



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

**EXPLORING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN THE ELECTRONIC
MUSIC INDUSTRY AND DANCE MUSIC CULTURE: THE
EXAMPLE OF LISBON**

Internship Report submitted to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies
(Management of the Arts and Culture)

By

Andrea Delle Monache

Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2024



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Under the supervision of Professor Adriana Martins

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Abstract

This internship report discusses my traineeship at Ritmo Fulcral Agency in Lisbon between September 2023 and February 2024. During this period, I had the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in the management, production, and dissemination of electronic dance music, what led me to select the contemporary dance music industry, its evolution over time, and the state-of-the-art in clubbing as the focus of my internship report.

Through a focused examination of my internship at the Lisbon-based music agency Ritmo Fulcral, this study traces the evolution of electronic dance music from its countercultural roots to its contemporary commercial landscape. By delving into the historical, cultural, and economic dimensions of this genre, the research highlights the intricate interplay between artists, labels, and fans. A particular emphasis is placed on the role of independent music agencies in shaping local music scenes and supporting emerging talent. Moreover, the study examines the unique characteristics of the dance music industry, including its underground ethos, democratic structures, and complex relationship with mainstream culture.

Through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates knowledge from the fields of Cultural Studies, Music Studies, and Sociology, theories of reputed experts on the electronic music industry, empirical observations and firsthand accounts from interviews, this report offers a nuanced understanding of the industry, its cultural significance, and the role of agencies like Ritmo Fulcral in shaping its future.

Keywords

Electronic music, dance music, clubbing, culture, electronic music scene, record labels, independence, Lisbon.

Resumo

Este relatório discute o meu estágio na agência Ritmo Fulcral em Lisboa, entre setembro de 2023 e fevereiro de 2024. Neste período, tive a oportunidade de ganhar experiência em primeira mão na gestão, produção e disseminação da música eletrônica de dança, o que me levou a selecionar como tema do meu relatório esta indústria contemporânea de música, a sua evolução ao longo do tempo e o estado da arte do chamado *clubbing*.

Através de uma análise centrada no meu estágio na agência de música Ritmo Fulcral, este estudo traça a evolução da música eletrônica de dança, das suas raízes contraculturais à paisagem comercial contemporânea. Ao aprofundar as dimensões histórica, cultural e económica deste género, a investigação coloca em relevo a relação intrincada entre artistas, editoras e fãs. Ênfase particular é dada ao papel das agências independentes de música na formação de cenas musicais locais e no apoio aos talentos emergentes. Além disso, o estudo examina as características únicas da indústria da música de dança, incluindo o seu carácter *underground*, as suas estruturas democráticas e a sua relação complexa com a cultura dominante.

Através de uma abordagem multidisciplinar que integra conhecimentos dos domínios dos Estudos de Cultura, Estudos de Música e da Sociologia, teorias propostas por reputados especialistas na indústria da música eletrónica, observações empíricas e relatos de entrevistas em primeira mão, este relatório oferece uma compreensão variada da indústria, do seu significado cultural e do papel de agências como a Ritmo Fulcral na definição do seu futuro.

Palavras-chave

Música eletrónica, música de dança, clubbing, cultura, cena da música eletrónica, gravadoras, independência, Lisboa.

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Introduction

This internship report summarizes the outcomes of the internship I completed within the framework of the Master's program in Culture Studies (specialization in Arts Management) at the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon.

The report provides a detailed analysis of my internship experience, conducted from early September 2023 to the end of February 2024 at Ritmo Fulcral, a Lisbon-based agency specializing in electronic music that offers artist and label booking and management services, produces electronic music events, and provides programming and artistic direction services to clubs and venues. My internship at the agency, besides allowing me to delve into the dynamic world of the contemporary electronic music industry, and to acquire practical skills and knowledge, particularly in the areas of dance music distribution and promotion, provided me with the opportunity to learn how to organize and execute musical events.

The decision to undertake an internship at an agency specializing in electronic music stemmed from a deep-seated curiosity and a strong desire to gain a comprehensive understanding of this cultural sector. My interest in electronic music has always driven me to deepen my knowledge, explore its nuances, and comprehend its intricate dynamics. When the opportunity arose to observe the inner workings of the music industry firsthand, I did not hesitate for a moment. I recognized that this experience could serve as a springboard towards a professional career in the music world, allowing me to engage closely with clubs, subcultures, and the wider ecosystem that has always held an irresistible allure.

The prospect of contributing, even in a small way, to the promotion and dissemination of a musical genre that I have a profound appreciation for filled me with enthusiasm from the outset. I have always admired the vibrant energy of clubs, the creativity of musicians, and the passion of the crowds, and I have aspired to contribute to this community. The internship presented itself as a unique opportunity to transform this passion into a profession, to develop my skills, and to learn from established professionals in the field.

The comprehensive overview of the contemporary electronic music industry and scene offered in this report results from my personal experience at Ritmo Fulcral and from

my need to understand the mechanisms that govern the music industry (particularly as far as dance music is concerned); the motivations that drive passionate individuals to contribute to this genre through the launch of labels and events, the production of music, and the participation in events where this music is played, what enabled me to explore attendees' behaviors and choices. In my analysis of the dance music world, I also tried to provide satisfactory answers to the questions that arose during my professional experience.

Although electronic music has not been extensively explored by the academic community, I have always believed that what transpires within the confines of an underground club or in front of a wall of speakers at a rave in a remote corner of the planet is a cultural phenomenon of profound significance, more than worthy of detailed analysis. This academic study seeks, therefore, to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding electronic music culture, shedding light on its intricacies and complexities, and providing a nuanced understanding of this vibrant and ever-evolving cultural landscape. The discussion of the role of Ritmo Fulcral and of my internship activities within the agency is anchored on the investigation of the historical and cultural context of dance music from mainstream disco's decline to its resurgence as an underground movement that rejects the star system and prioritizes genre over individual artists. Moreover, in my attempt to delineate the genre's identity since its inception, I highlight the importance attributed to community building and to communal values such as inclusivity and acceptance.

Furthermore, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the contemporary music industry, offering insights into the complexities of the music distribution and promotion process. It examines the challenges and opportunities faced by independent artists and labels in the digital age, highlighting the role of agencies like Ritmo Fulcral in supporting and promoting emerging talent. The study also explores Ritmo Fulcral's pivotal role in Lisbon's electronic music scene, detailing the city's vibrant and evolving landscape, the challenges it faces due to socio-economic factors, and the rise of local talent that is shaping the scene's unique identity.

In the first chapter, I frame my internship at the electronic music agency Ritmo Fulcral in Lisbon as the culmination of my personal, academic, and professional journey. My interest in analyzing the electronic music and Lisbon's vibrant nightlife served as motivation for this choice. The chapter provides an overview of Ritmo Fulcral agency by highlighting its focus on dance music genres and its mission to advance dance music culture

by nurturing a community of enthusiasts and creators. It also delves into the historical context of dance music, tracing its origins as a countercultural outlet for marginalized communities and discussing the evolution of DJs and the concept of the Body without Organs in rave culture. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the significance of community in dance music culture, setting the stage for a more in-depth exploration in subsequent chapters.

The second chapter explores the unique dynamics of the dance music industry, tracing its evolution from the decline of disco to its underground resurgence. This new era embraced secrecy, exclusivity, and a rejection of the star system, prioritizing genre over individual artists. The internship at Ritmo Fulcral's discography division provided firsthand insights into the industry, detailing the agency's portfolio of record labels and the intricacies of music distribution and promotion. The chapter also examines the complex causes of disco's demise, its lasting influence on dance music, and the genre's democratic ethos, manifested in its participatory nature, decentralized networks, and accessible technology. Additionally, it touches upon the oppositional nature of dance music, inheriting a legacy of anti-corporatism and strengthened by moral panics. The chapter concludes by offering a holistic view of the dance music industry, highlighting its challenges and opportunities.

The final chapter shifts focus to Ritmo Fulcral's DJ management, event production, and consultancy divisions, all deeply embedded in Lisbon's music scene. It starts with an exploration of the city's electronic music history, from the groundbreaking Frágil club in 1982 to the contemporary scene influenced by both rave legacy and emerging local talent. Despite challenges like high living costs and limited international recognition for Portuguese artists, the scene remains vibrant, driven by a Do-It-Yourself ethos and initiatives promoting inclusivity. The rise of Afro-Portuguese electronic music further adds to Lisbon's unique cultural identity. The chapter subsequently analyzes Ritmo Fulcral's divisions and details their functions and contributions. The internship experience, particularly in the discography division, is also recounted, highlighting the valuable skills and insights gained. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the agency's role in shaping Lisbon's electronic music landscape and the transformative nature of the internship experience.

Scattered throughout the body of the text are several photographs from the Deskrte photographic archive, a photography project by my friend and flatmate, Gustavo Salvador, which capture some of the places and people I discuss in this report. I was with Gustavo when he took almost all of the photographs included, making the selection a collection of shared memories. Created with the primary goal of capturing live music (concerts, DJ sets, festivals, etc.) using disposable black and white film cameras, Deskrte offers a unique perspective on the art of photography.

These cameras, lightweight and easy to use, are accessible to anyone, regardless of their photography skills. The resulting images, often characterized by low quality and limited flash range, serve as a source of inspiration for the project. Salvador's artistic process involves editing the photographs to achieve a desired aesthetic, transforming the original images into something entirely new.

Deskrte is also a critique of the disposable camera culture, highlighting the environmental impact of mass production and planned obsolescence. By drawing attention to the existence of these cameras, the project aims to stimulate discussions about sustainable alternatives.

For Salvador, Deskrte is also a personal journey, a way to preserve and relive the emotional moments he experiences at concerts and festivals. Each photograph is a snapshot of a particular time and place, capturing the energy, the atmosphere, and the emotions of the moment.

Salvador's approach to photography can be described as "slow photography," as he avoids the immediate gratification of social media sharing. Instead, he allows the photographs to mature over time, becoming historical records of the events and the emotions they evoke.

I have included these photographs because I believe that Deskrte is, in some ways, a photographic translation of one of the ultimate goals of this internship report: to portray a panorama of the contemporary music and electronic scene in its various facets. I recognize in Gustavo the same sensitivity I have in wanting to portray and analyze the cultural phenomena in which we are immersed on a daily basis.

The analysis of this internship report is conducted through a multidisciplinary lens, drawing from Cultural Studies, Music Studies, and Sociology. Foundational theories and authors are leveraged to provide a comprehensive understanding of the electronic music

industry. Tim Lawrence's work offers an in-depth analysis of dance music culture, while Will Straw's insights explore the concept of the music scene and its transformation. David Hesmondhalgh's research provides a meticulous examination of the music industry, and Sarah Thornton's seminal work on club cultures serves as an authoritative guide. Hillegonda Rietveld's research delves into the phenomenological and experiential aspects of dance music culture. In sum, by integrating these theoretical perspectives with empirical observations and firsthand accounts from interviews, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the electronic music industry, its cultural significance, and the role of agencies like Ritmo Fulcral in shaping its future.

Chapter 1. Building Community: The Evolution of Ritmo Fulcral and Its Role in Dance Music Culture

1.1. My Path to the Electronic Music Industry

During my six-month curricular internship at the electronic music agency Ritmo Fulcral, undertaken within the framework of the Culture Studies program with a specialization in Management of the Arts and Culture at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the multifaceted world of the contemporary music industry. The internship was the culmination of my personal, academic, and professional experiences, all of which ultimately led me to pursue a career in the electronic music industry.

My passion for electronic music and clubbing culture began to take root over three years ago when I first moved to Lisbon from Italy, my home country, as part of the Erasmus experience in the first half of 2021.

Upon arrival, I was immediately captivated by the city's vibrant and diverse nightlife scene. Despite its smaller scale compared to European metropolises like Rome, Paris or Berlin, the Portuguese capital boasts an impressive network of clubs, venues, bars, and spaces dedicated to the pulsating rhythms of electronic music. This initial personal immersion in Lisbon's electronic music scene was further validated and deepened through interviews I conducted with the entire Ritmo Fulcral team. Their insights underscored the significance of the city's vibrant nightlife and its ongoing evolution. This emphasis resonated deeply with my own observations, highlighting the unique cultural influence of electronic music in Lisbon. The city's rich tapestry, woven with the sounds of electronic music, provided the fertile ground for the projects and activities I participated in during my internship.

One such insightful conversation was with Christian Vismara, a DJ, producer, and key figure within Lisbon's electronic music scene. During our interview, Vismara elaborated on the deep integration of clubbing and electronic music into Lisbon's daily life. He emphasized how these elements are embedded in the fabric of the city's social and cultural activities, a phenomenon more pronounced in Lisbon than many other cities. His words

echoed my own observations, further solidifying my fascination with Lisbon's unique electronic music culture: a fervent, diverse, and thriving community of artists and enthusiasts from various backgrounds.

Beyond the initial spark ignited by Lisbon's nightlife scene, my academic background in Arts Management played a significant role in shaping my career aspirations. Courses undertaken during my Master of Arts program, particularly those focused on the organization and management of cultural projects, provided valuable insights into practical applications. Furthermore, the opportunity to interact with professionals working in the creative industries fueled my desire to contribute to the development of cultural projects. Additionally, the program's vibrant international and multicultural environment fostered intellectual growth and exposed me to diverse artistic and musical expressions, further stimulating my curiosity about the arts and entertainment sector.

It is noteworthy that some connections established during the program, among other factors, led me to discover Ritmo Fulcral and their party, Whoopee. This initial discovery significantly intensified my intention to gain practical experience within the electronic music industry.

Finally, my limited professional background also played a role in shaping my career path. In May 2023, I volunteered in setting up Waking Life, a midsummer festival focused on creativity and artistic experimentation. This experience Equipped me with a solid understanding of the intricate organization behind an independent festival, from fundraising to volunteer coordination, and managing an event hosting thousands of attendees.

Further enriching this experience was my volunteer work at Moga Caparica 2023, a commercial electronic music festival in Costa de Caparica. This contrasting experience gave me a deeper understanding of the logistics and audience dynamics of a larger-scale, commercially driven event. Together, these volunteer experiences not only solidified my ambition for exploring the operational side of the electronic music world but also offered invaluable practical knowledge about event production specifics.

Beyond professional experiences, my deep engagement with electronic music extended to various aspects. As a listener, I actively sought out and consumed new releases. As a budding DJ, I experimented with music mixing, further deepening my understanding of the creative process. Finally, my volunteer work in event production broadened my perspective on the behind-the-scenes workings of electronic music events.

This multifaceted journey, encompassing personal experiences, academic pursuits, and diverse professional engagements, ultimately led me to pursue an internship at Ritmo Fulcral. The internship provided the perfect opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application within the electronic music industry.

1.2. Ritmo Fulcral: the Origins

Ritmo Fulcral, headquartered in Lisbon, emerges as a groundbreaking and distinctive entity within the field of DJ management, record labels, and electronic music events. Its particular focus is on the broad genre of dance music, with a specific preference for Disco music, Funk music, House music and their various subgenres, including Disco House, Nu-Disco, Deep House, and Tech House, among others. The name of the agency, as elucidated by Maurizio Clemente, its founder and production manager, embodies a profound ethos of inclusion and convergence. Acting as a nexus, Ritmo Fulcral gathers a wide range of musical talents, ranging from musicians to DJs to producers from different corners of the world. Within this ensemble of artists, several influences and creative energies converge, resulting in a dynamic "fulcral rhythm" that infuses every facet of the agency's operations.

Established in 2020, Ritmo Fulcral is not only a new venture but also represents the culmination of Maurizio Clemente's extensive and rich experience in the industry, a journey he generously shared during an in-depth telephonic interview. Through this conversation, he shed light on the roots and the core motivations of this ambitious and innovative adventure.

Clemente explained that his initial foray into the professional world came away from music, his primary interest, toward fashion, his other great passion. At the age of 20, he opened his first store and later worked as a designer for several prestigious companies. Feeling the need for a change, he ventured to London in the 1990s, where he began his career in the music industry. There, he spent five years collaborating with prominent musicians such as Kid Batchelor and his label Warriors Dance, which played a significant role in inspiring the British electronic music band "The Prodigy", also recognized as one of the groups that contributed to spreading rave culture on a media level. (Roberts, 2019)

Upon returning to his hometown, Rimini, Clemente did not veer away from the musical path he began in the UK, but rather continued to shape his career trajectory within the music industry, specializing in a range of genres spanning from disco and funk to house. His pivotal role in the rise of house music in Italy is noteworthy, as he championed its cause through the clubs dotting the Italian Adriatic coast and contributed to esteemed labels such as Flying Records & UMM in the capacity of an A&R executive. Moreover, he founded his first label, Zippy Records, in the UK during the era of vinyl-only releases, forging collaborations with David Piccioni of Black Market Records Distribution.

Over the years, Clemente's career has evolved, leading him to organize music conferences throughout Italy and manage a roster of internationally renowned DJs, such as Tony Humphries, Kerri Chandler, Kenny Carpenter, Lenny Fontana, DJ Spen, Karizma, Nicky Siano, and numerous others. This commitment has led him to expand his influence in Spain and Portugal through strategic partnerships. Following his tenure with Flying UMM Records, he founded his own entity, Key Note Multimedia, aimed at promoting club culture through the production of documentary films such as *Italo House Story 1984-1994* and publications such as *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture 1970-1979* and *Hold On to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell And The Downtown Music Scene, 1973-1992* by Tim Lawrence—cultural artifacts that served as indispensable resources for my academic research and the subsequent composition of this internship report. At the same time, Key Note Multimedia operated the TR Records label and managed DJ bookings. However, this venture eventually ended, prompting Maurizio Clemente to pursue a new challenge. Relocating from Italy to Portugal, he embarked on a new journey, founding Ritmo Fulcral LDA in January 2020. Through this initiative, he continues to leverage the wealth of musical experience accrued over the years, offering bespoke management and consulting services tailored for the music industry, DJs, and artists alike.

Clemente's pivotal role in introducing house music to Italy, a genre previously unfamiliar to the Italian audience, his endeavors as a DJ manager significantly contributing to the global dissemination and prestige of dance music, and his dedication to promoting club culture through conferences and the publication of books and documentaries, as disclosed during the interview, serve as fundamental pillars for my research.

During my collaboration with him at Ritmo Fulcral, I delved deep into this realm, broadening my understanding of dance music, clubbing, and the music industry in general. This experience has deeply enriched my cultural repertoire and provided a robust foundation for my academic research.

1.3. Ritmo Fulcral: the Structure

The agency's organizational structure is characterized by three main divisions: discography, DJ management, inclusive of event organization, and programming and artistic direction consultancy. Each division plays a crucial role in advancing the agency's overarching mission of promoting the global culture of electronic music and providing proficient services to artists, clients, and enthusiasts alike. Through strategic collaboration, innovative thinking, and a steadfast commitment to quality, Ritmo Fulcral continues to make significant contributions to the vibrant and ever-evolving electronic music industry.

In the following, the main features of each division are detailed.

