funding structures, touring circuits, venues, and unequal regimes of labor and citizenship.¹ More broadly, recent research on arts-based approaches to migration and violence has highlighted the capacity of artistic practices to render migration legible beyond reductive humanitarian or victimizing frames.² At the same time, studies of displaced artists in international art worlds demonstrate that migrant artists are often interpreted through essentialized geopolitical categories, even when they seek recognition primarily as professionals rather than representatives of crisis or national trauma.³ Research on media images and artistic discourses on refugees and migration has shown that such discourses can both reproduce and unsettle stereotypical identities⁴ while work on cultural peripheries suggests that value in semi-peripheral fields is produced through transnational dependence on external centers, standards, and forms of consecration.⁵ However, far less attention has been paid to ballet as a transnational cultural practice in semi-peripheral urban contexts such as Belgrade, especially in relation to the interdependence of repertoire, institutional support, and media visibility.

Classical ballet, despite its strong institutional transitions and historical ties to national cultures, has long operated within transnational circuits of training, performance, and exchange. In the present moment, ballet companies and dancers increasingly circulate outside established cultural centers, engaging with new audiences and institutional settings. These movements challenge conventional center-periphery models of cultural production and invite closer attention to less than expected sites of transnational collaboration. Belgrade represents one such site. Positioned outside dominant Western European cultural hubs, the city has become a space where international artistic practices are actively received, mediated, and recontextualized.

¹ Paul Scolieri, "Global/Mobile: Re-orienting Dance and Migration Studies," *Dance Research Journal* 40 (2008): 8.

² Cathy McIlwaine and Megan Ryburn, "Introduction: towards migration-violence creative pathways," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (2024), 3230.

³ Cristina Cusenza, "Artists from Syria in the International Artworld: Mediators of a Universal Humanism," *Arts* 8 (2019): 45.

⁴ Ricarda Drüeke, Elisabeth Klaus, and Anita Moser, "Spaces of Identity in the Context of Media Images and Artistic Representations of Refugees and Migration in Austria," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24 (2021): 164.

⁵ Giselinde Kuipers, Sylvia Holla, and Elise Van der Laan, "Structure, Strategy and Self in Cultural Peripheries: Theorizing the Periphery in the Polish and Dutch Fashion Fields," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 63 (2022): 216.

The central research question is: how is the perception of classical ballet practice re-established and transformed through interactions between migrant artists, local cultural institutions, and media discourses, within the broader context of war-induced displacement? The case study focuses on performances by the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade during 2024 and 2025, including productions of *The Nutcracker*⁶ and *Swan Lake*,⁷ staged in cooperation with local cultural venues. In this article, the term *Ukrainian Classical Ballet* is not used to denote the entirety of Ukrainian classical ballet as a national tradition, nor a historically unified stylistic formation. Instead, it refers more narrowly to the touring productions, professional performers, and public discursive framing through which the company was presented in Belgrade during 2024 and 2025. The term is therefore employed as a case-specific analytical designation, limited to the concrete transnational performance context examined in this study.⁸ The article does not seek to define Ukrainian ballet exhaustively, but to examine how it becomes legible within a specific host context through repertoire, institutions, and media representation. This article adopts a qualitative case study approach, combining discourse analysis of media and promotional texts with contextual institutional analysis of venues, organizers, and performance settings. It approaches transnational artistic collaboration as a situated cultural process through which professional networks and symbolic visibility are produced. The methodological framework combines three interrelated perspectives: analysis of the artistic practice, examination of the institutional context of performances, and analysis of the media discourse. Artistic practice is considered through repertoire, modes of presentation, and the professional positioning of the ballet company within the local cultural environment. Institutional analysis focuses on the venues, organizers, and cultural infrastructures that enable performances and shape their visibility. Media discourse analysis examines how the presence of the Ukrainian ballet in Belgrade is framed in Serbian and regional media, including online news portals, cultural magazines, promotional texts, and official digital platforms of the troupe and local organizers. The empirical corpus consists of selected publicly available materials related to the performances in Belgrade during 2024 and 2025, especially *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*. These materials are treated as discursive and institutional texts through which artistic collaboration, mobility, and cultural value are articulated. The aim is not to verify media reports, but to identify dominant narratives, recurring themes, and patterns of symbolic visibility.

