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### Abstract

Contemporary dance is used across various dance genres and is recognized to have diverse meanings. Similar to the postmodern era, it is difficult to pin down, giving it a unique and constantly evolving definition. I investigate the term contemporary dance as it has played out in the history of dance. My research asks: Is postmodern dance contemporary dance? This is motivated by the desire to better understand the aesthetic principles shared between postmodern forms of artistic expression and contemporary dance, as we understand today, especially in practices such as improvisation. By engaging with scholarly sources and analyzing choreographic videos, I will analyze the similarities and differences by applying them to the postmodern historical contexts of the sixties. Thus far, scholars such as Ramsay Burt, Sally Banes, and Beatrice Volbea, have discovered similarities in the motivation of both dance genres. This includes the desire to explore dance and complicate its existing structures openly and without constraints. Contemporary dance is typically regarded in broad and often indefinable terms, so by contextualizing it to its predecessor, postmodern dance, the aesthetic principles and societal motivations can be better understood. Altogether, the experimental approaches taken during the era of postmodern dance have resulted in lasting aesthetic effects on what is now considered contemporary dance.