Discography

The first division is primarily dedicated to discography, encompassing a broad spectrum of activities related to label management and record releases, specifically within the dance music genre, including house, disco, and more. This division prioritizes releases that showcase cutting-edge dance music, while also paying homage to the genre's rich history. Within this division, Ritmo Fulcral oversees the entire lifecycle of music production, from scouting and signing talented artists to overseeing the mastering and distribution of tracks. Additionally, this division is responsible for crafting strategic marketing and promotional campaigns to ensure maximum exposure and success for each release. Through meticulous curation and careful attention to detail, Ritmo Fulcral's discography division strives to cultivate a diverse and compelling catalog of music that resonates with audiences worldwide. The discography division works seamlessly alongside the events and consultancy divisions, creating a holistic approach to promoting electronic music artists and culture.

DJ Management

The second division focuses on DJ management, a multifaceted role that encompasses talent representation, booking coordination, and event organization. At the core of this division is the agency's commitment to nurturing and promoting the careers of electronic music artists represented by Ritmo Fulcral. This involves liaising with promoters,

venues, and festival organizers to secure performance opportunities for the agency's roster of DJs and ensuring their professional and artistic needs are met. Furthermore, the DJ management division takes an active role in event planning and execution, leveraging its expertise to curate captivating and memorable experiences for audiences. By seamlessly integrating artist representation with event management, Ritmo Fulcral aims to create synergistic opportunities that benefit both its clients and the broader electronic music community. Although event organization may be perceived as an independent division, Maurizio Clemente considers it as an essential element of its DJ management operations, given that the DJs featured on the agency's roster are an indispensable component of the parties organized by Ritmo Fulcral.

The agency's events division is responsible for conceptualizing, planning, and executing a wide range of musical gatherings and performances, ranging from intimate release parties to larger-scale events, often featuring internationally renowned guests and/or in collaboration with other parties worldwide.

Prominent artists who have performed at Whoopee parties include Jamie 3:26, Kamma & Masalo, Satoshi Tomiie, Don Carlos, Antal, and Kid Batchelor. Additionally, the agency has collaborated with influential parties such as The Fabulous and Rainbow Disco Club. Drawing upon its extensive network of artists, promoters, and industry partners, Ritmo Fulcral is committed to creating inclusive and dynamic events that celebrate the richness and diversity of electronic music culture. Whether it's curating lineups, securing venues, or coordinating production logistics, the events division plays a pivotal role in bringing the agency's artistic vision to life.

Programming and Artistic Direction Consultancy

The third division offers consultancy services in venue programming and artistic direction. Leveraging Ritmo Fulcral's expertise gained through its extensive industry experience and specialized skills, personalized guidance and support are given to clients seeking to enhance their music programming, elevate their artistic direction, or optimize their venue operations. From advising on artist bookings and event curation to offering strategic insights on branding and marketing, Ritmo Fulcral's consultancy division serves as a valuable resource for venues and organizations looking to thrive in the competitive electronic music landscape.

1.4. Ritmo Fulcral's Fundamentals: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Mission, vision, and core values are the guiding principles that delineate Ritmo Fulcral's purpose, aspirations, and ethos within the dynamic landscape of the electronic music industry.

Established with a clear and ambitious objective, the agency is dedicated to advancing the global culture of dance music, leveraging its extensive expertise and commitment for the genre. At the heart of Ritmo Fulcral's mission lies a dedication to nurturing a vibrant community of electronic music enthusiasts and creators. With a keen focus on fostering talent and innovation, the agency endeavors to provide a platform for passionate and creative individuals to express themselves artistically and contribute to the ongoing evolution of the music industry.

In pursuit of its mission, Ritmo Fulcral operates on both a regional and global scale, with strategic initiatives aimed at promoting the proliferation of electronic music culture.

At the European level, the agency is deeply engaged in the facilitation of DJ bookings, connecting artists with opportunities to showcase their talent and reach new audiences. Simultaneously, on a broader international stage, Ritmo Fulcral is dedicated to launching and supporting emerging artists, as well as established ones, thereby contributing to the diverse and ever-expanding discography of electronic music.

However, Ritmo Fulcral's mission extends beyond mere business endeavors, encompassing a broader commitment to enriching the cultural fabric of its home base in Lisbon and beyond. Recognizing the transformative power of music in fostering social bonds and connection, the agency actively participates in and promotes alternative music scenes, organizing events such as the Whoopee parties. Through these initiatives, Ritmo Fulcral seeks to create immersive and inclusive experiences that celebrate the spirit of electronic music while cultivating a sense of belonging and unity within the community.

In essence, Ritmo Fulcral's mission is not just about advancing the interests of the agency but about championing the broader cultural significance of electronic music. With a steadfast dedication to fostering creativity, innovation, and inclusivity, the agency aspires to be a driving force behind the continued growth and evolution of the electronic music industry, leaving a lasting impact on both its community and the global music landscape.

1.5. Impact of Ritmo Fulcral's Vision on my Research

This research is based on a deep curiosity and passion for understanding the complex interplay between cultural phenomena and societal dynamics. Through an immersive exploration of dance music culture, I aim to unravel its complexities and shed light on its multifaceted significance in contemporary society. Through rigorous analysis and critical inquiry, I endeavor to uncover the mechanisms behind the evolution of the dance music industry and its broader cultural implications. Additionally, by examining the role of nightclubs as cultural institutions and social spaces, I hope to highlight their contributions to community building, artistic expression, and cultural exchange. In this way, I seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the cultural, social, and economic dimensions of dance music, enriching our understanding of its transformative power and enduring legacy.

My academic exploration finds its starting point in the focus of the agency Ritmo Fulcral, with particular attention to its mission and vision that guide the endeavors of its team.

Gathering insights from various sources, including the agency's official channels and interviews with its staff, a cohesive narrative of Ritmo Fulcral's overall goals and aspirations emerges.

At the core of Ritmo Fulcral's mission and vision is a deep commitment to fostering a global community centered on the vibrant culture of dance music. Through deliberate strategies and collaborative endeavors, the agency is steadfast in its efforts to amplify the cultural significance of electronic music and make substantial contributions to the music industry's future. This dedication is prominently reflected in initiatives to cultivate a dynamic community of electronic music enthusiasts and creators, support alternative music scenes, and cultivate meaningful relationships with artists, both locally and internationally.

1.6. Background: The Role of Community in Dance Music

The values of community, acceptance, and inclusion have consistently held a central and enduring role, demonstrating their lasting significance within the culture of dance music and the broader domain of the electronic music industry. Likewise, the establishment and cultivation of a community represent the foundational cornerstone of Ritmo Fulcral agency's overarching vision. This concept is deeply ingrained within the very fabric of dance music, embracing all its various components, ranging from the audience to DJs, to industry stakeholders, without exception.

The following paragraphs examine the community values inherent in dance music through three main contexts: dance music culture, clubbing, and raving. The first section traces the evolution of dance music from the 1970s in New York City clubs, emphasizing the emergence of inclusivity and acceptance in response to LGBTQ+ intolerance. The second section discusses the changing role of DJs and the concept of dance, highlighting a shift towards more communal experiences and inclusive movements. The third section explores the clubbing experience, where participants transcend individuality and experience collective belonging through music and shared spaces, reflecting the "oceanic feeling" as described by Freud and Storr. The fourth section examines rave culture and the concept of the "Body without Organs", a philosophical idea developed by Deleuze and Guattari, demonstrating how music, lights, and psychoactive substances foster a unified community experience. Collectively, these paragraphs elucidate the role of dance music culture in fostering communal values and facilitating profound social bonds.

Furthermore, the analysis delves into the concept of community within a framework more pertinent to the contemporary electronic music industry, with a specific focus on the strategies adopted or proposed by the Ritmo Fulcral agency for the establishment and nurturing of this community. This encompasses its broadest interpretation, as a community of creators and enthusiasts collectively, as well as individually, as an audience, and a community of artists.

1.7. The Origins of Dance Music and its Communal Character

From its inception, dance music has symbolized the expression of a community bound by shared values of freedom, inclusivity, and solidarity. This vibrant cultural movement was deeply embedded in the tumultuous socio-political landscape of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. During these decades, significant shifts were occurring: the decline of the Black Power movement, the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, the oil crisis, and the onset of stagflation. Amid these changes, a new political agenda emerged, centered on civil rights, feminist activism, gay liberation, and pacifist protests. This period laid the groundwork for a cultural revolution that would soon manifest on the dance floors of New York City.

In *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*, the first volume of a trilogy exploring the history of dance music culture in New York City, Tim Lawrence (2003, 189-190) posits that the deepest cultural roots of this culture trace back to the 1960s. Lawrence argues that despite the subsequent decline in the intensity of demonstrations with the economic improvement in the early 1970s, the fundamental principles of the 1960s political agenda were not abandoned. Instead, these principles found new expression in the burgeoning clubs of New York, where the demographic cohesion and the political use of the body intrinsic to protests for sexual freedom manifested in bustling dance communities.

The “clubbers” of the era, diverse in their composition and aligned with the rainbow political coalition, bore witness to various violent repressive incidents by US law enforcement. These incidents included those targeting drag queens outside the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located in Greenwich Village, New York, and the crackdown on Black Panther activists, occurring between the late 1960s and early 1970s. Seeking in the safety of spaces like clubs a countercultural outlet for expression, they found refuge. When discussing this generation, Lawrence (2011, 233) notably emphasizes the “political thrust of early seventies dance culture”. He highlights how the ultimate aim of those within this culture was to foster a democratic, inter-cultural, and thoroughly heterogeneous community.

The events at the Stonewall Inn, characterized by the New York City police's reprisals against the establishment's owners for their refusal to pay customary bribes, which escalated into violent clashes with the drag queens who frequented the venue, were not merely isolated

incidents. Following these events, the Stonewall Inn emerged as the emblem of the gay rights activism movement and served as the catalyst for a veritable renaissance of New York City nightclubs such as the Sanctuary, situated in the marginalized neighborhood of Hell's Kitchen in midtown Manhattan. (Lawrence 2003, 32) In describing the Sanctuary, considered the first openly gay discotheque in downtown New York City, Lawrence (2003, 41) speaks of a strong sense of community fostered by the prevailing repression in the city streets, along with a range of policies implemented by the venue, such as allowing only gay individuals to manage the entrance. These venues were not only reflections of a burgeoning new community but also safe spaces where individuals could express their suppressed impulses and inclination towards provocative hedonism. Those who had lost their rights, or who had never had them, such as gay people of color and other marginalized groups, recreated their own earthly paradise within the protected environments of nightclubs, where dance floors assumed the role of true sanctuaries. (Lawrence 2003, 58) The cultural practices enacted within these "sanctuaries" were not aimed at asserting a particular gender, a specific sexual orientation, or a precise ethnic group. On the contrary, in the newly born dance ritual, the bodily experience took on a new dimension, transforming participants into active agents rather than passive subjects. Within this ecstatic dance, an alternative way of living emerged, characterized by fundamental principles such as physical rather than verbal communication, group hedonism, and the rediscovery of freedom through ecstasy. (Lawrence 2011, 233)

Stonewall represents but a brief historical interlude in the narrative of dance culture, yet undoubtedly, the surge of energy unleashed by the gay rights movements found its conduit in venues like nightclubs, which actively embraced and channeled this energy. (Lawrence 2003, 33) The celebratory ethos of the gay liberation movements was effectively transmitted to these club settings. Even H. C. Rietveld (2011, 6-8), from the London South Bank University, confirms that the convivial and festive atmosphere that permeated the disco dance floors of the 1970s found its *raison d'être* in the victorious battles for American civil rights, including those of the Black population, the LGBTQ+ community, and women. The common thread linking these struggles was always the desire to be recognized by state authorities.

Further, boosting the dance music phenomenon, was mainly the loosing of restrictions on nightclubs frequented by the gay community, which occurred around the early 1970s. From the inception of dance culture, the LGBTQ+ community was actively involved

in shaping the dance scene of New York City, and now it could finally emerge fully. (Lawrence 2003, 79) The revival of dance culture in Manhattan was therefore largely credited to the gay community. However, despite being relatively few in number, exclusively gay venues in downtown New York were a minority; most establishments hosted a mixed clientele. This fostered a blend of individuals in clubs scattered throughout the city center, where there were no restrictions based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual preferences. There were no barriers, only the desire to dance to the rhythm of the increasingly popular music. Every week, heterosexuals, gays, blacks, whites, Latino Americans shared the same dance floor, thus writing the early chapters of nightclub culture. (Lawrence 2003, 95)

The desire for change, recognition, freedom, and internationalization were the ideals resonating in all environments where the countercultural movement of the 1970s gained momentum. Those involved, in the form of newly politicized yet disenfranchised groups, sought new gathering places. The notoriously repressive acts carried out by the police made the streets of New York unsafe and perilous for meetings, while downtown New York, recently abandoned by the city's light industry, lent itself perfectly to the demands for freedom and inclusion of these new social groups. The neighborhood offered a wide availability of spaces originally intended for purposes other than dancing and revelry, which would later prove ideal for hosting New York's dance culture.

These gatherings, known as Sanctuary, Salvation, Loft, Haven, Limelight, Tambourine, and many others, were characterized by similar aesthetic and social practice: dance as a cathartic experience and a means of unfiltered self-expression through both movement and attire. Among those who frequented them, the idea was already prevalent that they were contributing to the birth of a new culture: that of dance music. The new practices developed would ultimately change the concept of discotheques and club culture forever. (Lawrence 2011, 240)

The patrons of the Loft, located in David Mancuso's apartment in NoHo, Lower Manhattan, were notably drawn from diverse social backgrounds and cultures. However, they were united by their affiliation with the counterculture that emerged in the 1960s, and those who met on the dance floor could often be found at demonstrations on the streets. A continuum connected the streets to the dance floor, politics to dancing, and the Loft served as the perfect link between them. As the late 1960s ended, protests started to decline, influenced by the impending economic shift, and the countercultural movement was

gradually losing momentum. In this context, Mancuso, the creator and host of the Loft, forged a path into the 1970s by offering a cultural and social space, particularly as an alternative for those who had lost their rights or never had them, and still held hope for the counterculture. The Loft provided those marginalized members of society with an egalitarian, open, and non-judgmental environment, causing a real rupture with the mainstream. In the case of this private club, the break occurred through the ecstasy of dance. (Lawrence 2003, 56-58)

The downtown New York party scene was notably unique. It could be deemed peripheral, as it was primarily frequented by marginalized communities, yet simultaneously central, being situated right in the city center, under the watchful eyes of all. Evident, as the popularity of these parties steadily grew, attracting even segments of the population who previously looked disdainfully upon the emerging dance culture. Yet imperceptible, as the venues where the festivities took place were predominantly abandoned industrial spaces. However, perhaps the most significant aspect of this cultural habitat lay in its operation outside the realm of the American music industry, while beginning to steer and dictate its influences. (Lawrence 2003, 12)

Manhattan had thus become the epicenter of the dance music universe, a realm that was gradually expanding further. In 1975, approximately fifty new licenses were issued for those wishing to open new dance venues. Dance floors had become the new favorite destination not only for the New York community but also for many others. The queues outside the clubs were comparable only to those formed outside cinemas showing horror films, albeit with the difference that going dancing cost less than going to the movies, which made a significant difference. Many sought to explain this true discotheque boom. Among the various hypotheses was that of Mario Mannino, owner of the Sound Machine discotheque, who argued that people flocked to clubs and sought to immerse themselves in dance due to the critical economic situation of the time. According to the venue's manager, the worsening economic situation was directly linked to the influx of people into dance halls.

With the spread of this genuine "dance fever", starting from the mid-1970s, dance floors began to be frequented by those who had never set foot in them before. While a few years earlier, the main patrons of these venues were predominantly members of the gay community, now even heterosexuals from the middle class were beginning to view dancing

and the venues where it was practiced as a means to break away from daily routine, to detach oneself, to explore a new sense of community, and to experience freedom.

The progressive practice of dancing was no longer confined to homosexuals and other marginalized communities that had popularized it but was also embraced by members of the middle class, who until then had been confined to their sheltered and, in some cases, closed environment.

The erosion of many economic certainties and the escalating unemployment rate had led this segment of the population to abandon their rigid positions and to flock *en masse* to nightclubs. (Lawrence 2003, 189)

Nightclubs and their emergent culture had become undeniably trendy, with the disco dance party assuming such significance that it was often likened to Woodstock, the music festival held in 1969 in New York state, which had become a symbol of the countercultural movement. The party model, and thus the nightlife entertainment, that various downtown clubs had initiated had reached entirely unexpected proportions, to the extent that even those who initially had reservations about nightclubs and their clientele had now embraced the countercultural demands advocated by the dance culture. All this indicated one thing only: that the events of Stonewall were not isolated incidents, and that the gay population of New York, which had initiated and energized the downtown parties, had thereby created a genuine trend that was having a significant impact on American society as a whole. (Lawrence 2003, 192)

Amidst all this, week by week, an increasing number of nightclubs were emerging, with even restaurants converting their spaces into full-fledged dance floors. The Manhattan club circuit had given rise to a phenomenon of colossal proportions, hinting that this disco-mania would soon spiral out of control for its initiators. A wave of upscale nightclubs was emerging, and the prejudice against the downtown underground club circuit had never truly dissipated. A confrontation was imminent. (Lawrence 2003, 12)

In his commentary on the Italian edition of *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979* by Tim Lawrence, Giovanni Ranieri eloquently summarizes the underlying principles championed by the dance music culture, highlighting the pressing social issues that drove its emergence. He emphasizes how the disco phenomenon was a direct response to identifiable societal circumstances. The presence of mature social imperatives, ripe for expression and urgently demanding attention, made the

rise of this phenomenon inevitable. These imperatives primarily centered around matters of sexual identity, as well as the increasing visibility of ethnic minorities and their integration into the music consumption landscape. Furthermore, Ranieri underscores the importance of the innovative forms taken by the rebellion against prevailing cultural norms, building upon the foundations laid in preceding years. Additionally, he highlights the swift and profound changes in social customs related to collective entertainment, encompassing behaviors previously marginalized or stigmatized.

Consistent with the perspectives of other cited authors, Ranieri also emphasizes the newfound dignity and opportunities afforded to historically marginalized and marginalized individuals within entertainment and leisure circuits, particularly African Americans, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

1.8. The Communal Values of Dance Music

As highlighted in the preceding section, during the early 1970s, a strong sense of community and inclusivity began to emerge in certain New York City clubs as a response to the prevalent intolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community. This ethos of acceptance and tolerance, stemming from the principles of the gay liberation movement, became deeply ingrained within disco music, the genre that had begun to emerge in those American venues, and subsequently echoed in all forms of dance music. (Maloney 2018, 234) Subsequent paragraphs will delve into aspects of the dance music culture where this ethos has manifested.

During this transformative period, the role of the DJ underwent a significant evolution. Previously, disc jockeys were typically viewed as employees under the venue's management, tasked with following prescribed patterns to manipulate the atmosphere—faster records to incite dancing and slower ones to encourage patrons to migrate to the bar, thereby enhancing the venue's revenue. However, a notable shift occurred as DJs began to operate without such directives, assuming the role of architects of a communal experience. This marked a pivotal moment where DJs and the audience engaged in a continuous and democratic exchange, establishing a sense of equality between them. DJs were no longer mere facilitators but rather active participants, compelled to consider the desires of the crowd or risk facing disapproval. Conversely, the audience acknowledged the authority of the DJ while simultaneously exerting influence, collectively shaping the soundtrack in tandem with the DJ. Communication between the two parties transcended verbal dialogue, relying instead on physical gestures and signals that conveyed sentiments ranging from excitement and enthusiasm to disinterest and indifference toward the DJ's performance. The DJ set, or performance, thus possessed a communal and shared character, as it represented the outcome of the interaction between the mixer and the audience. Tim Lawrence (2011, 234-236) specifically refers to this dynamic when he describes the DJ set as a "collectively generated musical assemblage."