⁶ Snežana Rakić, “The Nutcracker at the MTS Dvorana,” *Serbian Monitor*, December 1, 2025, <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/the-nutcracker-at-the-mts-dvorana/>.

⁷ Snežana Rakić, “Ukrainian Classical Ballet to Perform Swan Lake in Belgrade,” *Serbian Monitor*, December 27, 2024, <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/ukrainian-classical-ballet-to-perform-swan-lake-in-belgrade/>.

⁸ In using the term *Ukrainian Classical Ballet*, this article follows the public designation found in venue and promotional materials related to the touring productions discussed here, while employing it in a narrower analytical sense specific to the case study. See “Ukrainian Classical Ballet,” Thessaloniki Concert Hall, accessed March 22, 2026, <https://www.tch.gr/default.aspx?id=4375&lang=en-GB&page=44>; and Rakić, “Ukrainian Classical Ballet to perform Swan Lake in Belgrade.”

Motion beyond displacement

The artistic practice of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade is characterized by a clear emphasis on continuity, professional stability, and commitment to the classical ballet canon.⁹ Although the Belgrade source base centers on only two titles, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, these repeated productions provide sufficient material for analyzing artistic practice through repertoire, public self-presentation, visual framing, and performer profiling. In announcements for *The Nutcracker*, the production is linked to the choreography of Valeriy Petrovich Kovtun and is described through elaborate stage design, costumes, giant video beams, and, in later announcements, contemporary video projections.¹⁰ Public materials for *Swan Lake* similarly frame the performance as a classical ballet event and describe the troupe as a collective of award-winning soloists from major European theatres such as Teatro di Roma, Magdeburg Opera House, Teatr Wielki, and Opera Narodowa Warszawa.¹¹ In some promotional descriptions, the artistic leadership of the ensemble is also identified through Alessandro Bonavita, while the company is presented as preserving classical ballet tradition while incorporating selected modern choreographic elements.¹² These materials make it possible to analyze artistic practice not only through the titles performed, but through the public construction of style, professionalism, and legitimacy. Rather than foregrounding experimental reinterpretation or explicit political commentary, the Belgrade presentations emphasize continuity, canon, visual spectacle, and the authority of internationally mobile soloists. In that sense, the Ukrainian Classical Ballet appears in Belgrade less as an emergency cultural presence defined solely by war and more as a professionally legible transnational ballet formation.

The transnational character of this practice becomes visible in the mobility of dancers, touring structures, and the adaptation of productions to different performance venues. Although classical ballet is often associated with institutional stability and national traditions, in this case it functions as a mobile cultural form maintained by transnational networks of performers, choreographers, and organizers. Such mobility corresponds with understanding of transnational cultural processes as sustained relations and ongoing connections, rather than as singular acts of displacement.¹³ At the same time, the artistic choices observed in this case resist an interpretative framework based solely on rupture or cultural loss. While the broader context of war and forced migration remains inseparable from the presence of Ukrainian artists abroad, the performances themselves emphasize continuity of artistic identity and professional legitimacy. The decision to present canonical repertoire also shapes the

⁹ Gail Grant, *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet* (Dover Publications, 1982), 45.

¹⁰ Snežana Rakić, “The Glittery Edition of *The Nutcracker* at MTS Dvorana,” *Serbian Monitor*, November 27, 2023, <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/the-glittery-edition-of-the-nutcracker-at-mts-dvorana/>.

¹¹ Rakić, “Swan Lake’ at MTS Dvorana”.

¹² City Magazine, “Ukrajinski klasični balet ‘Labudovo jezero’ MTS Dvorana,” March 5, 2024, <https://citymagazine.danas.rs/vodic/ukrajinski-klasicni-balet-labudovo-jezero-mts-dvorana/>.