The evolution towards a more communal dimension also extends to dance itself. Initially rooted in a strictly heterosexual, couple-oriented framework, dance transitioned towards a collective interconnectedness. The exclusivity of the dance floor for heterosexual couples waned as solo dancing gained traction, and individuals embraced both solo and

group movements, interacting with one another. The dynamic composition of the dancing crowd constantly evolved, marking a departure from the traditional couple-centric paradigm towards a new collective sociality that transcended previously defined social boundaries.

Following this shift, dance expression evolved into freeform movements, relegating conventional social dance patterns to the background. (Lawrence 2011, 231-234) Enhanced communication and interaction among dancers further enriched this emerging sense of community or collective sociality. Within venues like his Noho Loft, David Mancuso, as the host, foreshadowed the transformative potential of dance, recognizing its capacity to cultivate a new sense of community—a collective energy that thrived on the dance floor, fulfilling a profound human need of the era. The presence of disco balls suspended from the ceilings of the Loft, as well as in various other dance venues across 1970s New York, mirrored the vibrancy of the dance floor—an energy that was always collective and communal, never individualistic. (Lawrence 2003, 29)

Finally, it can be argued that even the music itself, in its various facets, has taken on a more collective connotation. Lawrence discusses how in downtown New York venues, DJs recreated a true sonic dominance, where the auditory element prevailed over the visual, forging a community based on sound. (Lawrence 2011, 239) Regarding the stylistic characteristics of dance music, particularly the lyrics of songs belonging to this genre, a recurring theme in early-to-mid disco is the portrayal of a communal approach to life, with positivity and pluralism being intrinsic values. For instance, "Friendship Train" by Gladys Knight, released in 1969, is an open exhortation to listeners to embrace harmony, without ethnic prejudice of any kind. Similarly, "Could Heaven Ever Be Like This" by Idris Muhammad, from 1977, portrays the sacredness of the dance floor, a place of brotherly and erotic love, where spirituality mingles with sensory experience. Meanwhile, Patti LaBelle's "The Spirit's in It" from 1981 is a hymn to community of purpose and the harmony of being and acting together. This depiction of peaceful coexistence and mutual sharing draws inspiration from the rhetoric of the Christian gospel, a significant influence that has infused religious elements into disco and subsequently much of dance music. These elements not only impacted the lyrical content of musical compositions but also influenced vocal performances and instrumental arrangements. (Maloney 2018, 234)

Despite the formal end of the American disco music era in the late 1970s, marked by the controversial Disco Demolition Night¹, the recurring themes found in disco songs did not disappear but rather persisted in the lyrics of new house tracks, which began to replace disco in the charts. For instance, "I Have a Dream" by dB featuring Bambi in 1987 still espouses the utopian idea of creating a nation, and thus a community, founded on the house groove, through love, peace, and unity. Just a year later, Joe Smooth's "Promised Land" emerged as one of the most acclaimed classics of house music, focusing on themes of emancipation and freedom to be achieved collectively. (Maloney 2018, 242)

Supporting the argument that disco music, and subsequently house music, were strongly influenced by Christian gospel, is the fact that many vocalists and producers of these genres received their musical training within ecclesiastical environments, which hold fundamental significance for much of the African American community. These church settings provided both musical training and instilled communal values and spiritual expression, deeply impacting their creative output.

Thus, it is plausible to assert that, at least in part, the communal values of inclusion and acceptance that frequently emerge in dance music have a religious root, specifically Christian. (Maloney 2018, 235)

This connection is evidenced by the recurrent themes of unity and harmony within the community found in both genres. However, a notable difference persists in terms of focus between the lyrics of disco and house music and those of sacred texts. In sacred texts, the listener's attention is consistently directed towards Jesus, the prominent figure in the Christian faith. Conversely, in dance music lyrics, the focus shifts to the community itself, becoming the primary subject of interest and celebration. In dance music, the sacred and the secular coexist and alternate harmoniously, creating a unique balance within the genre. (Maloney 2018, 243)

Moreover, in house music tracks, there is no room for utopian or otherworldly aspirations; instead, they portray a community that is already established and cohesive, representing the ideal model of how society should be. The concept of community and family

¹ Disco Demolition Night was a notorious event in the history of popular music that occurred on July 12, 1979, at Comiskey Park in Chicago. As a promotional stunt between White Sox games, DJ Steve Dahl detonated a dumpster filled with disco records, sparking a riot among fans. While Dahl later claimed that disco was already declining in popularity, his actions undoubtedly accelerated its downfall. Nile Rodgers of the disco group Chic famously likened the event to a Nazi book-burning, highlighting its cultural significance and impact. (Lynskey 2023)

is central to house music culture, with no trace of distinctions or prejudices related to gender, ethnicity, religion, or race. The music acts as a mantra, constantly reminding and inviting community members to remain united in harmonious coexistence, promoting values of solidarity and inclusion. Each track serves as a call to the strength of the collective, emphasizing the importance of cohesion that transcends individual differences and fosters a sense of belonging. The repetitive nature of house music reinforces this sense of unity, as the rhythms and lyrics echo the ideals of togetherness and mutual support, making every listening experience a reaffirmation of communal bonds and shared purpose. (Maloney 2018, 242)

1.9. Clubbing, Community, and Oceanic Feeling

The conception of community within the realm of clubbing is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, expressed through various levels of belonging, identification, and collective connection. The term "clubbing" itself, that indicates the activity of gathering and socializing at nightclubs and festivals, evokes the idea of unity and membership, deriving from the word "club", which implies gathering and combining resources and energies for a common purpose. This concept inherently suggests a sense of cohesion and community. (*Collins Concise Dictionary* quoted in Malbon 1999, 37)

In an urban context often characterized by the anonymous and stressful presence of strangers, clubbing emerges as a refuge where individuals can experience an atmosphere of belonging and identification. Zygmunt Bauman (quoted in Malbon 1999, 40) asserts that city life is conducted by strangers among strangers, and this can create an impulse towards seeking an alternative environment of belonging. Malbon emphasizes how clubbing addresses this need for belonging, counteracting the typical indifference of the urban crowd. In clubbing, social interaction primarily manifests through collective dancing rather than one-on-one relationships, fostering a strong identification with the dancing crowd.

Dancing within a crowd of clubbers allows individuals to transcend their individuality and feel part of a larger entity. This collective experience can be viewed as a journey towards a sense of "home" and belonging, where extraordinary moments of ecstasy reflect a profound sense of connection with the group. Malbon describes this experience of liminality, in which the boundaries of the self dissolve, allowing clubbers to experience a sensation of unity and harmony with the crowd. This sensation of "being one among many" distinguishes clubbing from other forms of social interaction, emphasizing the collective experience over individuality. (Malbon 1999, 41-48)

Oceanic experiences, where participants feel one with the external world and experience a temporary loss of self that translates into a sense of collective unity, are a key point in Malbon's analysis. This experience is intensified by the music and the immersive environment of the club, which can induce altered states of consciousness and feelings of ecstasy. Freud and Storr described the oceanic experience as a feeling of an indissoluble bond with the universe, and Malbon applies this concept to clubbing, where participants feel

a fusion with the dancing crowd, creating a powerful sense of belonging and collective identification. (Malbon 1999, 105-110)

The concept of "communitas", developed by Victor Turner and expanded by Michel Maffesoli (quoted in Malbon 1999, 156-157), helps to understand the group dynamics in clubbing. Communitas manifests as a temporary equality among participants, transcending social differences to create a sense of communion and belonging. Maffesoli speaks of "unicity", a harmonious coexistence of diverse elements that harmonize in a common experience, overcoming the barriers of individualism and creating a sense of collective belonging.

The communal dimension of clubbing is further accentuated by the intense sensory experiences that characterize club nights. The combination of loud music, psychedelic lights, and the collective energy of the crowd creates an immersive environment that promotes the dissolution of individual boundaries. In this context, clubbers often experience altered states of consciousness that can be described as moments of ecstasy, where the sense of self is temporarily suspended and replaced by a sense of fusion with the crowd. These experiences can be profoundly transformative, offering participants a temporary escape from everyday reality and an opportunity to explore new dimensions of their identity.

Rather than seeking connection with a single partner, clubbers find meaning and fulfillment in the collective participation in dance. This sense of unity is further emphasized by the music, which acts as a catalyst for collective connection. As Merleau-Ponty (quoted in Malbon 1999, 108) observed, the movement of the body during dance is a means to transcend the boundaries of the self and connect with the external world. This transcendence is amplified by sharing a common space with other individuals participating in the same sensory experience, creating a strong bond of community.

The importance of the crowd in creating these experiences cannot be underestimated. As noted by Le Bon (quoted in Malbon 1999, 155), merely being within the dancing crowd can instill a sense of vitality and energy in participants. This phenomenon of "collective effervescence" as described by Durkheim (quoted in Malbon 1999, 156-157), manifests through music and dance, creating a sense of communion that transcends individual differences. Spencer and O'Connor (quoted in Malbon 1999, 156-157) have further explored this concept, highlighting how dance can break down social hierarchies and create a sense of communion among people from different social backgrounds.

The clubbing community also provides a space for reflexive exploration of the self. Experiences of ecstasy and fusion with the crowd can lead to greater self-understanding and understanding of others. This dynamic of "being one among many" facilitates both moments of individual reflection and moments of collective ecstasy, allowing clubbers to navigate between their personal identity and that of the group. This dualism between individuality and collectivity is a distinctive feature of clubbing, enabling participants to continually explore and redefine their identity within a communal context. (Malbon 1999, 155-157)

In summary, the community within the world of clubbing is defined by shared experiences of belonging, ecstasy, and collective identification. Through dancing and participation in the crowd, clubbers experience profound and temporary connections that address a fundamental human need for belonging and meaning within a group. These experiences, which can include altered states of consciousness and feelings of ecstasy, represent a unique fusion of individuality and collectivity, where the self is both exalted and transcended within a vibrant and interconnected community. The intense sensory dimension of clubbing, combined with the dynamic of "being one among many", creates an environment in which participants can explore new dimensions of their identity and find a sense of belonging that is both personal and collective.

1.10. Raving, Community, and the Body Without Organs

In 1995, Tim Jordan delved into the examination of communal dynamics within the sphere of dance music culture, particularly rave culture, and the consequent feeling of belonging it engenders. His analysis sought to establish connections between the widespread phenomenon of rave parties and certain theoretical concepts articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their collaborative works. Before delving into this phenomenon, it's essential to understand the historical context and emergence of rave parties.

Starting from the mid-1980s, the trajectory of dance music in Great Britain took an unforeseen turn as a response to the perceived 'commercialization' of nightlife and the expansion of the leisure industry. (Thornton 1995, 79) This led to the emergence of the inaugural rave parties, underground events held in improvised and sometimes clandestine locations such as abandoned warehouses, aircraft hangars, municipal pools, and tents in farmers' fields. (Hutson 2000, 35; Thornton 1995, 42) These gatherings had no entry restrictions, welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together and revel in the mesmerizing rhythms of the music. The attendance at rave parties was significant, frequently numbering in the thousands. These events featured DJs who played music for extended periods and included specific genres of dance music such as house, acid house, techno, and jungle. (Thornton 1995, 47) Raves, representing the newest evolution of the discotheque, were designed as singular events rather than regular weekly gatherings. As a result, some of them have achieved the status of exceptional occurrences, reaching a scale and significance that were previously exclusive to live rock festivals. (Thornton 1995, 54) In the absence of modern communication technologies, the dissemination of rave information relied heavily on word-of-mouth and the notorious telephone message, which greatly facilitated the coordination of these gatherings. (Chester 2017) To underscore the magnitude of the rave phenomenon, West Midlands police statistics in the period between 1990 and 1992 demonstrate the impressive number of rave parties, which exceeded one thousand events only in that specific region, with peak attendance of up to 15,000 individuals. (Jordan 1995, 129) In these large-scale gatherings, participants gradually relinquish their subjective sense of self and amalgamate into a collective entity, which, according to Jordan, aligns closely with the concept of the Body without Organs, developed by two French thinkers, Gilles Deleuze, a philosopher, and Felix Guattari, a philosopher and

psychoanalyst, within the framework of their theory of desire. Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire is inherently a collective and horizontal function and that desiring production constitutes the fundamental principle of desire. Since desire is inherently a collective endeavor, the interconnection between individuals forms a “desiring-machine” or assemblage, which represents an actualized form of desire. (Coles 2018, 6) The Body without Organs, in essence, serves as the locus where desiring-production is transmuted from a general principle into a specific desiring-machine (Jordan 1995, 126-128). The Body without Organs functions as the conduit that links production, desiring-production, and the resultant assemblage or desiring machine—a space where production occurs, blurring the distinction between the producer and the product. The concept of the Body without Organs stands in opposition not to the notion of an organ but to that of an organism. Whereas an organism establishes fixed relationships among its various organs, the Body without Organs fosters new and infinite connections among organs, fostering a boundless and unrestricted production of desire. (Jordan 1995, 128)

Incorporating theories formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, Tim Jordan situates their concepts within the framework of rave culture. He contends that the production of raving, which represents what participants desire to experience through the construction of a rave party, involves an ongoing process of entering a state devoid of individual subjectivity, similar to a state of intense joy, akin to rapture. Enhanced by the influence of substances, participants engage in extended periods of dancing amidst immersive sensory stimuli, ultimately culminating in a communal state of euphoria.

According to Jordan's analysis, raving is conceptualized as a desiring-machine, wherein a multitude of elements including music, lighting, drugs, and volume are interconnected to induce the desired collective state. Each component of this rave-machine plays a distinct role in eliciting desire and contributing to the overall experience. The amalgamation of these elements forms an assemblage that realizes desiring-production, culminating in the creation of the rave phenomenon.

Central to Jordan's argument lies the concept of the Body without Organs within the context of raving, which embodies a unified and undifferentiated state experienced collectively by participants. This state is characterized by a shared sense of delirium and ecstasy, where individual distinctions dissolve amidst the immersive sensory experience of the rave environment. The Body without Organs of raving serves as the foundational

framework for the interconnections established within the rave-machine, fostering a collective euphoria that epitomizes the essence of rave culture. (Jordan 1995, 129-131)

As noted by Hillegonda Rietveld (quoted in Jordan 1995, 130), individual egos dissolve within the pulsating atmosphere of the rave, with participants no longer perceiving lights, music, or fellow ravers as separate entities but rather as integral components of a unified and intense experience known as the trance dance. The Body without Organs of raving thus emerges as a collective entity, borne out of the shared delirium experienced by participants immersed in the rave environment. Rietveld explores the dissolution of the self and the merging with the other, a process she likens to a spiritual or peak experience. In rave-style events, this phenomenon manifests not through the destruction of the object to release its spirit, as Bataille (quoted in Rietveld 2004, 45) might suggest, but rather through the merging of individual subjectivities with the surrounding environment and other participants. This dissolution of boundaries between the self and the other is particularly significant for those who feel politically or socially marginalized, providing them with a strong sense of community and belonging. The intense vulnerability experienced during these peak moments, akin to a religious ceremony, can enhance the sense of community, especially for marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community in gay dance gatherings. The aesthetic experience in raving, described as a melting between self and other, can be compared to the experience of an orgasm or the empathetic effects of drugs like Ecstasy. This leads to a profound intimacy and connection with the collective spirit of the community on the dance floor. (Rietveld 2004, 46-49)

Olaveson (2004, 85), on the other hand, highlights the phenomenological aspect of raving, where participants often report an intense sensation of connectedness and unity. This experience, often described using terms like "connectedness", "unity", or "love", resonates with Victor Turner's concept of "communitas", which refers to the deep sense of equality and shared humanity that can arise in ritualized settings. Ethnographic research on rave cultures underscores the therapeutic and healing aspects of this unity, suggesting that the sense of connection experienced at raves can facilitate personal and communal healing. The "doof" party movement², for instance, exemplifies how contemporary rave culture uses rituals of ecstasy and community to create a sense of belonging and collective effervescence.

² The doof movement emerged in Australia as a counterculture to mainstream rave culture, emphasizing autonomy, anti-corporate values, and a focus on the sensory experience. Doof parties are typically held in remote locations, organized by non-profit communities, and prioritize a DIY ethos. (John 2001, 24-25)

Furthermore, the collective consciousness and communal nature of raves are particularly pronounced when MDMA (Ecstasy) is involved. The effects of this drug often lead to a temporary dissolution of interpersonal differences, allowing participants to experience a total identification with others. This results in a collective body where individual desires and productions merge into a state of flow, akin to Turner's description of the *communitas* observed in various cultural rituals, as already pointed out. This merging of selves creates a mutual experience where each participant fully perceives the being of the other, generating a powerful sense of community and unity. (Olaveson 2004, 90)

In summary, Jordan posits that desiring-production manifests within the rave-machine, a complex assemblage that seeks to connect diverse elements such as music, fashion, and time. This productivity gives rise to a non-productive plane, or *Body without Organs*, which underlies the connections and experiences within the rave environment. The collective ecstasy experienced by participants reflects the fulfillment of their desire to exist within the *Body without Organs* of desubjectified euphoria, thus affirming the significance of the rave-machine in contemporary cultural expression.

1.11. Community Role in Ritmo Fulcral

As explored in detail in the preceding paragraphs, the concept of “community” within the realm of dance music stands as a multifaceted construct, encompassing a diverse range of interpretations and nuances. This theme finds recurring resonance within the slogans and discourse of the electronic music agency Ritmo Fulcral. The agency's mission is firmly rooted in the construction and cultivation of a thriving community of music creators and enthusiasts. This endeavor intertwines with a commitment to fostering a space of creative expression for those who choose to join this collective, alongside a fervent desire to promote an alternative musical landscape. The following paragraphs will delve into a detailed examination of the community concept within the framework of Ritmo Fulcral. This exploration will highlight the significance of this overarching notion for the agency's members, while shedding light on the strategies and methodologies employed to achieve this objective. These insights are drawn from in-depth interviews conducted with two key figures within the agency: Maurizio Clemente, the director, and Christian Vismara, A&R for the Whoopee Records label and artistic director of the Whoopee party.

A pivotal point emerged from my interview with Christian Vismara, one that immediately underscored the clear-sighted nature of the Ritmo Fulcral project. Vismara frankly observed that the concept of "community" is often misused, employed as a smokescreen to mask the financial motives behind artistic endeavors. He was keen to emphasize from the outset that while Ritmo Fulcral undoubtedly aims to foster a community of artists and enthusiasts, it is, at its core, a business. And like any business, to thrive and achieve its stated goals, it requires economic sustainability. Behind Ritmo Fulcral, as with any enterprise, lies a fundamental exchange of value.

Vismara's candid assessment highlights the refreshing pragmatism that underpins Ritmo Fulcral's approach. The agency recognizes that community building is not merely a feel-good exercise but a strategic imperative for long-term success. By nurturing a vibrant community, Ritmo Fulcral cultivates a loyal following, attracts new talent, and enhances its brand reputation. This, in turn, translates into financial gains, enabling the agency to continue its mission and provide value to its stakeholders.

Ritmo Fulcral's pragmatic approach separates them from those who see community as an afterthought. Their genuine commitment is evident in initiatives supporting artists and

the underground scene, while balancing this passion with sustainable business practices. This unique model, fostering a community through shared values and economic exchange, is both noteworthy and replicable.

One key aspect of Ritmo Fulcral's thriving community is its carefully curated collective of music creators. As Maurizio Clemente emphasizes, fostering a true community goes beyond simply bringing talented individuals together. He highlights the importance of finding the right people who can work in a team and prioritize a shared vision over individual egos – a challenge that can be particularly pronounced in the creative world.

Clemente meticulously selects artists based on their musical tastes, styles, and sensibilities. This collective is a foundational element for Ritmo Fulcral, fostering a collaborative environment where creativity can flourish. A shared passion for music and a commitment to artistic quality act as a unifying element for those involved in the Ritmo Fulcral project. This applies to artists on the agency's roster, those releasing music on its labels, and even those performing at its events. All share a common thread with Clemente - a deep appreciation for music and a dedication to artistic excellence.

The incentive for this collaborative spirit is practical: the collective growth and success of Ritmo Fulcral itself. When scheduling conflicts arise, artists can rely on a fellow member with a similar style to fill in seamlessly. Remixes are exchanged for feedback, fostering mutual respect. This shared understanding and support system create a productive environment for creativity, ensuring the project's continued momentum.

While the Ritmo Fulcral community boasts a sense of camaraderie, it's important to recognize that it extends beyond a mere group of talented individuals. The artists involved form a network bound by their shared passion for music and their belief in each other's potential. This synergy, fostered by Clemente's discerning eye and the collective spirit, undoubtedly contributes to Ritmo Fulcral's success within the music industry.

At the heart of Ritmo Fulcral's thriving party series, Whoopee, lies a deep understanding of audience engagement and community building. The agency recognizes that the success of its parties hinges on cultivating a loyal following, a passionate group of individuals who not only enjoy the music but also believe in the overall concept and vibe of the events. This connection transcends mere attendance; it's about fostering a sense of belonging, trust, and shared experience.

Ritmo Fulcral's approach to audience engagement is deeply rooted in understanding the emotional connection between music and its audience. Music has an inherent power to attract and unite people who share similar tastes and passions. By curating events that showcase music that resonates with their target audience, Ritmo Fulcral lays the foundation for building a loyal fan base.

This emotional connection goes beyond simply enjoying the music; it's about creating an atmosphere that fosters a sense of community and belonging. Ritmo Fulcral's parties provide a space where attendees can connect with like-minded individuals, share experiences, and immerse themselves in a shared passion for music.

To further refine its audience engagement strategy, Ritmo Fulcral recognizes the importance of tailoring the party experience to specific groups within its overall target audience. This involves carefully considering various factors that influence the type of crowd an event attracts, such as:

- **Venue Selection:** The choice of location, whether it's a warehouse, a forest setting, or a beachside venue, plays a significant role in defining the ambience and attracting a specific clientele.
- **Event Timing:** The decision to host a party in the afternoon or evening can also influence the type of crowd. Daytime events may appeal to a more laid-back crowd, while evening gatherings tend to attract a more energetic and party-oriented audience.
- **Artist Selection:** Collaborating with artists who have their own established fan bases can significantly expand the reach of a party. Understanding the demographics and preferences of an artist's audience allows Ritmo Fulcral to curate events that resonate with a broader range of music enthusiasts.
- **Ticket Pricing:** The cost of admission can serve as a subtle filter, attracting a specific type of audience based on their willingness to invest in the experience. Higher ticket prices may appeal to those seeking a more exclusive and upscale party atmosphere.
- **Promoter Partnerships:** Collaborating with promoters and influencers who have a strong connection with Ritmo Fulcral's target audience can further amplify the event's reach and attract a diverse range of attendees.

While Ritmo Fulcral carefully considers various factors to tailor its parties to specific audience segments, it also recognizes that there will always be an element of unpredictability. Different groups of people may come together at an event, each with their unique perspectives and interests. The key lies in creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and engaged, regardless of their specific background or preferences.

By embracing diversity and fostering a sense of shared passion for music, Ritmo Fulcral transforms its parties into more than just entertainment hubs; they become catalysts for community building, fostering a sense of belonging and connection among its audience. This loyal and engaged community, in turn, drives the continued success of Ritmo Fulcral's party scene, ensuring that the music and the vibe continue to resonate with a growing audience.

A vibrant music scene never emerges solely from the efforts of a single player. Instead, it's the culmination of a dynamic interplay between a passionate community, shared musical interests, and the organic evolution of creative expression. While a fully developed scene may not yet exist around Ritmo Fulcral, their passionate community holds the potential to blossom into one. This transformation is driven by several key factors:

- **The Power of Shared Passion and Collective Creativity**

At the heart of every music scene lies a shared passion for music and a collective desire to create, express, and share that passion with others. Ritmo Fulcral's parties serve as a catalyst for this collective energy, bringing together like-minded individuals who find common ground in their love for music. This shared passion fuels a dynamic exchange of ideas, inspirations, and creative collaborations.

- **The Fertile Ground of Competition and Collaboration**

As the community grows and more individuals become involved in organizing events, creating music, and promoting the genre, a natural element of competition emerges. This competition, however, is not destructive but rather a driving force for innovation and creativity. Artists and organizers strive to differentiate themselves, pushing the boundaries of their craft and exploring new sonic territories.

- **Cross-Pollination and the Birth of Sub-Genres**

Within this competitive landscape, a fascinating phenomenon occurs: cross-pollination. As artists, organizers, and fans interact and exchange ideas, a natural blending of styles and influences takes place. This cross-pollination can give rise to new sub-genres, fresh perspectives, and unexpected musical fusions.

- The Emergence of a Distinct Identity

Over time, as the community continues to evolve and interact, a distinct identity may start to solidify. This identity wouldn't be defined by a single artist or organization but rather by a shared set of values, aesthetics, and musical preferences. A unique sound, a passionate fanbase, and the ability to attract and nurture new talent are all key features of a thriving scene.

- A Catalyst for Growth

Ritmo Fulcral acts as a vital catalyst in this potential evolution. They provide a platform for community expression through venues, resources, and collaboration opportunities. Additionally, they bridge the gap between the community and the wider music industry, amplifying the nascent scene's voice and reach.

In essence, Ritmo Fulcral's parties are more than just entertainment; they represent a microcosm of the creative process itself. They provide fertile ground for shared passion, collective creativity, and the potential for a thriving music scene to emerge. The agency's commitment to fostering this community holds the promise of enriching not only Lisbon's musical landscape but also the broader world of music.

Dance music, with its rich tapestry of genres and subgenres, forms the cornerstone of Ritmo Fulcral's philosophy. Clemente trained in the vibrant Italian club scene of the 1990s, which in turn was heavily influenced by the late 1980s New York scene and the golden age of disco in the 1970s. This deep immersion in the history of dance music, particularly disco, funk, and house, has undeniably shaped his approach to music curation and event creation.

This connection to the genre's roots manifests in Ritmo Fulcral's unwavering commitment to the core values that have defined dance music since its inception: positive energy, camaraderie, and inclusivity. Their focus is on creating a space where people can feel liberated, lose themselves in the music, and experience pure joy.

While the sounds and production techniques of dance music have undoubtedly evolved over time, the essence remains firmly rooted in these fundamental principles. The

Ritmo Fulcral team, united by a deep appreciation for the genre's history and values, draws inspiration from legendary figures like Mancuso, Nicky Siano, Frankie Knuckles, and Larry Levan – the architects of disco, funk, and house.

However, their reverence for the past goes beyond mere imitation. It's about understanding the spirit of dance music and reinterpreting it for a contemporary audience. Ritmo Fulcral's events are more than just playing music; they are immersive experiences that evoke the emotions, the vibe, and the sense of community that have always been at the heart of dance music culture.

In essence, Ritmo Fulcral serves as a bridge, connecting the rich heritage of dance music, particularly disco, funk, and house, with its vibrant contemporary expression. By honoring the genre's roots while embracing its evolution, Ritmo Fulcral ensures that the music and values of dance music continue to resonate with music lovers around the world.

1.12. Final Remarks

In this chapter the foundation for understanding Ritmo Fulcral, the electronic music agency where I conducted my internship has been presented. After having examined the fundamental aspects of the agency, including its history, mission, and values, an exploration of the concept of community, a cornerstone of Ritmo Fulcral's ethos, within the context of dance music culture has been performed. In the chapter, the evolution of community from its roots in American disco music to its contemporary manifestations in clubbing and raving scenes worldwide has been traced.

The next chapter will delve deeper into Ritmo Fulcral's internal structure, examining its various divisions and their contributions to the agency's success. Additionally, it will further explore the intricacies of dance music culture, delving into its subgenres, technological advancements, and global impact. This comprehensive approach aligns with the overarching goals of this internship report, which seeks to leverage my personal experience within a contemporary electronic music agency to provide a panoramic overview of the current dance music industry and analyze the state-of-the-art of clubbing. Ultimately, this endeavor aims to unravel the profound significance of dance music culture, drawing upon its rich heritage and contemporary expressions.

Chapter 2. The Dance Music Industry: Dynamics, Anonymity, and Innovation

2.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses the distinctive characteristics of the dance music industry, tracing its evolution from the perceived "demise" of disco in the late 1970s to the resurgence of an underground movement characterized by secrecy, exclusivity, and rejection of the star system. The industry's adaptation to these dynamics will be examined, highlighting the embrace of anonymity, the "faceless" aesthetic, and the prioritization of genre over individual authorship.

Furthermore, this chapter will present a detailed account of my internship experience at the discography division of the electronic music agency Ritmo Fulcral. The structure and functions of this division will be analyzed, showing the agency's diverse portfolio of six independent record labels, each with its unique identity and target audience. The crucial role played by independent record labels in fostering creativity and innovation within the dance music landscape will be emphasized.

In addition, a comprehensive overview of the daily activities involved in the distribution and promotion of musical releases will be presented. This includes a detailed examination of the distribution process, from master file preparation to publication on digital platforms, as well as the promotional strategies employed to maximize the visibility and impact of Ritmo Fulcral's artists.

By combining theoretical analysis with practical insights drawn from direct experience, this chapter aims to provide a holistic view of the dance music industry. It will offer a comprehensive understanding of the unique dynamics, challenges, and opportunities that characterize this evolving industry, shedding light on the intricate interplay among artistic expression, technological advancements, and market forces.

2.2. Disco's Demise and the Paradox of Pluralism: A Multifaceted Decline

The perceived "death" of disco in the late 1970s remains a complex and contested issue. While McLeod (2001, 62) attributes its decline to a combination of commercial oversaturation and the homophobic backlash from rock audiences, Maloney (2018, 235-236) delves deeper, exposing the racial and sexualized undercurrents fuelling the anti-disco sentiment. The notorious "Disco Demolition Night" in 1979, chronicled by Maloney, is often portrayed as a pivotal moment, symbolizing the rejection of disco's cultural significance. Some commentators, like Nile Rodgers, the co-founder of the American disco band Chic, have drawn parallels between the anti-disco sentiment and historical instances of cultural suppression, such as Nazi book burnings, to emphasize the intensity and destructive nature of the backlash. However, it's important to note that while such comparisons highlight the cultural significance of the event, they should not be taken literally. The "Disco Demolition Night" primarily represented a rejection of a particular musical genre and the cultural shifts it embodied, rather than a systematic attempt to eradicate a culture.

Nonetheless, Maloney exposes the contradictory nature of this "discophobia". Disco was simultaneously condemned as elitist and decadent, often associated with the extravagance of Studio 54, yet also celebrated for its liberating "Otherness" expressed through sexuality and hedonism. Notably, figures like Nelson George and Vince Lawrence (cited in Maloney 2001, 236) emphasize the racial dimension often overlooked in the narrative. Disco's rejection, they argue, stemmed not only from homophobia, but also from a disdain for a predominantly Black and gay cultural expression. This perspective challenges the dominant narrative, in which the target of "discophobia" is primarily seen as the LGBTQ+ community.

Maloney further highlights the disconnect between the music's perceived decline and its continued relevance within its core communities. While commercially ostracized, disco's musical essence and its dedicated audience remained vibrant. Notably, Robbie Leslie and David DePino (cited in Maloney 2001, 236) downplay the impact of the anti-disco movement on their respective dance communities, highlighting the genre's continued underground life.

Moreover, Will Straw (1990, 170-173) offers a unique perspective on disco's demise, focusing on the breakdown between the music industry and its core audience. He argues that

disco wasn't simply a victim of overexposure, but rather a casualty of a fundamental incompatibility between industry marketing strategies and disco's innate "pluralism". According to Straw, major record companies attempted to expand disco's audience beyond its core of dedicated club-goers. This strategy involved promoting singles across various formats (12-inch, 7-inch, albums), aiming for widespread appeal. However, this clashed with disco's "lifecycle". Unlike rock where albums were central, disco fans prioritized purchasing numerous 12-inch singles to stay updated on the genre's rapid stylistic evolution.

Straw (1990, 170-173) highlights the incompatibility between the industry's focus on individual artist careers (characteristic of rock music) and disco's emphasis on "generic progression". Disco innovation was driven by advancements in the genre as a whole, rather than individual performers. This meant a disco record's value was judged against its contemporaries, not the artist's entire discography, leading to faster obsolescence. The industry's failure to establish "stable followings" for disco artists stemmed not only from the music itself, but also from the genre's dynamic nature. Disco wasn't conducive to building long-term fan loyalty around individual performers, as innovation was constantly pushing the boundaries of the genre.

Straw (1993, 170-171) further argues that disco's decline wasn't due to waning interest in dance clubs. In fact, dance music's popularity was expanding to suburban areas. However, this mainstreaming "vulgarized" disco for its core audience. Disco transformed from a curated selection of distinct recordings by professional DJs into "an unending and undifferentiated soundtrack". A crucial turning point came when disco radio listeners were found to share similar dispositions with "Beautiful Music" listeners, a popular easy-listening instrumental format on American radio stations of that era. Both desired an unvarying soundscape, highlighting disco's shift from a dynamic cultural experience to generic background music.

The prevailing view, supported by Haden-Guest and Reynolds (cited in Maloney 2001, 235-236), suggests that disco didn't truly "die" but rather underwent a "mutation". The genre's influence and stylistic vocabulary would resurface in the form of house music in the mid-1980s. McLeod (2001, 86) lends further credence to this perspective by suggesting that despite the widespread perception of disco's "death" during the 1980s, the genre simply retreated "underground" to its core black and gay urban audiences. This underground evolution led to the emergence of house music, named after Chicago's Warehouse Club and

pioneered by resident DJ Frankie Knuckles. In conclusion, Straw suggests that disco's demise resulted from a dismantled relationship between DJs, record companies, and the core audience. When DJs served as curators and tastemakers, shaping the success of records, a sense of order existed. However, the industry's focus on mass-market appeal and disco's inherent "pluralism" led to a disconnect, ultimately contributing to the genre's decline. Straw views the post-disco era's greatest threat to dance music as the "tendency towards musical chaos", a fear of losing control over the genre's cultural meaning and direction.

In conclusion, the demise of disco was not a singular event, but a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by social, cultural, and commercial forces. While the anti-disco backlash, fuelled by homophobia and racism, undoubtedly contributed to its decline, disco's impact on music culture was far from over. It retreated underground, evolving and transforming into new genres like house music, maintaining its vibrancy within its core communities. The genre's intrinsic pluralism, initially seen as a weakness by the music industry, proved to be its strength, allowing for continuous innovation and the birth of new subgenres. Thus, the "death" of disco was not an end but a transformation, a testament to the resilience and adaptability of dance music culture. It is an evidence of the complex interplay among music, identity, and social forces, and the enduring power of music to evolve and transcend boundaries.

2.3. Dance Music: The Rejection of the Star System and the Culture of Secrecy

The decline of disco in the late 1970s resulted in a significant transformation in dance music culture. As discussed in the previous section, Straw (1993, 172) attributes disco's demise to its "dispersion into a stagnant pluralism", a fragmentation that led to a loss of credibility and an association with commercialism and excess. However, this decline also served as a catalyst for a new era of dance music, one characterized by a deliberate rejection of disco's perceived flaws and a strategic embrace of "complex systems of differentiation" (Straw 1993, 176) to guard against the threat of similar vulgarity.

The Rise of Secrecy and Exclusivity

By the early 1990s, dance music had successfully re-established itself as a credible and oppositional form, a testament to the "elaborate conceptual labour" undertaken by those within the scene to redefine its identity and values (Straw 1993, 171). This shift away from the mainstream involved a conscious embrace of secrecy and obscurity, strategies that dance music professionals employed to distance the genre from its disco roots and foster a sense of underground authenticity.

This newfound emphasis on secrecy and exclusivity manifested in various ways, contributing to the establishment of what Straw (1993, 172) describes as the "tension between obscurity and popularity central to the functions of dance culture". The physical space of the dance club, for example, became a stage for this tension, with the DJ booth representing a carefully guarded realm of knowledge, distinct from the open display of physical movement on the dance floor. Straw argues that this spatial relationship between the floor and booth symbolized a broader cultural divide between "low" populism and "high" connoisseurship. The DJ, as the gatekeeper of musical knowledge, maintained an air of mystery and exclusivity, carefully curating the soundtrack of the night and withholding information about the tracks being played. This intentional concealment of information, aligned with the DJ's role as described by Toynbee (2000, 151), where they are "entrusted by the subculture with ensuring a high rate of innovation" by playing new records early and exclusively, created a sense of intrigue and allure. This practice, akin to Bourdieu's (cited in Toynbee 2000, 151) concept of "restricted production", not only built esteem for both the

record and the DJ but also drew dancers into a world of secret knowledge and shared experience, while simultaneously fostering a sense of underground authenticity and cultural distinction.

The physical artifacts associated with DJ work also reflected this investment in secrecy. Extended remixes, while facilitating seamless transitions, also eliminated the traditional announcement of track titles, leading record companies to request the display of record covers in DJ booths (Straw 1993, 172). This act, however, was often met with resistance from DJs, who saw it as a disruption of the dance floor's energy and a breach of their curated musical selections.

The rise of white label releases – vinyl records with blank, monochrome inner labels – further intensified this culture of secrecy in dance music. As Jenewein (2021, 78-80) observes, while these records initially served practical purposes as test pressings or promotional copies, their roots as a cultural artifact can be traced back to 1950s Jamaica. In this context, enterprising producers began selling white label advance copies to consumers, capitalizing on the scene's fascination with newness and exclusivity. By the 1980s, this practice had permeated the electronic dance music scene, where white labels became emblematic of the genre's rejection of the star system and its emphasis on the collective experience. These records, devoid of artist names or track titles, fostered an environment where the music itself took centre stage, a deliberate disavowal of the individualistic narcissism associated with rock and pop. As Jenewein (2021, 78-80) suggests, this "faceless" aesthetic allowed for a focus on the "impersonal and collective musical forces and affects" generated within the DJ set and the club night. In its stark simplicity, the white label thus became a symbol of the underground dance music ethos, a testament to the genre's commitment to anonymity, community, and the primacy of the musical experience.