¹³ Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (Routledge, 1996), 10.

power dynamics of transnational collaboration. By working within an internationally recognized artistic canon, the Ukrainian Classical Ballet positions itself as an equal participant in cultural exchange, not as a marginal or dependent actor. In this view, the case challenges simplified center–periphery models of cultural production and enables Belgrade to function as a legitimate site of artistic circulation, not merely as a secondary or receptive space. This dynamic can be read through Immanuel Wallerstein’s distinction between center, semi-periphery, and periphery, understood here as a relational rather than strictly geographic model.¹⁴ In that sense, Belgrade appears as a semi-peripheral site where artistic legitimacy is not simply imported from dominant cultural centers, but negotiated through recognizable repertoire, institutional hosting, and public presentation. The repeated staging of *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake* shows how canonical form can function as a shared professional language through which Ukrainian ballet becomes legible and institutionally validated outside the traditional centers of European cultural authority.

Wallerstein’s model is useful here not because it fixes Belgrade within a static hierarchy, but because it makes visible how cultural value circulates across uneven positions. Artistic practice thus emerges as a key mechanism in stabilizing transnational collaboration: classical ballet functions not only as an aesthetic form, but as a shared professional language that supports cooperation across borders, institutions, and audiences, even under conditions shaped by geopolitical crisis.

Displacement is most theorized as a condition of forced movement accompanied by loss, rupture, and instability. In cultural theory, it is often associated with exile and the disruption of social and professional continuity.¹⁵ While such interpretations remain crucial, they risk framing displacement exclusively as a traumatic state, leaving limited space for analyzing how artistic practices persist and transform under conditions of forced mobility. Recent theoretical approaches have challenged this reduction, conceptualizing displacement not as a singular event, but as a continuous process inherent to modern forms of movement, where mobility precedes stability.¹⁶ From this perspective, displacement does not necessarily signify the suspension of practice, but a reconfiguration of its spatial and institutional conditions. Productive dimensions of displacement, particularly in cultural and artistic fields, include the approach that mobility can generate new forms of connection, negotiation, and creative continuity.¹⁷ Applied to the case of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade, such an approach shifts the focus from interruption alone to the reconfiguration of the spatial and institutional conditions through which artistic practice is sustained.

Classical ballet presents a particularly revealing case in this regard. As a performative art fundamentally structured around disciplined bodily motion, repetition, and circulation, ballet is not disrupted by movement per se. The paradox emerges

¹⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Duke University Press, 2004), 17–23.

¹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 175.

¹⁶ Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 26.

¹⁷ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Polity Press, 2018), 89–91.

when migratory movement, commonly associated with rupture, intersects with an art form already grounded in mobility. In the case of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade, displacement does not primarily appear as a break in artistic practice, but as a shift in the spatial context of performance. Technique, repertoire, and professional discipline remain stable, while the geography of performance changes. This suggests that displacement, instead of defining artistic identity, operates as a contextual condition within which transnational collaboration takes shape. The motion intrinsic to ballet allows migratory movement to be absorbed into professional practice, transforming forced mobility into a space of continued artistic production and cultural presence.

From mobility to infrastructure

While artistic mobility is a visible and often emphasized dimension of transnational collaboration, mobility alone is insufficient to sustain artistic practice across borders. Transnational artistic practice requires institutional frameworks that stabilize movement, transform temporary presence into structured collaboration, and provide symbolic and material conditions for artistic work. In this sense, institutions play a central role in translating mobility into infrastructure. Following Becker's understanding of art worlds as networks of collective action,¹⁸ artistic production depends on a range of actors, conventions, and organizational arrangements that extend beyond individual artists. Public materials allow this institutional layer to be specified more precisely. In Belgrade, performances were hosted at MTS Dvorana, specifically in its multifunctional Great Hall (Sala 1), whose stage configuration, technical equipment, and dressing rooms make it suitable for touring ballet productions, while promotional materials identify external organizing partners rather than a resident ballet institution.¹⁹ These institutional arrangements anchor transnational collaboration within a specific cultural space and allow artistic practice to function beyond the temporality of touring. From a transnational perspective, institutions also operate as mediators between global artistic networks and local cultural fields. Hannerz conceptualizes transnational connections as sustained relationships, not just episodic movements.²⁰ Applied to this case, the recurring presence of Ukrainian ballet performances in Belgrade indicates not a singular event of cultural import, but an ongoing relationship supported by institutional continuity. The repetition of performances, stable venues, and recognizable formats contributes to the normalization of transnational artistic presence within the local cultural landscape.