The concept of "hipness", as outlined by José Piedra and discussed by Straw (1993, 174), is central to understanding the role of secrecy in dance music culture. Hipness encompasses both the physicality of dance and a relationship to knowledge that is often elusive and enigmatic. For DJs, this meant cultivating an air of instinctually and effortless cool, masking the extensive research and knowledge that went into their selections. The DJ's ability to read the crowd, anticipate their desires, and create a seamless musical journey became a form of embodied knowledge, a skill that could not be easily replicated or codified.

The Anti-Star Ethos of Dance Music

This shift towards secrecy and obscurity was not merely a reaction to the perceived vulgarity of disco but also a reflection of a broader trend in dance music culture: a focus on shifts in style rather than the individual identity of performers. Hesmondhalgh (1998, 238) explains that while authorship and genre are both important dynamics in the music industry, dance music audiences have traditionally been more interested in the evolution of genres and subgenres than in the cult of personality surrounding individual artists. This emphasis on style over authorship can be traced back to earlier dance music subcultures like Northern Soul, where fans were more concerned with collecting knowledge about obscure records and emerging styles than with following the career trajectories of specific artists. This focus extended to a keen interest in the record labels themselves, which often served as indicators of a particular sound or style. Hesmondhalgh (1998, 239) notes that this attention to small, independent labels drew upon pre-house dance music traditions, where soul aficionados, for example, would pay as much attention to record labels as to the often-obscure performers.

This focus on genre and sub-genre is evident in the organization of dance music record shops, where records are typically categorized by sub-genre rather than artist. This reflects the constantly shifting landscape of dance music styles, as new subgenres emerge and evolve at a rapid pace. The emphasis on genre also allows for a more democratic and inclusive approach to music consumption, as listeners can explore different styles and discover new sounds without being bound to the work of a particular artist.

The relative lack of concern with authorship in dance music can be attributed to several factors. To better understand this characteristic of dance music, comparisons with rock music, which holds a contrasting perspective on authorship, will be made in the following analysis.

Firstly, dance music audiences have traditionally been less interested in the rock notions of authenticity, sincerity, and integrity, preferring instead the values of immediacy, sensuality, and the thrill of discovering obscure sounds (Hesmondhalgh 1998, 238). This preference for anonymity and underground culture has led to a rejection of the star system, which is often associated with the mainstream music industry and its focus on commercial success.

Secondly, the aesthetic features of dance music, with its emphasis on rhythm, texture, and overall sound, lend themselves to a more collective and collaborative approach to music-

making. Unlike rock music, where the singer or songwriter is often seen as the primary creative force, dance music production often involves multiple contributors, including producers, technicians, and vocalists. This collaborative nature of production further reinforces the idea that dance music is a collective effort, where the focus is on the music itself rather than the individual artist.

This anti-author or anti-star aesthetic is a significant departure from the rock tradition, where, as Toynbee (2000, 131) observes, the auteur is the visible and celebrated creator, responsible for the entire production process from writing and recording to live performance. In contrast, the dance music producer often operates behind the scenes, adopting an enigmatic persona through pseudonyms. The DJ, not the producer, takes centre stage in the club, their role primarily functional: to make bodies dance. This utilitarian division of labour contrasts sharply with rock's expressionism, emphasizing the collective experience of the dance floor over individual artistic expression. In dance music, it is the music itself that becomes the protagonist, not the individual behind it.

Furthermore, this ethos of collectivism and anonymity is evident in the very nature of innovation within dance music. Toynbee (2000, 161) notes that unlike the "heroic" periods of jazz and rock, where individual artists were often credited with major aesthetic breakthroughs, dance music innovation is characterized by a "flatter distribution" across a larger number of producers and DJs. This means that many music makers contribute incrementally to a continuous flow of innovation across a given genre, rather than a few individuals dominating the creative landscape. This collaborative approach to innovation has fostered a more dynamic and inclusive environment, where diverse voices and perspectives can contribute to the evolution of the music.

This shift away from the cult of the individual artist, as also noted by Hesmondhalgh (1998, 238), has been embraced as an ideological goal in post-house dance music. The high degree of credibility attached to white labels and the widespread use of pseudonyms are testaments to this anti-star ethos. Dance music commentators have often remarked on the lack of a star system as a distinctive and challenging feature of the genre, emphasizing its celebration of collectivism and its rejection of the individualistic tendencies of the mainstream music industry. This rejection of the star system is not simply a matter of taste or preference; it is a deliberate attempt to create a more democratic and inclusive music culture, where the focus is on the shared experience of the music rather than the individual

ego of the artist. This lack of a star system has also had practical implications for the industry's structure and dynamics. As Hesmondhalgh (1998, 240) observes, small record companies, which are often at the forefront of innovation in dance music, have been able to thrive without having to invest in expensive promotional campaigns to build up a profile for new artists. This has fostered a more diverse and decentralized music scene, with numerous small labels and producers operating independently of major corporations.

Toynbee (2000, 155-156) also elaborates on this phenomenon, highlighting the unique economic landscape of dance music. Despite many releases, the average sales per record are relatively low, reflecting a more even distribution of success across a wider range of artists and labels. This contrasts sharply with the traditional cultural industries model, typified by the rock mainstream, where a few massive successes dominate the market while most releases fail. Toynbee attributes this difference in part to the dance floor's demand for high innovation and the prevailing anti-author/anti-star aesthetic within the genre. The lack of a star system, coupled with the low cost of production facilitated by accessible technology, has created a more democratic culture of production, where more artists have a chance to enter the market and gain recognition for their work.

The Genre-Driven Landscape of Dance Music

Dance music's focus on genre and subgenre, as opposed to individual authorship, has led to a unique and constantly evolving landscape. This emphasis on stylistic shifts, rather than star power, has been a defining characteristic of the genre since its post-disco origins, as noted by Hesmondhalgh (1998, 238). The proliferation of subgenre names within the electronic/dance music scene is a testament to this dynamic. As McLeod (2001, 60) observes, this phenomenon is unparalleled in other musical genres, with a careful scan of relevant magazines and compilation CDs in 1998 and 1999 revealing a staggering list of over 300 subgenre names.

These subgenres are not merely marketing ploys; they are meaningful categories that shape the way people talk about and engage with the music, as argued by Reynolds (quoted in McLeod 2001, 66). They serve as a way to navigate the vast and diverse landscape of electronic/dance music, providing a framework for understanding and appreciating its various styles and subcultures. In this context, McLeod (2001, 66) draws on Italian scholar Franco Fabbri's definition of musical genres as "a set of musical events (real or possible)

whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules". This emphasizes the role of shared social understandings in the formation and evolution of genres.

However, as both McLeod (2001, 66) and Toynbee (2000, 135-136) point out, these rules or shared social understandings are not fixed but are constantly contested and renegotiated, particularly within the dynamic and ever-changing world of electronic/dance music. Simon Reynolds (quoted in McLeod 2001, 66) further supports this idea, arguing that subgenre categories are not just about classification but also about dialogue and debate, shaping the music's direction and purpose. Toynbee (2000, 136) adds to this by suggesting that the very process of genre is one of "regulating repetition and difference". Musicians strive to recreate the initial pleasurable experience of a particular sound, but this inevitably leads to variations and deviations, resulting in the emergence of new subgenres.

This constant evolution is further fuelled by what Toynbee (2000, 135) terms "transgression", a reflexive process where music makers consciously break existing codes and conventions as a strategy for renewal. This "thoughtful deviance" has been a driving force in the development of dance music, as artists experiment with new sounds, rhythms, and structures, pushing the boundaries of the genre and creating new subgenres in the process. In this sense, the dynamic nature of dance music is not simply a result of market forces or cultural appropriation, but also a reflection of the genre's inherent drive for innovation and experimentation. The constant emergence of new subgenres is a testament to the creativity and restlessness of dance music producers and DJs, who are constantly seeking new ways to express themselves and connect with their audience. Furthermore, as Fabbri (quoted by McLeod 2001, 66) observed, even the graphics and design of record sleeves contribute to determining the meaning of the music itself, a concept that holds true for the visual language employed in electronic/dance music. The sleeve design of electronic/dance compact discs often signals to the consumer what type of music the discs contain, even before the words on the package are read. The bright, day-glo colors and smiley face graphics, for example, can immediately identify a compilation of acid house music (McLeod 2001, 68). Similarly, for those who do not necessarily buy the music they dance to, the graphics on flyers that advertise events are similarly important in identifying the types of music that will be played.

The rapid emergence of new subgenres in dance music, such as house, techno, and trance, is driven by a multitude of factors, including the music's own rapid evolution, the

accelerated pace of consumer culture, the appropriation of music from marginalized communities by dominant groups, and the marketing strategies of record companies. To drum up new business, for instance, record companies often resort to marketing gimmicks that trumpet "the next big thing", thereby further fuelling this constant flux and dynamism (McLeod 2001, 67). This perpetual state of change and innovation makes dance music a vibrant and ever-evolving cultural force, constantly pushing boundaries and challenging conventions.

The naming of subgenres is a complex process that involves multiple actors and institutions, including record companies, music magazines, DJs, and fans, all vying to shape the discourse around genre and subgenre. This process is often driven by commercial interests, as record companies seek to create new markets and revitalize existing ones. McLeod (2001, 68) highlights this phenomenon, noting that the music industry frequently introduces new names for pre-existing music, pushing artists through an "image-making mill" to create an illusion of novelty. Examples abound, such as the rebranding of Black Sabbath-influenced heavy metal as "grunge" or the repackaging of classic soul as "new soul".

This practice is not unique to the broader music industry; it also permeates the dance music scene. McLeod (2001, 68) cites the emergence of "techno" as a prime example. Initially a term coined by a record company to categorize the electronic music coming out of Detroit, "techno" gained traction as a replacement for the overexposed term "house". This deliberate rebranding, involving consultations with DJs and other music scene figures, aimed to give the music a distinctive identity and create a sense of novelty.

The proliferation of subgenres also serves as a gate-keeping mechanism, as McLeod (2001, 60) suggests. The ability to navigate the ever-changing landscape of subgenre names and their associated cultural codes requires a certain level of cultural capital. This specialized knowledge allows insiders to distinguish themselves from outsiders, reinforcing the boundaries of the scene and creating a sense of belonging among those "in the know".

The continuous emergence of new subgenres in dance music is propelled by a complex interplay between cultural and economic forces, as highlighted by Bourdieu and Kruse (quoted by McLeod 2001, 61). The field of cultural production, in this case, music-making and consumption, overlaps significantly with the economic field, where electronic/dance music is marketed, merchandised, and sold. This interplay is evident in the

way record companies and music magazines work together to promote new subgenres, often by coining new terms for existing styles or repackaging them in new ways. This constant need for novelty and differentiation is driven by the logic of consumer culture and planned obsolescence, where the rapid turnover of styles and trends is essential for maintaining demand and generating profits. Nonetheless, as McLeod (2001, 60) suggests, despite the diversity of subgenres, they remain unified under the umbrella term "electronic/dance music" due to overlapping consumer bases and the interconnected social and economic systems that support these diverse musical styles.

The appropriation of music from marginalized communities, particularly Black and Latino artists, has also played a role in the proliferation of subgenres. As McLeod (2001, 71) notes, the act of changing genre names, such as from "house" to "techno", can be seen not only as a rebranding strategy but also as an attempt to re-signify the "otherness" of the original name, making it more palatable to mainstream audiences. This process of cultural appropriation, while often problematic, has also contributed to the diversification of dance music, as new styles and subgenres emerge from the fusion of different cultural influences. This phenomenon can be observed in the evolution of jungle music, a genre with roots in Black British culture. As jungle gained mainstream acceptance, it was often diluted and rebranded under the name "drum 'n' bass", a less culturally specific term (McLeod 2001, 72). Additionally, the emergence of "intelligent jungle", a subgenre associated with a more cerebral and predominantly white audience, further demonstrates the complex dynamics of cultural appropriation and genre evolution within dance music. While the term may not have been intentionally racist, its implications raise questions about the subtle ways in which cultural appropriation can operate within the genre.

2.4. The Democratic Heart of Dance Music: Participation, Decentralization, and Inclusive Aesthetics

Dance music has long been recognized for its democratic ethos, a characteristic that permeates its production, consumption, and overall cultural significance. This section will investigate the multifaceted nature of this democratic spirit, exploring its roots in participatory music-making, decentralized networks, accessible aesthetics, and the empowering impact of technology. By examining the works of scholars such as Toynbee (2000), Turino (2008), and Hesmondhalgh (1996; 1998; 1999; 2015), this analysis will uncover the various ways in which dance music fosters inclusivity, challenges traditional power structures, and promotes a sense of community and shared experience.

Participatory Music-Making and the Dance Floor as a Democratic Space

As highlighted by numerous dance insiders (Hesmondhalgh 1998, 234), the democratic ethos of dance music is a defining feature of the genre. Its roots lie in the very nature of music-making itself, which Toynbee (2000, introduction) argues is inherently democratic. Musicians, as popular creators, inspire others to engage in the creative process, fostering a sense of agency and collective expression even in challenging times. This democratic spirit is particularly evident in dance music, where the boundaries between artist and audience blur, and the act of dancing becomes a form of active participation.

Building on this idea, Turino (2008, 35) identifies participatory music-making and dancing as inherently democratic forms of cultural expression, contrasting sharply with the competitive and hierarchical structures prevalent in other musical fields and the broader capitalist-cosmopolitan formation. Dance music embodies this participatory ethos, transforming the dance floor into a space where individuals can freely express themselves, connect with others, and collectively contribute to the energy and atmosphere of the event. This participatory nature is further reinforced by the very structure of dance music – its repetitive beats, infectious melodies, and hypnotic rhythms invite dancers to lose themselves in the music and the moment, fostering a sense of unity and shared experience that transcends social barriers. The DJ, as the facilitator of this experience, plays a crucial

role in creating an inclusive space where everyone feels welcome and can actively participate in shaping the collective energy.

Decentralization, Democratization, and the Rise of the Bedroom Studio

The democratic ethos of dance music extends beyond participatory practices on the dance floor and into the very fabric of its production and dissemination. As Hesmondhalgh (1998, 240) suggests, two key features – decentralization and the rise of an independent sector – have facilitated the democratization of music production within the dance music culture. This decentralization, as explored by Toynbee (2000, 154), manifests as an "alternative network" characterized by its geographical reach, dispersed nodes, and fluid exchange of information and emotions. This network stands in stark contrast to the traditional, hierarchical structures of established cultural institutions.

In this alternative network, agency is paramount, and the conventional "instrumental logic of accumulation" is actively resisted. The dance music subculture, as Toynbee posits, not only offers an alternative to established cultural institutions but also, through its unique mode of sociality, points towards new and equitable forms of social organization. The club, as the primary site of dance music culture, embodies this decentralized network. Unlike the hierarchical structure of a rock concert, where the audience faces the stage in a passive manner, the club encourages a 360° interaction among dancers, fostering a sense of mutual engagement and collective experience. This decentralization is not merely a theoretical concept but a tangible reality in the evolution of dance music. Hesmondhalgh (1998, 236) emphasizes that dance music has spurred a significant decentralization of subcultural music production in Britain. Towns once considered cultural backwaters have become thriving hubs of dance music scenes, fuelled by the widespread availability of production technology and the geographic spread of clubbing as a leisure activity. The disco boom of the 1970s led to the proliferation of nightclubs throughout Britain, creating local scenes and fostering a sense of community. The subsequent rise of acid house and rave culture further pushed dance music beyond metropolitan centers, reaching a wider audience and blurring the lines between urban and provincial scenes.

This decentralization also manifested in the rise of specialist record shops, which became important institutions for fostering local dance music infrastructures outside major

cities. These shops served as hubs for information exchange, community building, and the circulation of underground dance music, further contributing to the democratization of the scene.

The democratization of music production through technology has further amplified this democratic ethos. Hesmondhalgh (1996, 236) highlights the transformative impact of the "bedroom studio", which has revolutionized access to music-making. By the late 1980s, advancements in music technology, such as multi-tracking and the MIDI protocol, enabled the creation of affordable and sophisticated home studios. This shift empowered aspiring musicians to produce high-quality music independently, challenging the dominance of major labels and traditional studio systems. The boom in bedroom equipment led to a resurgence of grassroots music-making, where artists could experiment, create, and distribute their music on their own terms.

This democratization of music production has had a profound impact on the dance music landscape. It has fostered a vibrant and diverse scene, where artists from all walks of life can participate and contribute. The emergence of independent labels, operating alongside major players, has further diversified the musical landscape, providing platforms for niche genres and experimental sounds. This decentralized and accessible approach to music-making not only challenges traditional power structures but also nurtures a sense of community and shared purpose among artists and fans alike. The dance music scene becomes a dynamic ecosystem where creativity thrives, innovation is encouraged, and diverse voices can be heard.

The Democratic Aesthetic of Dance Music

Dance music's democratic spirit extends beyond the dance floor, permeating its production, distribution, and aesthetic features. This complexity manifests in various essential aspects of the genre.

Firstly, the sonic landscape of dance music itself reflects a democratic ethos. Toynbee (2000, 132) notes how the genre's pastiche, depth lessness, and flattening of hierarchies contribute to a democratic manifestation. The emphasis on rhythm and repetition, a common thread across various subgenres, transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, fostering a shared experience that unites dancers on a primal level. This shared

experience, in turn, contributes to a sense of community and belonging, blurring the lines between artist and audience.

Moreover, as Tagg (quoted in Toynbee 2000, 132) observes, the absence of traditional song structures in dance music and its focus on rhythm and groove create a more egalitarian listening experience. By de-emphasizing hierarchy and privileging the collective experience, dance music encourages individual interpretation and expression. Dancers are liberated to move and respond to the music in their own unique ways, contributing to the diverse and dynamic atmosphere of the dance floor. This freedom of expression is a hallmark of democratic participation, where individual voices are valued and contribute to a collective whole.

The inclusive nature of dance music is further exemplified by its sampling practices in the music-production process. By incorporating sounds and samples from diverse cultures and genres, dance music creates a musical melting pot that reflects the diversity of its audience. This inclusivity extends to the lyrical content of many dance music tracks, which often address themes of unity, love, and social justice. These themes resonate with the values of inclusivity and equality that underpin democratic societies, further solidifying the connection between dance music and democratic ideals.

In essence, the democratic aesthetic of dance music is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived experience, embodied in the sonic landscape, the participatory nature of the dance floor, and the inclusive sampling practices that characterize the genre. It is a music that invites participation, encourages individual expression, and celebrates diversity, all of which are fundamental tenets of a democratic society.

To sum up, the democratic ethos of dance music is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing its participatory nature, decentralized production and distribution, accessible aesthetic, and the empowering impact of technology. By challenging traditional power structures, fostering inclusivity, and promoting a sense of community and shared experience, dance music has become a powerful force for social and cultural change.

2.5. Dance Music as Oppositional Culture: A Legacy of Countercultural Roots and DIY Ethos

Dance music, as a cultural phenomenon, has consistently embodied a spirit of radicalism, subversion, and anti-corporatism. These characteristics are not new but have been inherited and transformed from previous countercultural movements, notably rock and punk. This section delves into the ways in which dance music has carried forward this legacy, maintaining a strong anti-corporate stance and advocating for alternative modes of cultural production and consumption.

Countercultural and Punk Influences on Dance Music's Anti-Corporatism

Hesmondhalgh (1998, 239) emphasizes that dance music culture inherited a “countercultural and punk distaste for the music corporations”. This distaste is rooted in a complex mix of romantic, bohemian, and political reasons, often driven by a strong belief in artistic freedom and autonomy.

The rise of the recording industry as a major cultural industry in the 1950s and 1960s, dominated by large corporations, led to a growing perception among countercultural youth that these companies were stifling creativity and commodifying music for mass consumption. Dance music, emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s, absorbed this anti-corporate sentiment from the rock counterculture and punk movements. It rejected the mainstream music industry's focus on profit and commercial success, instead prioritizing artistic expression, community, and a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos. This is evident in the early rave scene, which often operated outside of established venues and legal frameworks, creating temporary autonomous zones where participants could freely express themselves and challenge societal norms.

The Role of Independent Record Labels and the "Indie" Ethos

The concept of independence has been crucial in popular music, particularly in genres perceived to have social and cultural significance beyond mere entertainment.

As observed by Hesmondhalgh (2015, 2), independent record labels have consistently been associated with alternative approaches to aesthetics, institutional structures, and even politics, offering a distinct and potentially superior way of organizing

the production and consumption of culture. This strong link between independence and alternative cultural expression is especially pronounced in popular music compared to other art forms.

Hesmondhalgh (2015, 2) attributes this phenomenon to the deep-rooted connection between institutional musical independence and the broader notions of artistic freedom and autonomy. Music, especially in the post-Enlightenment era, has been viewed as a domain where the instrumentalism of science and the relentless pursuit of wealth could be countered, offering access to deeper truths about human existence. The ability of music to express, arouse, or instil emotions has further cemented its status as a powerful medium for personal and collective expression.

In this context, independent record labels, often referred to as "indie" labels, have come to symbolize a rejection of the perceived commercialism and conformity of the mainstream music industry. They are seen as champions of artistic freedom, allowing musicians to express themselves without the constraints imposed by major labels. This ethos of independence has resonated strongly with both dance music fans and artists alike, further solidifying the genre's anti-corporate stance.

In the dance music scene, independent labels have played a pivotal role in fostering creativity and innovation, providing a platform for artists who may not fit into the mainstream mold. These labels typically operate on a smaller scale, with a focus on niche genres and subcultures, allowing for greater artistic freedom and experimentation. The "indie" ethos, with its emphasis on DIY culture, community, and authenticity, has become synonymous with dance music, reinforcing its position as a countercultural force.

Furthermore, the rise of DIY culture, fuelled by accessible digital technologies, has further amplified this independent spirit. It has revolutionized music production, empowering individuals to create and share their work autonomously, particularly in dance music where the technical skills required are relatively accessible. This DIY approach has not only challenged the dominance of major labels but has also fostered a vibrant and diverse musical landscape where experimentation and innovation thrive. The internet has further democratized this process, providing independent artists with unprecedented opportunities to reach global audiences and challenge the traditional power structures of the music industry.

The Role of Media and Moral Panic

Dance music's oppositional and subversive nature is not solely derived from its inherent radical rhetoric or its connection to countercultures like punk and rock. A significant factor contributing to this character is the role of the media, particularly through the creation of moral panics, as highlighted by Hesmondhalgh (1998, 237) and McRobbie and Thornton (1995, 559). The moral panic surrounding the rave scene and acid house in the late 1980s and early 1990s exemplifies how media narratives can amplify the perceived threat of a subculture, ultimately solidifying its oppositional status.

The emergence of acid house and rave culture in the late 1980s was met with a wave of moral panic fuelled by sensationalist media coverage. McRobbie and Thornton (1995, 565) describe how the media, particularly tabloids, framed this burgeoning subculture as a dangerous threat to societal norms, focusing on its association with drug use, hedonism, and illegal gatherings. This moral panic served to demonize and marginalize the rave scene, but paradoxically, it also strengthened its appeal to those seeking an alternative to mainstream culture.

The media's portrayal of acid house as a transgressive and rebellious movement resonated with the countercultural ethos inherited from punk and rock. The demonization of the scene by the establishment further solidified its oppositional identity, attracting those who sought to challenge societal norms and express their individuality through music and dance. As McRobbie and Thornton (1995, 565) note, "disapproving mass media coverage legitimizes and authenticates youth cultures to the degree that it is hard to imagine a British youth 'movement' without it".

While the media's moral panic served to solidify dance music's oppositional character, it also had unintended consequences. The heightened attention brought to the rave scene led to increased police surveillance, stricter regulations, and the criminalization of certain aspects of the culture. This, in turn, forced the scene further underground, creating a sense of exclusivity and reinforcing its countercultural appeal.

Moreover, the media's sensationalist coverage often misrepresented the rave scene, focusing on its negative aspects while ignoring its positive contributions to community building, artistic expression, and social activism. This skewed portrayal not only perpetuated stereotypes but also missed an opportunity to engage in a more nuanced discussion about the cultural significance of dance music.

While the tabloid media played a crucial role in creating the moral panic around acid house, the music and style press also contributed to the narrative, albeit in a more complex way. As McRobbie and Thornton (1995, 565) point out, these publications often predicted and even fuelled the moral panic, recognizing its potential to boost sales and generate interest in the scene.

The music and style press played a dual role, both amplifying the perceived threat of the rave scene and providing a platform for its defenders. They published articles that sensationalized drug use and illegal activities, but also featured interviews with DJs and producers, reviews of new music, and reports on the latest fashion trends. This created a complex and often contradictory discourse around dance music, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the scene itself.

2.6. Ritmo Fulcral: The Discographic Division

The evolution of dance music from the underground scene to the mainstream has been marked by a constant negotiation between artistic expression, subcultural values, and commercial viability. As analyzed in this chapter, the demise of disco, though fuelled by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic factors, eventually paved the way for a more diverse and resilient dance music culture. The rejection of the star system, the embrace of anonymity, and the prioritization of genre over individual authorship became distinctive features of this alternative scene.

This shift towards a more democratic and decentralized model of music production and consumption has created new opportunities for artists and labels alike. Independent labels have played a crucial role in fostering creativity and innovation, providing a platform for artists who may not fit into the mainstream mold. This is particularly evident in the case of Ritmo Fulcral, an electronic music agency that has embraced this independent spirit, fostering a diverse portfolio of record labels that cater to a wide range of musical styles and subgenres.

The discography division of Ritmo Fulcral is of fundamental importance to the agency as it serves as a platform for artistic expression and freedom, not only for the artists within its roster but also for external talents seeking to release their music through the agency's record labels. In an interview, Christian Vismara, the A&R of Whoopee Records, one of Ritmo Fulcral's labels, shed light on the nuanced reasons why artists choose to partner with a label, particularly in the context of the contemporary music industry.

Vismara acknowledged that while the financial benefits of label affiliation may have diminished compared to the pre-digital era, when labels bore the cost of physically producing music on vinyl and CD, the core value proposition remains compelling. "The main advantage that a label ensures, not to be taken for granted, is still reaching an audience that you could never reach alone", he explained. In an era where the music market is saturated with new releases, independent artists often struggle to gain traction and visibility. Labels like those under the Ritmo Fulcral umbrella provide a curated platform and a built-in audience, instantly connecting artists with listeners who are already receptive to their particular genre or style.

Moreover, labels offer more than just exposure. They provide a stamp of approval, a form of validation that can significantly enhance an artist's credibility and reputation. This is particularly crucial in the electronic music scene, where the sheer number of DJs and producers makes it challenging for bookers and promoters to assess talent effectively. As Vismara noted, "Affiliation with a reputable label is undoubtedly an indicator of the DJ's quality". This validation can open doors to new opportunities, such as bookings at prestigious venues and festivals, collaborations with other artists, and increased media attention.

In essence, while the digital age has democratized music distribution, making it easier for artists to release their music independently, the role of labels remains vital. They provide a crucial link between artists and audiences, offering not only exposure and validation but also a sense of community and belonging within a specific musical niche. This is particularly evident in Ritmo Fulcral's diverse range of labels, each catering to a distinct audience and sound, thereby creating a rich and vibrant ecosystem for artistic expression and growth.

This discographic division ensures that what the artist produces reaches the listener through a structured process, taking approximately five weeks from the receipt of the mastered track to its availability for purchase in digital stores. This process is made possible through six distinct record labels, five of which, excluding Major Underground, operate independently. These independent labels, as Hesmondhalgh (1999, 35) defines them, are small companies without ties to larger corporations. This structure aligns with the dance music scene's historical emphasis on independence and artistic autonomy, a concept explored earlier in this chapter in the section regarding the genre's oppositional character. As discussed, independent labels have been crucial in fostering creativity and providing a platform for artists who may not fit into the mainstream mold, particularly in genres like dance music that often carry social and cultural significance beyond mere entertainment (Hesmondhalgh 2015, 2). Ritmo Fulcral's commitment to independent labels reflects this broader trend within the dance music industry.

In the interview I conducted with Maurizio Clemente, he explained that the rationale behind establishing multiple labels is rooted in the idea that each label is conceptually unique and serves a distinct purpose. In the following the specific record labels managed by Ritmo Fulcral and their differentiating factors will be examined.

- Whoopee Records: established in 2023, is the latest addition to Ritmo Fulcral's roster of labels and is dedicated to showcasing the signature vibe that defines the Lisbon sound through its successful party series. The label and the Whoopee parties are intrinsically linked, with the label promoting the music of its artists and the parties, in turn, promoting the label itself.

- Album Only: this label serves as a compilation of Ritmo Fulcral's top releases, bringing together albums and tracks that have achieved success on other labels within the agency.

- Ritmo Fulcral Digital Factory: founded to support emerging talent, this label provides a platform for young Portuguese music producers who face challenges in releasing their music.

- TR Records: Showcasing the diverse spectrum of soulful dance music, this label encompasses genres ranging from deep, jazzy, and funky styles to the uplifting energy of R&B-soul, dance pop, and modern soulful/Afro tech.

- Jazz in Da House: curated by musician Max Marinacci, this label is dedicated to Jazz and soulful music, encompassing styles like nu jazz³, broken beat⁴, and chillout⁵.

These five independent labels, each with its unique identity, bear witness to Lawrence's (2003) observation that the contemporary dance music scene, particularly in the realm of independent electronic and dance music labels, owes much to the underground scene that flourished in New York in the 1970s. This early countercultural movement laid the groundwork for the emergence of an independent electronic scene that endures to this day, and its ideals and innovations resonate strongly in the sound and aesthetic championed by Ritmo Fulcral's independent labels.

- Major Underground: a joint venture with Sony Music Italy, this record label is a unique entity within Ritmo Fulcral's portfolio. Its name pays homage to both the major label's distribution power (Sony Music) and Clemente's extensive

³ Nu jazz is a hybrid genre emerging in the late 1990s that blends traditional jazz elements with soul, funk, electronic music, and free improvisation.

⁴ Drawing heavily on influences from jazz-funk and R&B, Broken beat is a subgenre of electronic dance music characterized by syncopated rhythms and irregular snare drum patterns.

⁵ Chillout is a subgenre of electronic music known for its relaxed tempo and tranquil atmosphere. It often features ambient soundscapes and downtempo rhythms, creating a soothing and contemplative listening experience.

experience in the underground music scene, honed through his work with Key Note Multimedia and Ritmo Fulcral. This label aims to bridge the gap between the underground and the mainstream, infusing the commercial music market with a fresh sound that draws inspiration from 90s R&B dance mixes and "pop hit" styles. The label's aesthetic and graphics further reinforce this fusion of influences, creating a distinct visual identity that reflects its innovative approach to music production.

While not a wholly owned subsidiary of a major label, Major Underground exists as a "pseudo-independent" entity, a concept explored by Hesmondhalgh (1998, 246). This model, prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, often raised questions of credibility due to the perceived conflict between corporate interests and the anti-establishment ethos often associated with independent labels. Major Underground was established as an experiment to explore whether such a partnership could provide a unique avenue for penetrating the music market.

This approach reflects a strategic move by major labels to harness the "credibility" and subcultural knowledge inherent in independent labels, as Hesmondhalgh (1998, 245) points out. While Major Underground benefits from the resources and distribution power of a major label, it retains a degree of autonomy in its creative direction, branding, and artist selection. This allows it to appeal to audiences who value the authenticity and innovation often associated with independent labels, while still leveraging the commercial advantages of a major label partnership.

The "pseudo-independence" of Major Underground illustrates the complexities of the contemporary music industry, where the lines between major and independent labels are increasingly blurred. It also highlights the ongoing tension between commercial viability and artistic integrity, as well as the evolving strategies employed by both major and independent labels to navigate these challenges.

There is another label, however, that doesn't perfectly fit the characteristics of an independent label. Album Only, while being an independent label that showcases Ritmo Fulcral's top releases from across its various imprints, embodies the complex dynamics of the compilation album market within the dance music scene, as discussed by Hesmondhalgh (1998, 240-243). While serving as a valuable platform for consolidating and promoting the agency's successes, it also highlights the inherent paradox between maintaining independent credibility and achieving commercial viability. As Hesmondhalgh notes, compilation

albums can be a double-edged sword for independent labels. On the one hand, they offer a cost-effective way to reach a wider audience and generate revenue by aggregating previously released tracks or licensing tracks from other labels. This financial boost is crucial for sustaining the independent sector, allowing labels to cross-subsidize less successful releases and invest in future projects.

However, the inherent "commercialism" of compilation albums can also erode a label's credibility within the dance music community, which often values exclusivity and underground status (Hesmondhalgh 1998, 241). This tension between economic and cultural capital creates a constant balancing act for independent labels like Album Only.

Despite this challenge, Album Only navigates this paradox by strategically curating its compilations. By focusing on high-quality tracks that have already garnered recognition within the agency's other labels, it aims to maintain a level of artistic integrity and appeal to both existing fans and new listeners. This approach demonstrates the label's commitment to showcasing the best of Ritmo Fulcral's output while still adhering to the principles of independence and artistic freedom.

In this way, Album Only exemplifies the ongoing negotiation between commercial success and subcultural credibility that defines the independent dance music landscape. It serves as a reminder that even within a system driven by market forces, there is still space for artistic expression and the pursuit of a unique sonic identity.

The diversity of Ritmo Fulcral's labels, each with its distinct identity and purpose, allows the agency to navigate the complexities of the contemporary music industry. By balancing the artistic freedom and subcultural credibility of independent labels with the commercial reach and resources of a major label partnership, Ritmo Fulcral has created a multifaceted approach to music production. This model enables the agency to cater to a wide audience, support a variety of musical expressions, and ultimately make a significant and lasting contribution to the music industry.

The agency's commitment to both established and emerging artists, as well as its ability to adapt to the evolving landscape of the music industry, positions Ritmo Fulcral as a key player in the Portuguese and international music scenes. By embracing both independent and collaborative models, the agency demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the music industry today, and a willingness to forge its own path towards a sustainable and creatively fulfilling future.

In addition to the diverse range of labels offered by Ritmo Fulcral, the agency's appeal to artists also lies in its comprehensive support services. While some artists may initially attempt to navigate the music industry independently, the complexities of distribution, promotion, and audience development often lead them to seek the assistance of an agency.

As Clemente noted in our interview, "It is very rare for artists to handle everything on their own... The agency takes care of all the procedures for distributing and promoting the artists' music, allowing them to focus solely on creating new music". This sentiment is echoed by the experiences of numerous artists who, after attempting self-distribution through platforms like DistroKid, ultimately turned to Ritmo Fulcral for its established network and visibility.

The agency's value proposition extends beyond logistical support. Clemente emphasized the importance of audience reach, stating that "Every day, tens of thousands of releases come out, and in this sea of publications, the label makes you stand out, placing you in a musical context already known to listeners". This curated context, provided by each label's distinct identity and audience, can significantly enhance an artist's visibility and potential for success.

The following section will highlight the inner mechanisms of this division, offering a detailed analysis of the multifaceted process that leads to the making of a musical release. This investigation will begin by dissecting the intricacies of music distribution, providing a step-by-step account of how tracks are prepared, promoted, and finally released to the global audience. This complex process, spanning multiple platforms and involving meticulous coordination between various stakeholders, will underscore the dynamic landscape of the music industry and the pivotal role played by agencies like Ritmo Fulcral in supporting artists and facilitating their creative endeavors.

2.7. The Distribution and Promotion Process: A Firsthand Account

Upon joining Ritmo Fulcral, my primary responsibility was overseeing the discography division, which entailed managing the six distinct record labels previously outlined. My role specifically encompassed the distribution and promotion of the agency's musical releases.

The process of electronic music distribution, a task I handled on a daily basis, involves several intricate steps that culminate in the release of artists' music on platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Bandcamp, Soundcloud, Deezer, and numerous others. This process, which typically spans five weeks, begins with an email from Maurizio Clemente, the head of production, informing me of the next scheduled release. Importantly, this communication only occurs once the artist's contract has been formalized, the release has been titled and assigned a catalogue number, and the final mastered tracks are ready for distribution.

To fully grasp the significance of the "master file" in this process, and to understand the creative and technical elaborations involved in its creation, it's helpful to consider the insights shared by Christian Vismara during our interview.

Christian Vismara, a DJ and producer himself, elaborated on the intricacies of music production, emphasizing the individualized nature of each producer's creative process. He described his own workflow as commencing with an initial idea or "cue," which he then develops using Ableton Live, a popular music production software.

For original mixes, Vismara typically begins by experimenting with synthesizers, drums, bass, and other analogue instruments to find a combination that resonates with him. This initial spark then serves as the foundation for further development of the track. Alternatively, he might take on commissioned remixes or edits, or even rework existing singles to enhance their suitability for club play. Once a satisfying combination of sounds and instruments is achieved, Vismara delves into the details of the arrangement, refining the various elements of the track until they seamlessly blend together, creating a dynamic and engaging musical experience.

The mixing process, which Vismara often undertakes concurrently with the arrangement, ensures that all the individual elements of the track coalesce into a cohesive whole. This stage, he noted, is both technical and creative, requiring a keen ear and a deep

understanding of sound engineering principles. The resulting "premaster" or "final mix" is then ready for the final stage of mastering, which prepares the track for distribution. While some producers opt to handle mastering themselves, Vismara emphasized the industry standard of engaging a professional mastering engineer, particularly for high-profile projects. This additional layer of expertise ensures that the final product is polished and optimized for various playback systems.

Vismara acknowledged that many artists, even established ones, choose to delegate both mixing and mastering to professionals, as it allows them to focus on their creative strengths while minimizing the risk of technical errors. He emphasized that mastering engineers are not miracle workers, but rather skilled technicians who can enhance an already well-crafted track. The final master, he concluded, is the ultimate product, ready for distribution across various platforms and formats.

Vismara's insights highlight the further democratization of music production in the contemporary age. The "bedroom studio" of the 80s/90s, already easily affordable then, has been largely replaced by the even more accessible and affordable software like Ableton Live. This shift has empowered a new generation of artists to create and share their music with the world, further underscoring the need for agencies like Ritmo Fulcral to provide essential support in navigating the complexities of distribution and promotion in the contemporary music landscape.