The role of institutions becomes even clearer when examined through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field. In Bourdieu's framework, artistic practices gain

¹⁸ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1–9.

¹⁹ MTS Dvorana, "Sala 1," accessed March 22, 2026, <https://www.mtsdvorana.rs/sala/sala-1>; *ARTPARTNER*, "The Nutcracker—Belgrade," accessed March 22, 2026, <https://artpartner.hr/show-item/the-nutcracker/>.

²⁰ Hannerz, *Transnational Connections*, 8.

legitimacy through their position within institutionalized fields of cultural production.²¹ By hosting canonical ballet productions in established venues, local institutions in Belgrade confer symbolic capital upon the Ukrainian Classical Ballet, positioning it as a legitimate cultural actor, not as a temporary or marginal presence. Institutional recognition thus transforms mobility into cultural legitimacy.

Importantly, this process also reconfigures the position of the host city. While Belgrade does not occupy a dominant position within the global cultural system, its institutions function as active gatekeepers that facilitate transnational collaboration. In doing so, they enable the city to operate as a semi-peripheral yet meaningful site of cultural circulation, where transnational artistic practices are not merely received but institutionally embedded. This shift from mobility to infrastructure highlights a key dimension of transnational artistic practice. Instead of being defined solely by movement across borders, such practices are sustained by institutional conditions that stabilize collaboration, mediate legitimacy, and enable continuity. The case of Ukrainian ballet in Belgrade thus demonstrates how institutions play a decisive role in transforming transnational mobility into an enduring cultural practice.

The activities of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade form part of a broader regional circuit of performances in cities such as Zagreb, Ljubljana, Budapest, Graz, and Trieste. This circulation reveals a shared institutional logic that supports transnational artistic collaboration beyond major global cultural centers. Across these locations, several structural similarities can be observed. First, performances are predominantly hosted by large multifunctional cultural venues, more than permanent ballet institutions (such as national theaters). Concert halls and cultural centers such as MTS Dvorana (Belgrade), Lisinski Hall (Zagreb) or Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana) function as flexible infrastructures capable of accommodating touring ballet productions. Their accessibility, audience capacity, and technical adaptability make them suitable platforms for transnational performances. Second, regional institutions tend to collaborate with external producers and touring companies more than maintaining resident ensembles. This model aligns with Becker's concept of art worlds as networks of cooperation, where artistic production relies on coordination between multiple actors more than on centralized institutional control. In all observed cases, the Ukrainian Classical Ballet enters the local cultural field as a professional partner, not as a guest requiring exceptional accommodation. Third, media promotion and audience engagement follow similar patterns across the region. Performances are framed as major cultural events, often linked to canonical repertoire and seasonal programming, but also marketed as spectacle. This emphasis on classical legitimacy contributes to institutional trust and facilitates repeated collaborations, with modern marketing campaigns that promote classical elements of trusted choreography and well-known Tchaikovsky music compositions.

Despite these similarities, important differences emerge in the institutional positioning of transnational collaboration. In cities such as Zagreb and Ljubljana,

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 32.