Returning to the distribution process, as soon as Clemente indicated the track I should focus on via email, for which we already knew the name, artist, and catalogue number, and for which contracts and master files were ready, I contacted the graphic designer asking them to create the cover for the release. The cover had to include the catalogue number, artist, title, and tracklist. In the latter part of the internship, I personally created the covers using Figma, a vector graphics editor.

Once the cover was received or created, the second step began, where I uploaded the release to the first platform, Labelworx. LabelWorx is a distinguished global digital distributor specializing in electronic music. In other words, Labelworx was the platform that sent the finished product to all the digital stores we all know and use. Its main objective is to facilitate collaboration between independent artists and labels with digital platforms, providing a comprehensive infrastructure for successful music releases. This distributor also offers a range of essential tools and services for continuous growth and success, and it is not

the only platform offering such services; others include DistroKid and TuneCore. On Labelworx, I scheduled the release date, which always fell 5 weeks after the upload, on a Friday. The 5-week period ensures an accurate distribution process and maximizes the impact of the song's launch. Friday is a conventional release date set by the International Federation of Phonographic Industry (IFPI) in 2015 to limit piracy, as records were often distributed in America before the rest of the world, leading non-American fans to illegally download the music.

The third step involved uploading the release to the second platform, Traxsource. Traxsource, unlike Labelworx, is not a distributor, but a digital store. It operates as an online store specializing in electronic music sales, focusing on genres like house, techno, soulful, funk, and related styles. It serves as a platform for both music enthusiasts and industry professionals to procure and download digital music tracks. Traxsource features selections from independent labels and emerging artists in the electronic music scene. When distributing music on digital platforms, one can choose a specific store for an exclusive release with a temporary preview compared to all other digital stores. For most of the internship, except in the final period, Ritmo Fulcral released music exclusively on Traxsource, and this is the reason why during the internship I uploaded the music to Traxsource directly, without going through the distributor, Labelworx. The substantial difference in the procedure between Labelworx and Traxsource was that on the latter platform, the number of preview weeks had to be established, usually around two for Ritmo Fulcral labels. The necessary information for uploading releases on these platforms included catalogue number, title, artist of the release and each track, cover, genre of the release and each track, a brief synopsis of the release which I wrote after carefully listening to the tracks, release credits, and master files of the tracks.

The day after uploading to Traxsource, I submitted a Traxsource pitch or feature request, indicating that one of the upcoming releases should be featured prominently on Traxsource. In the final phase of the internship, exclusivity shifted from Traxsource to Beatport, another online platform for electronic music sales founded in 2004. Beatport offers a vast catalogue of tracks from independent and famous artists. Users can purchase and download digital music, access personalized playlists, podcasts, and streaming of live events. To grant exclusive releases to Beatport, it was sufficient to indicate it on the first platform,

Labelworx, avoiding the steps related to Traxsource and the Traxsource pitch, but adding promotional steps.

The work ended there concerning the specific release and resumed, with the fourth step, on the Friday just before the release, where I used the Promo-cloud platform. Promo-Cloud is a platform used in the music industry to preview and promote music tracks. It allows artists and labels to send promotional material to music journalists, DJs, and radio stations. The platform facilitated feedback, performance monitoring, and simplified communication in the music industry. I used Promo-Cloud mainly to send releases in advance to a network of contacts, including DJs, producers, and radio stations. The procedure was similar to the other two platforms. The difference was that, at the end of the process, I could live-track the feedback from the contacts to whom the material was sent in advance, which I then forwarded to the artists who produced the releases. Prominent figures in the music industry often provided feedback. I cannot hide how exciting it was to read them, knowing that the music was not yet available to the public, and I could only imagine how thrilling it was for the artists who produced those tracks!

Promo-Cloud serves as a modern iteration of the historical "record pools" described by Straw (1990, 147-160) and Toynbee (2000, 152). Much like these earlier systems, Promo-Cloud facilitates the distribution of promotional material to key influencers in the music industry, such as DJs, producers, and radio stations. This practice allows for early feedback and buzz generation, crucial in the fast-paced and competitive electronic music landscape.

As Toynbee (2000, 152) explains, the emergence of record pools in the 1970s was a direct response to the challenges faced by record companies in navigating the dynamic disco scene. The volatile nature of the market and the fragmented network of discotheques made it difficult to gauge audience reception and make informed promotional decisions. Record pools, essentially localized DJ associations, served as intermediaries, providing a structured way for record companies to distribute promotional copies and receive valuable feedback from DJs. This feedback, often in the form of "reaction sheets," helped labels identify potential hits and tailor their promotional strategies accordingly.

The parallels between record pools and modern platforms like Promo-Cloud are evident. Both systems recognize the pivotal role of DJs and other tastemakers in shaping musical trends and tastes. Just as record pools provided a centralized hub for DJs to access new music and share feedback, Promo-Cloud streamlines this process in the digital age. It

allows artists and labels to reach a vast network of influencers with a few clicks, fostering a direct line of communication and facilitating the crucial feedback loop that drives promotional success.

This practice of sending out promos in advance to DJs and other influencers has proven to be invaluable in the electronic music industry, both historically and in the present day. It not only generates buzz and anticipation for upcoming releases but also provides artists with valuable insights into how their music is received by their target audience. This feedback loop, facilitated by platforms such as Promo-Cloud, remains a cornerstone of music promotion, enabling artists and labels to make informed decisions and adapt their strategies for maximum impact.

The fifth step occurred on the release day and involved the Spotify pitch, like the Traxsource pitch, as it always aimed to highlight a track worthy of being included in one or more playlists on the platform. It was done through the Artists section of Spotify, choosing a track from the release to propose to playlist editors, answering a series of questions about the artist's background, the genre of the track, musical culture, mood, instruments used, and briefly explaining why it deserved to be featured in a playlist. As Hesmondhalgh (1998, 244) highlighted, the role of specialists within the music industry has been pivotal, historically dating back to the disco era, when dance music specialists within major corporations curated releases for specific markets. This underlines the importance of the pitch, as it serves as a direct line of communication to the A&R departments of these platforms. These professionals, akin to the dance music specialists of the past, have the power to elevate a release, potentially placing it in prominent playlists or features. The pitch is not merely a promotional tool, but an opportunity to catch the attention of those who shape musical trends and tastes. The significance of this final stage of pitching to platforms like Spotify and Traxsource cannot be overstated. As McLeod (2001, 68) illustrates, the music industry has a history of collaborations between record companies, A&R representatives, and music magazines to champion new genres and subgenres. A prime example is the birth of the term "techno," which emerged from a Virgin Records compilation and strategic discussions with DJs and industry insiders. Similarly, the pitches I made were not only promotional efforts but also opportunities to contribute to the ongoing dialogue within the electronic music scene, potentially influencing the way music was categorized and perceived. It was a small but crucial step in the larger process of shaping musical trends and tastes.

The sixth and final step also occurred on the day of the record's release and was linked to its promotional part. On that day, through the Hypeddit platform, I created a smart link that consolidated the link of the release for all the platforms where it was available. This link was then embedded into social and promotional content, so that those who followed the artists or the agency on social media could access the release through their preferred platform with a single link. This smart link was also very useful because it allowed me to monitor the number of visits, clicks, and emails captured, helping me to understand whether people were interested in the release or not. Thus ended the five-week process that turned a master file into a listenable song on all digital streaming platforms and beyond.

This process ended here for all but one of Ritmo Fulcral's labels, for which the process extended to an additional step related to the promotional aspect of the releases. For Whoopee Records, in fact, when the releases came out, which was usually much less frequently than for the other labels, I was in charge of finding and contacting YouTube and Soundcloud channels interested in premiering the tracks. In other words, I contacted various YouTube channels and Soundcloud profiles to inquire if they would be interested in premiering one of the tracks on their channels, ensuring that each track was ultimately premiered by a different channel. The goal was to increase the visibility of the release, as the profiles I contacted had a large following, particularly among fans of house/disco house music, the genre of Whoopee Records. While most channels offered this service for a fee, many offered it for free to share the music they liked best with their audience.

In the last phase of the internship, the final stage concerning previews no longer remained exclusive to Whoopee Records, but was also extended to the releases of other labels, undoubtedly increasing my workload significantly, as this task was quite demanding, involving contacting dozens and dozens of channels for each premiere, monitoring responses, and organizing with those who wanted to proceed with the premiere.

An additional task added in the concluding phase of the internship was related to collaboration with Beatport, initiated around January 2024. Within this collaboration, I coordinated a meeting between Ritmo Fulcral's DJ producers and Beatport's management, aimed at discussing new promotional strategies for the platform for the agency's artists. Following this meeting, I personally took charge of guiding the artists to implement what was discussed, thus achieving greater visibility and prominence.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to focus on several defining characteristics of the dance music industry, tracing its historical trajectory while integrating personal experiences to offer a comprehensive overview of this vast culture. From the demise of disco to the rise of independent labels, the interplay of cultural, economic, and technological forces has shaped a dynamic musical landscape where artistic independence and innovation are paramount.

The following chapter will shift focus to Ritmo Fulcral's other divisions, examining my contributions and the agency's impact on the local music scene in Lisbon, both within the club environment and the broader urban context. This exploration will illuminate the pivotal role music agencies play in supporting artists, promoting musical culture, and shaping the vibrant and ever-evolving landscape of dance music.

Chapter 3. Local Soundscapes: DJ Management and Event Production in Lisbon's Electronic Music Scene

3.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter examined the distinctive characteristics of electronic music and delved into Ritmo Fulcral's record label division. This division, arguably the least directly connected to the geographical and socio-cultural context of Lisbon, where the agency is headquartered, is comprised primarily of artists who are neither Portuguese nor based in Portugal. In contrast, this chapter shifts its focus to Ritmo Fulcral's other divisions, namely DJ management and booking, event production, and programming and artistic direction consultancy. These divisions are deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric of the Portuguese capital and play a pivotal role in shaping its dynamic electronic music scene.

To provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the agency's operational context and to immerse them in the dynamic world of Lisbon's electronic music, the following sections will first embark on an in-depth exploration of the city's electronic music landscape. The journey will begin with the dance music scene's origins in the central Bairro Alto neighborhood in the early 1980s, tracing its evolution through the decades to the present day, where it thrives as a diverse and multifaceted musical ecosystem. This historical overview will shed light not only on the key figures, venues, and events that have shaped Lisbon's electronic music identity, but also on the issues and contradictions that characterize the contemporary electronic scene in the Portuguese capital, and on the figures who, through initiatives and cultural projects, are trying to find solutions.

Following this, an analysis of the agency's divisions not yet addressed will be presented. The chapter will then delve into the specific tasks and responsibilities undertaken during my internship at Ritmo Fulcral. This firsthand account will offer valuable insights into the day-to-day operations of the agency, providing a glimpse into the inner workings of Lisbon's electronic music industry. The chapter will conclude with a thoughtful reflection on the internship experience, highlighting key takeaways and personal observations.

3.2. The History of Electronic Music in Portugal

The birth of modern Portuguese nightlife can be traced back to the opening of Frágil in 1982, a unique venue located at Rua da Atalaia 126 in Lisbon's Bairro Alto district. This crucial moment transformed Lisbon's cultural landscape (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a). Manuel Reis, the visionary behind Frágil, created an unparalleled space that challenged the conventions of the time by fostering an inclusive and avant-garde atmosphere. Unlike the traditional, exclusive clubs of the era, Frágil welcomed a diverse clientele, from artists and intellectuals to journalists and politicians, transcending social and political boundaries. Notably, Reis's decision to hire a woman as a door attendant was a courageous move that further emphasized the club's commitment to breaking traditional norms (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a).

Frágil's significance went beyond its eclectic clientele and innovative atmosphere. The club became a symbol of a generational shift, as the children of the Revolution, which overthrew Portugal's dictatorship in 1974, sought to break free from the past and embrace a new cosmopolitan culture. Imbued with the DIY spirit of punk, an attitude we have seen to be typical of many cultural movements that break with the past, this generation rejected the rigid dichotomies of the post-revolutionary era, seeking a more open and inclusive society. Frágil provided a platform for this cultural shift, becoming a hub for artistic expression, social interaction, and a celebration of diversity (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a).

Moreover, the opening of Frágil in 1982 coincided with a period of significant social and political change in Portugal, marked by the decriminalization of homosexuality that same year. This convergence of events further reinforced Frágil's role as a catalyst for change, as it provided a space where diverse groups could come together and express themselves freely. The club's opening marked the city's emergence as a modern and cosmopolitan hub. Manuel Reis's vision and innovative approach to nightlife laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and diverse cultural landscape, paving the way for the vibrant and dynamic scene that would emerge in later years.

It was within the walls of this iconic establishment, amidst its distinctive blend of white tiled ceilings, red velvet curtains, and gilded mirrors, that Yen Sung, now a leading

figure in Lisbon's dance music scene, found her artistic footing and began her journey as a DJ, encouraged by Manuel Reis himself (Akingbehin 2021).

The impact of *Frágil* reverberated throughout Lisbon's cultural landscape, inspiring the emergence of other innovative venues and cultural initiatives. The Bairro Alto district became a hotbed of creative activity, with new bars, shops, and artistic spaces opening their doors. This creative ferment extended to other parts of the city, as nightlife gradually migrated from Bairro Alto to areas like Santos and Alcântara (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a).

One of the most notable venues to emerge in this period was Plateau, a nightclub that opened in 1985. Like *Frágil*, Plateau sought to challenge the elitism of Lisbon's traditional nightlife by creating a more inclusive and democratic space. The club's minimalist design, innovative programming, and eclectic music selection, ranging from new wave to goth and electronic music, contributed to its popularity and influence.

Another key figure in this cultural transformation was Tó Pereira, later known as DJ Vibe, who played a crucial role in introducing new sounds and styles to Lisbon's nightlife scene (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a). Pereira's residencies at Plateau and later at Alcântara-Mar and Kremlin helped to popularize electronic music and pave the way for the emergence of a vibrant dance music culture in Portugal.

The establishment of "Noites Longas" (Long Nights) at Conde Barão in 1985 further democratized Lisbon's nightlife. This series of events, with its diverse programming and extended hours, attracted a wide range of people, contributing to a more inclusive and vibrant scene. Although not strictly raves, the energy and essence of Noites Longas have been compared to the British raves of the Second Summer of Love, showcasing a similar spirit of freedom and experimentation (De Oliveira Feitor 2021a).

The opening of Alcântara-Mar in 1988 and Kremlin in the same year introduced a new entertainment model to Lisbon's nightlife. These venues, with their focus on electronic music and innovative design, served as a gateway to the acid house and acid culture that were sweeping the UK at the time, gradually introducing these sounds and aesthetics to the Portuguese audience.

In general, in the 1980s, Portugal's music scene was primarily dominated by rock and pop, with electronic music occupying a niche space in late-night club sets. However, the influence of international trends, particularly from the UK, played a significant role in

introducing and popularizing electronic music in the country (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). This influence was stronger than that of the US, especially in the early stages of the scene's development.

The arrival of acid house in Portugal in 1988, coinciding with its peak in the UK, marked a turning point (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). DJ Tó Pereira became a key figure in this transition. Having experienced the acid house scene in London firsthand, Pereira began incorporating acid house tracks into his sets at Alcântara-Mar, earning him the nickname “gajo dos martelos” (the guy with the hammers) who played “música das bolinhas” (music of the little balls) due to the genre's distinctive sound (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b).

Despite initial resistance from a more conservative audience, the growing interest in electronic music was fueled by several factors. Specialized record shops like Hippodrome and Bimotor played a crucial role in importing and distributing records from abroad, providing access to new sounds and style. Additionally, media outlets like *Blitz* magazine and radio programs dedicated to electronic music helped to raise awareness and generate excitement around the emerging scene.

The Kremlin club, with Tó Pereira as its resident DJ, further solidified the presence of electronic music in Lisbon (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). The nightclub's focus on electronic dance music and its innovative atmosphere attracted a growing audience, creating a space for experimentation and the development of a distinct Portuguese electronic music identity. While Lisbon was a central hub for the emerging electronic dance music scene in Portugal, the movement was not limited to the capital (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). Although most of the national nightlife scene remained relatively static, adhering to traditional formats from the 80s, larger cities and coastal tourist areas began to embrace the changing sounds and styles.

In Porto, for instance, venues like No Sense bar and Amnésia nightclub were early adopters of Chicago house and acid, introducing these genres to the region (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). Amnésia stood out for its unique industrial aesthetic, inspired by the clubs of Ibiza.

The role of DJs also underwent a significant transformation during this period. DJs evolved from being background figures to becoming central to the nightlife experience. Echoing the innovations brought forth by visionary clubs in Manhattan, New York, this trend finally reached Portugal as well. DJs honed their skills, transitioning from

simply playing a mix of styles to crafting cohesive musical journeys through skillful mixing. This shift in the DJ's role mirrored the broader changes taking place in the music scene, as electronic music gained prominence and DJs became recognized as artists.

The growing popularity of electronic dance music was also fueled by the arrival of international bands and DJs in Portugal, exposing audiences to new sounds and trends (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). However, the most significant catalyst for change was the emergence of freelance DJs, who began to break away from their residencies and play at various clubs. DJ Vibe was a pioneer in this movement, and his success helped to further popularize electronic music in Portugal.

The rise of electronic music in Portugal was not solely a domestic phenomenon. The "Second Summer of Love" in the United Kingdom, with its burgeoning rave scene, had a profound impact on Portuguese music enthusiasts. This influence was facilitated by international media, as well as personal connections to individuals living and working abroad, who brought back news and music from Britain (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b).

The emergence of the first "house parties" in Portugal in 1991, featuring international DJs like Adamski and Paul Oakenfold, along with the underground raves held in Xabregas, a neighborhood in the eastern part of Lisbon, captured the spirit of the British rave scene and further solidified the growing popularity of electronic music in Portugal (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b).

The early 1990s marked a period of significant experimentation and innovation also in Portuguese music production. Tó Pereira, at Kremlin, began experimenting with electronic instruments, even daring to create a live mashup of traditional Portuguese music with contemporary electronic beats. This playful experimentation highlights the growing interest in electronic music among Portuguese artists.

Rui da Silva, a sound technician and regular at Kremlin, also embraced electronic music production. His collaboration with the band Pop Dell'Arte on their maxi-single *2002/Mc Holly* (1992) incorporated elements of electronic dance music and hip-hop, showcasing the increasing cross-pollination between genres. Da Silva's early solo work further cemented the growing influence of electronic music in Portugal. His second record, *Dream Frequency* (1992), is considered the first Portuguese electronic dance music record.

Around this time, four pivotal events marked the decisive start and establishment of the Portuguese dance scene (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b): a rave party at Estação da Luz dance

club in Aveiro, another at the Convent of São Francisco in Coimbra, yet another at the Convento do Beato in Lisbon, and the "Medieval Groove" at the castle of Montemor-o-Velho. While these events were referred to as raves, they differed significantly from the British model. These Portuguese events were legal, minimally organized parties that enjoyed the support of political and security authorities and were sponsored by commercial brands. The only shared characteristic with British raves was the desire to extend dancing hours into the early morning, a point of contention due to a political controversy in Portugal (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b).