ballet performances are more directly integrated into established national cultural narratives, often associated with strong state-supported cultural institutions. This integration reinforces continuity with existing ballet traditions and positions touring companies within a stable national framework. In contrast, Belgrade occupies a more hybrid institutional position. In Serbia, this context is shaped by long-standing challenges affecting major state cultural institutions, including periods of organizational instability, limited resources, and disrupted programming, thus such conditions form part of the structural background against which alternative venues gain prominence. While lacking the same level of centralized ballet infrastructure, the city compensates through institutional flexibility and openness to transnational programming. Venues such as the MTS Dvorana operate at the intersection of cultural, commercial, and international circuits, enabling a pragmatic approach to collaboration. This flexibility allows transnational artistic practices to be embedded without full institutional assimilation. Another difference concerns symbolic positioning. In some regional contexts, Ukrainian ballet is framed primarily as part of a broader European classical tradition. In Belgrade, institutional framing often emphasizes both professional excellence and the contemporary context of mobility, creating a narrative that combines artistic legitimacy with the reputation of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet troupe, but without raising much awareness of displacement. In this regard, the fact that performances by the Ukrainian Classical Ballet took place in the MTS Dvorana, and not at the National Theatre in Belgrade, is analytically significant. Rather than interpreting this choice as a consequence of a single institutional decision, it can be understood as indicative of a broader shift toward flexible, multifunctional cultural venues capable of accommodating international touring productions. A more precise conclusion is that Belgrade functions as one regional node within a recurring circuit of externally organized ballet events rather than as an autonomous hub. This is supported by comparable institutional arrangements in Zagreb, where performances are staged in the Great Hall of the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall and listed under the hall's own organization; in Ljubljana, where *Swan Lake* appears at the Cankarjev dom as a lease event organized by Art Partner d.o.o.; and in Trieste, where *The Nutcracker* is programmed at the Politeama Rossetti in Sala Assicurazioni Generali as an ArtPartner production.²² The comparison with neighboring cities demonstrates that transnational artistic collaboration in the region relies less on centralized cultural authority and more on adaptable institutional infrastructures. Within this framework, Belgrade's role is distinctive but structurally comparable, highlighting how regional institutions collectively enable the circulation of artistic practice beyond traditional centers.

²² Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall, "Due to Great Interest, the Third Performance of *Swan Lake*," January 14, 2025, <https://www.lisinski.hr/en/news/zbog-velikog-interesa-i-treca-izvedba-labudeg-jeze/>; Cankarjev dom, "Labodje jezero," accessed March 22, 2026, <https://www.cd-cc.si/kultura/priredittev-druega-organizatorja/labodje-jezero>; Teatro Stabile del Friuli Venezia Giulia, *Stagione 2025–2026* (Trieste: Teatro Stabile del Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2025), section "Lo Schiaccianoci."

Media and symbolic visibility

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping the public visibility and cultural meaning of transnational artistic collaboration. In the case of the Ukrainian Classical Ballet in Belgrade, media coverage does not merely document performances but actively participates in positioning the artists within the local cultural field. Through selection of narratives, emphasis, and framing, media discourse contributes to the production of symbolic legitimacy. The media corpus examined here consists primarily of Serbian online news and event portals, culture sections, and venue-linked promotional materials rather than extended critical reviews. It includes texts published by *Serbian Monitor*, *City Magazine*, *N1 Beograd (Kultura)*, and *Dan u Beogradu*, alongside promotional materials linked to the MTS Dvorana performances.²³ Across these outlets, the Ukrainian Classical Ballet is repeatedly framed through a vocabulary of canon, prestige, spectacle, and audience demand. *Serbian Monitor* presents *Swan Lake* as a “classic performance” by a troupe of prize-winning soloists from major European theatres, while *City Magazine* describes *Swan Lake* as an “artistic spectacle” staged on the Great Stage of the MTS Dvorana and emphasizes international awards, classical tradition, and selected modern choreographic elements.²⁴ *N1 Beograd* announces the March 2025 performances as a major cultural event and identifies named soloists, while *Dan u Beogradu* reports sold-out audiences, ovations, and the troupe’s repeated returns to Belgrade.²⁵ Taken together, these materials show that symbolic visibility is produced less through political contextualization than through recurring markers of professional excellence, canonical repertoire, visual spectacle, and public demand.

Bourdieu’s theory of the cultural field provides a useful perspective for understanding this process. Within the field of cultural production, media function as key intermediaries in the distribution of symbolic capital.²⁶ By emphasizing professionalism, institutional recognition, and audience approval, media discourse reinforces the ballet’s legitimate position within the local cultural hierarchy. Visibility thus becomes a form of symbolic capital that stabilizes transnational artistic presence. Importantly, this process also reflects the structural position of the host environment. In a cultural context marked by institutional fragmentation and limited state support, media visibility compensates for the absence of centralized cultural authority. Media platforms assume an amplifying role, extending the reach and legitimacy of transnational collaboration beyond the performance space itself. Media do not simply reflect institutional collaboration, they actively contribute to its consolidation by shaping how artistic mobility is understood, evaluated, and normalized within the public sphere.

²³ Dan u Beogradu, “Labudovo jezero u rasprodatoj MTS Dvorani,” March 10, 2025, <https://www.danubeogradu.rs/2025/03/labudovo-jezero-u-rasprodatoj-mts-dvorani/>.

²⁴ B.G.T., “Balet Krcko Oraščić ponovo u Beogradu,” *Politika*, November 3, 2025, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/707957/balet-krcko-orascic-ponovo-u-beogradu>.

²⁵ N1 Beograd, “Balet Labudovo jezero 9. i 10. marta u Beogradu,” February 28, 2025, <https://n1info.rs/kultura/balet-labudovo-jezero-9-i-10-marta-u-beogradu/>.

²⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 39.

In this case, symbolic visibility refers to the form of public recognition produced through media representation that positions the ballet as a legitimate, professional, and culturally valued artistic practice. Visibility is not generated by sensationalism or political framing, but by alignment with established markers of high culture, such as canonical repertoire, technical excellence, institutional presentation, and audience reception. Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework, such visibility functions as a form of symbolic capital, accumulated when cultural practices are publicly recognized as legitimate within the field of cultural production.²⁷

A defining feature of this symbolic visibility is the deliberate distancing of artistic representation from the political sphere. Media texts largely refrain from explicit references to war, geopolitics, or displacement when reporting on ballet performances. This absence should not be interpreted as a lack of contextual awareness, but rather as a field-specific strategy. By maintaining the separation between artistic value and external political and economic pressures, media discourse contributes to the preservation of artistic autonomy and allows the ballet to circulate as a professional and aesthetic practice, not as a political statement. This form of symbolic visibility can also be understood as a mechanism of concealment through display, in which intensified representation does not expose structural conditions but instead redirects attention toward aesthetic value and professional legitimacy, thereby neutralizing political context.²⁸ This strategy produces clear advantages. Symbolic visibility grounded in professionalism enables the normalization of transnational artistic presence and facilitates institutional acceptance. Artists are evaluated primarily based on their technique and performance, which strengthens their position within the cultural field and supports sustained collaboration. At the same time, this form of visibility carries inherent limitations. By neutralizing political context, media representation risks obscuring the structural conditions that shape artistic mobility and collaboration. As Bourdieu notes, the autonomy of the cultural field is always partial and historically conditioned, sustained by exclusions as much as by recognition.²⁹

Symbolic visibility thus operates as an ambivalent mechanism. It stabilizes the transnational artistic practice by embedding it within legitimate cultural frameworks, while simultaneously narrowing the range of meanings available for public interpretation. This tension reflects a broader dynamic of the cultural field, in which artistic autonomy is secured through selective disengagement from political discourse.

Conclusion

Based on analyses of artistic practice, institutional infrastructures, and media representation, it is argued that transnational artistic practice cannot be reduced to mobility across borders or interpreted solely within frameworks of displacement.

²⁷ Ibid., 40.

²⁸ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Zone Books, 1994), 12–13.

²⁹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 38.

More specifically, the case points to new forms of professional networks built through cooperation among mobile soloists, external organizers, venue-based hosts, and recurring regional touring circuits. It also reveals new forms of cultural visibility produced through online event portals, promotional journalism, and post-event media coverage that frame Ukrainian ballet through canon, prestige, audience demand, and professional excellence rather than through displacement alone.

At the same time, the analysis has drawn attention to the role of institutions and media in shaping the conditions of transnational collaboration. While institutional flexibility and media visibility contribute to the normalization and legitimization of artistic mobility, they also tend to neutralize political context by foregrounding artistic autonomy and professionalism. This tension clarifies the structural conditions under which transnational artistic practices become intelligible and sustainable within the cultural field. By situating Belgrade as an active node within a regional network of cultural circulation, the article offers insight into how transnational artistic practices are maintained in semi-peripheral contexts marked by both instability and opportunity.

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