DJ Vibe's visit to New York in 1992 proved to be a turning point for the Portuguese sound. His exposure to the American house scene, especially the tribal house sound championed by Junior Vasquez at the Sound Factory, profoundly influenced his musical direction and subsequently shaped the broader Portuguese scene. This influence is evident in the track *So Get Up*, produced by Underground Sound of Lisbon (USL), a duo formed by Vibe and Rui da Silva. The track featured a doom-forecasting monologue by Greek-born Californian artist Darin Pappas, a hard-thumping acid beat, and a heavy emphasis on drums, a characteristic that Vibe himself identified as a key element of the Portuguese sound, reflecting the influence of American tribal house (Lee 2018; De Oliveira Feitor 2021b).

The mid-1990s marked a transformative period for the Portuguese electronic dance music (EDM) scene, characterized by a significant push towards international recognition and a rapid expansion in popularity (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). The success of *So Get Up*, quickly become Portugal's "home-grown club anthem" (Lee 2018), propelled Portuguese electronic music onto the international stage, gaining recognition in the US and even reaching the top ten of essential tracks played by Junior Vasquez at the Sound Factory. This international acclaim, fueled by the allure of Portugal's beaches, gastronomy, and a relaxed legal environment contrasting with stricter regulations in the UK, led to a surge of interest in Portuguese electronic music (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). The country's burgeoning scene, often described as "a paradise called Portugal" and the "new Ibiza" by international media outlets like Muzik, attracted foreign DJs and enthusiasts, contributing to its rapid growth and diversification (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). This period saw Portuguese DJs and producers, such as DJ Vibe, touring the USA and performing at major international events like the Love Parade in Berlin and the Sound Factory in New York. The release of DJ Vibe's

mixed CDs, including collaborations with Tribal America, further solidified the connection between the Portuguese and American house scenes, with *So Get Up* becoming a global hit, reaching the top of the charts in the USA and the UK (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). This international success also led to the establishment of Tribal Portugal, a subsidiary label dedicated to Portuguese artists. Other Portuguese producers, such as João Daniel, also gained international recognition during this period, with his releases on high-profile labels like UMM (Underground Music Movement) in Italy (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b), a record label previously mentioned in this exploration, as Maurizio Clemente worked there as A&R between 1996 and 1997 (Decadance, 2022).

This international recognition and the growing popularity of EDM within Portugal led to a significant shift in the scene. The underground rave scene transitioned into a mass movement, with large-scale events attracting thousands of attendees (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). This rapid growth, however, also led to some negative consequences, including increased instances of violence and drug abuse, tarnishing the scene's initial novelty and contributing to a sense of excess and vulgarity, and highlighting the challenges associated with the commercialization and mainstreaming of the scene (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). Despite these challenges, the Portuguese dance scene continued to evolve and diversify. By 1997, new styles like drum'n'bass, jungle, trip-hop, minimal techno, and Goa-trance began to emerge, alongside new artists, venues, events, and labels (De Oliveira Feitor 2021b). This period marked the beginning of a new phase in Portuguese electronic dance music, characterized by a greater diversity of sounds and a continued push towards innovation and experimentation. The scene's evolution reflected a broader cultural shift in Portugal, with electronic music increasingly becoming a part of mainstream culture.

3.3. Lisbon's Contemporary Electronic Music Scene

Lisbon's contemporary electronic music scene stands as a testament to the unwavering creativity and resilience of its artists, who navigate a complex socio-economic landscape (Welsh 2024). Currently, the country grapples with a housing crisis, intensified by overtourism, foreign investment, and tax incentives, resulting in exorbitant rents, particularly in Lisbon, one of Europe's most expensive cities for housing (Welsh 2024). A low minimum wage of €820.00 per month, insufficient arts funding, and rising living costs further compound the challenges faced by artists and young people in the country (Welsh 2024).

A predominantly DIY ethos prevails within the scene, with artists and collectives resourcefully utilizing unconventional venues and resources to circumvent the lack of traditional spaces and financial support (Welsh 2024).



Figure 1. Opus rave setup at Quinta da Arealva, Almada. May 18th, 2024.

The past decade has witnessed a gradual rejuvenation of the scene, with a new generation of artists, labels, parties, promoters, communities, and collectives emerging and injecting it with renewed vibrancy and diversity (Welsh 2024). This resurgence of creative

energy has given rise to a rich tapestry of sounds and styles, with a multitude of artists and collectives each contributing their unique voice to the multifaceted electronic music landscape of Lisbon.



Figure 2. Lucine. Opus, Quinta da Arealva, Almada. May 18th, 2024.

Rave Legacy, Emerging Local Talent, and New Challenges

Lisbon's long-standing rave legacy from the 90s continues to influence the contemporary scene (Welsh 2024). The club originally established as Frágil in 1982, relocated in 1998 to a larger space situated along the Tagus River, becoming Lux Frágil, and continued the legacy of its predecessor, remaining central to the city's nightlife (Bandcamp Daily, 2024; Akingbehin 2021).



Figure 3. Maria Reis rooftop concert at Lux Frágil. July 25th, 2024.

The magic of the original Frágil seamlessly transitioned to Lux, as it's commonly known today, quickly propelling the club to popularity and even hosting a performance by Prince, the iconic artist behind "Purple Rain," just a month after opening (Akingbehin 2021). Today, Lux's three stories are decorated with abstract artworks and have the air of a creative playground where anything goes. The bar staff wear bright, colorful jumpsuits. Every visiting DJ's name has been inscribed onto rainbow-striped pillars. There's an enormous moon hanging above the stairs, and the words "I was here the whole time" have been carved into a wall by a local artist (Akingbehin 2021).

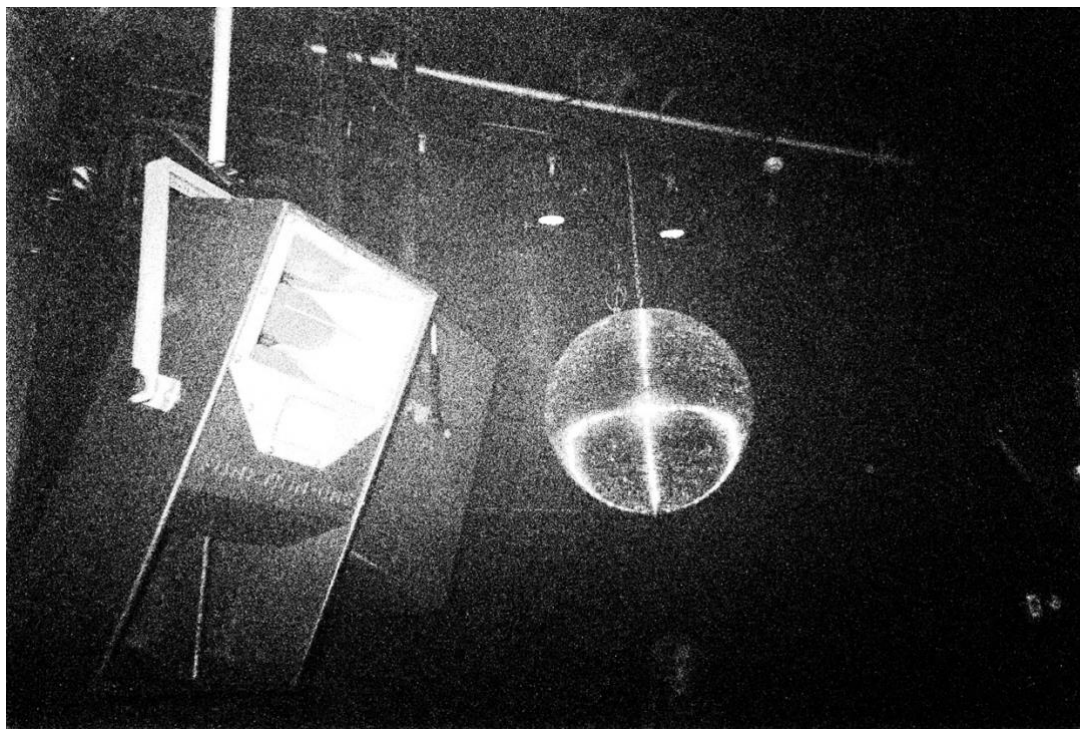


Figure 4. Lux Frágil dance floor. July 25th, 2024.

In our interview, Christian Vismara emphasized how Lux remains a pillar of the Portuguese electronic music scene, contributing significantly to Lisbon's reputation as a premier clubbing destination in Europe and beyond. Vismara highlighted that Lux's greatness lies in its meticulous and sophisticated music selection and artistic programming. This quintessential Lisbon club brings together internationally renowned stars and lesser-known local and international talents, creating a positive exchange, fostering networking among artists, and allowing the audience to broaden their tastes and knowledge.

However, the city's musical landscape is constantly shifting, with a new generation of artists, labels, and collectives emerging. Figures like Yen Sung and Photonz, who co-founded the label Alphabet Street in 2021, are championing homegrown talent and pushing the boundaries of electronic music (Welsh 2024). Despite the vibrant and innovative nature of the scene, challenges remain. As Diogo Vasconcelos, DJ, A&R, and manager of Lisbon-based label Discos Extendes points out, "I still don't see many Portuguese artists playing internationally, or able to make a living out of it" (Welsh 2024). This suggests that while the scene is thriving creatively, there are still obstacles to overcome in terms of economic sustainability and global recognition for Portuguese artists.

This lack of international recognition is not a reflection of talent, as evidenced by Yen Sung and two other DJs: Zé Pedro Moura, and Rui Vargas. These artists are longstanding and respected figures in Lisbon's scene, yet they have not achieved the same level of global recognition as some of their international counterparts. Yen Sung, despite being a resident DJ at Lux for many years and a well-respected figure in the Lisbon scene, has noted the challenges faced by women in the industry and the lack of recognition for local talent compared to international DJs (Akingbehin 2021). This disparity raises questions about the power dynamics within the music industry and the role of media in shaping perceptions of artistic value.

The influx of international DJs and producers, such as CC:DISCO! and Joe Delon, has significantly contributed to Lisbon's vibrant music scene. These artists have established their own labels and parties in the city, further enriching the cultural landscape. Maurizio Clemente himself told me that he recognized Lisbon's potential as a music hub around 2020. Observing the city's burgeoning clubbing culture and electronic scene, he made the decision to relocate from Italy and establish the Ritmo Fulcral agency. Today, approximately four years after making the choice to transfer his business to Lisbon, he expresses satisfaction with the decision and asserts that it has paid off. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic slowing down the cultural fervor and growth experienced around 2020, Lisbon has emerged as a significant destination for global dance music in 2024.

While these international contributions are undeniable, it is crucial to acknowledge and support the local talent that has been instrumental in shaping Lisbon's unique musical identity (Welsh 2024). Inês Coutinho, also known as Violet, and Marco Rodrigues, Photonz, through Rádio Quântica, are actively contributing to Lisbon's burgeoning creative scene by providing a platform for emerging artists and a hub for diverse musical expressions (Pearl 2018).



Figure 5. Violet. Vale Perdido at 8 Marvila, Lisbon. November 19th, 2023.

Rodrigues emphasizes the city's current creative boom, citing the emergence of new artists, labels, and unique venues as evidence of its dynamic cultural landscape (Pearl 2018). Lisbon's allure has attracted international attention, with the city often portrayed in the media as the "next Berlin" or "Europe's hot new art capital," or other simplistic comparisons designed to attract foreigners. However, Coutinho and Rodrigues emphasize the importance of recognizing the local artists and initiatives that have been instrumental in shaping and sustaining this vibrant cultural ecosystem (Pearl 2018). They believe that the true essence of Lisbon's music scene lies in its grassroots nature, its diversity, and its resilience in the face of adversity.

Christian Vismara has also expressed his opinion on Lisbon's creative boom in recent years, noting a familiarity between what is happening in Lisbon and what happened in Berlin in the past. The Italian DJ and producer has observed a significant transformation in Lisbon over the last 10 years, with a surprising number of DJs, record shops, bars, and clubs in such a small city—a scene comparable to much larger cities. He believes clubbing and electronic music play a central role in Lisbon's city life more than in other cities, reminiscent of Berlin. Vismara acknowledges that while the comparison might be slightly exaggerated, there are indeed some similarities between the two cities. It's not a coincidence that many

DJs and industry professionals, including Maurizio Clemente, have relocated to the Portuguese capital. All of this indicates one thing: as of now, Lisbon's electronic music scene is vibrant and growing.

However, Vismara has also expressed concerns about the uncontrolled rise in housing prices in Lisbon. He believes the future is uncertain because the cost of living has risen considerably. If surviving in Lisbon becomes impossible for artists, the quality of the city's artistic life will suffer. The relatively low cost of living was one of the factors fueling the city's artistic growth.

He suggests that several factors have made Lisbon an important destination for clubbing in recent years, which wasn't the case a decade ago. Now it's a significant hub that could potentially become the new Berlin if the cost of living doesn't discourage those interested in avant-garde musical styles and creativity. If, instead, it starts attracting an audience not interested in these aspects, the scene will inevitably lose its vibrancy. There won't be enough audience for parties, or the quality of events will decrease because the audience won't be interested in musical exploration and experimentation but rather in more established and commercial sounds.

According to Vismara, the major difference between Berlin and Lisbon is that the former is vast and has space for everyone, so there's still a chance to find affordable housing. Thus, for many artists, it still makes sense to move there. It remains to be seen whether Lisbon still holds the same appeal.

A growing emphasis on inclusivity and social consciousness within Lisbon's scene is evident in the recent work of clubs like Planeta Manas, which actively challenges the heteronormative, Western-dominated narrative of electronic music, creating safe spaces for the queer community (Welsh 2024). One of the people making Planeta Manas a reality, as well as actively shaping Lisbon's electronic music landscape, is once again Inês Borges Coutinho, known as Violet.

A DJ, producer, and label owner, Violet's work extends beyond music production and performance, advocating for inclusivity and challenging the industry's traditional norms. Her dedication to fostering a more welcoming and diverse scene is evident in her artistic practice and activism. She emphasizes the importance of creating a space where all ravers feel welcome, challenging the industry's often exclusive and conservative nature. This commitment to inclusivity is exemplified by her "stage invasion" at Lisbon Pride, where she

invited trans friends to join her performance, highlighting the lack of trans representation in the lineup (Cafolla 2018).

Violet identifies the historical context of Portugal, emerging from a dictatorship only 40 years ago, as a contributing factor to the difficulty of engaging in political dialogue within the music scene. She argues that this context necessitates more direct action to initiate conversations about inclusivity and social justice. Violet also critiques the privilege and power dynamics within the scene, noting that those in positions of authority, often white, upper-middle-class men, can easily dismiss concerns about inclusivity by focusing solely on the music. She argues that this perspective ignores the experiences of marginalized groups who face discrimination and exclusion within the scene (Cafolla 2018).

In contrast to this exclusionary environment, Violet co-runs Mina, a queer party held at Planeta Manas, that provides a safe and inclusive space for marginalized communities in Lisbon. Inspired by the vibrant queer nightlife scenes in cities like Berlin and London, Mina offers a space for self-expression, acceptance, and celebration (Cafolla 2018). This initiative demonstrates Violet's commitment to creating alternative spaces that challenge the dominant norms and power structures within the electronic music scene.



Figure 6. Roundhouse Kick. Mina Suspension at Planeta Manas, Lisbon. January 1st, 2024.

The rise of LGBTQ+-focused collectives like Mina and Circa A.D. represents a significant shift towards inclusivity and diversity within Lisbon's electronic music scene (Welsh 2019). These collectives are actively challenging the mainstream club culture's often exclusive and heteronormative nature, creating safe spaces for marginalized communities, and fostering a more equitable and inclusive cultural landscape (Welsh 2019).

The interplay between Lisbon's romanticized image and the realities faced by its residents and artists creates a complex and dynamic cultural landscape. While the city's affordability and creative energy continue to attract newcomers, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of local artists who have been instrumental in shaping Lisbon's unique identity. As the city continues to evolve, the future of Lisbon's music scene will be shaped by the ongoing negotiation between these competing forces, promising a vibrant and ever-evolving cultural landscape.

Kuduro, Batida, and the Afro-Portuguese Electronic Music Scene

While it's widely known that Brazilian music, particularly baile funk in the realm of electronic music, holds significant importance in Portugal due to the large Brazilian community residing there (Welsh 2024), perhaps less recognized is the global acclaim that Afro-Portuguese club music, specifically kuduro and batida, has garnered in the past decade.

Born in the streets of Angola during the 90s amidst the civil war, kuduro, literally meaning "hard ass", is a vibrant and energetic genre that fuses African rhythms with electronic beats. Although its roots lie in the African continent, kuduro's global recognition came through Lisbon, where it thrived in the city's peripheral neighborhoods such as Bairro da Portela, Quinta do Mocho, Bairro do Pendão, and Oeiras' Bairro do Pombal, known as "bairros" (Delaportas 2023; Cafolla 2019). These bairros, home to many first and second-generation immigrants from former Portuguese colonies, were initially characterized by social isolation and economic hardship. However, these communities became fertile ground for the development of kuduro and other forms of batida, an umbrella term for Afro-Portuguese electronic music. Artists like DJ Marfox, one of the pioneers of batida, channeled the energy and struggles of the bairros into their music, creating a unique sound that resonated with the community.

Initially, kuduro faced challenges breaking into the mainstream music scene of Lisbon. Its association with the bairros led to prejudice and marginalization. However, the

tide began to turn with the emergence of Príncipe, a record label and collective committed to promoting local music. By releasing music from artists like DJ Marfox and organizing events like Noite Príncipe at MusicBox, a club near the central Cais do Sodré metro station, Príncipe provided a platform for kuduro to reach a wider, global audience (Cafolla 2019).

Through Príncipe's efforts, kuduro not only gained local recognition but also caught the attention of international artists like M.I.A. and Diplo, who incorporated its elements into their music. This exposure further propelled kuduro onto the global stage, leading to a surge in its popularity and transforming the perception of the bairros (Bulut 2016).

As kuduro grew in popularity, it played a significant role in breaking down social barriers between the city center and the bairros. The success of artists like DJ Marfox and other "DJs from the ghetto" challenged stereotypes associated with these neighborhoods. It showcased the creativity and talent emerging from the bairros, promoting a more positive image and fostering a sense of pride within these communities. A landmark release in kuduro's history is the 2006 compilation *DJ Do Guetto Vol. 1* by the DJs Do Guetto crew. This mixtape circulated the bairros on personal stereos and its makers dominated block parties. As Marfox (Cafolla 2019) recalls, "It changed everything for us and the community. We made being a producer something they could really consider to be." This compilation inspired a new generation of artists, many adopting the "fox" suffix in their names as homage to DJ Marfox. Creative pockets sprung up elsewhere in the bairros, further solidifying kuduro's influence.

Moreover, Buraka Som Sistema, a band that blended kuduro with other global influences, played a crucial role in introducing kuduro to the world. Their energetic performances and collaborations with international artists helped to popularize the genre and solidified Lisbon's position as a hub for diverse musical expressions (Bulut 2016).

In conclusion, the rise of kuduro in Lisbon is a testament to the power of music to bridge social divides and transform communities. From its humble beginnings in the bairros to its global recognition, kuduro has not only become a symbol of Angolan and Portuguese culture but also a testament to the perseverance and creativity of marginalized communities. By challenging stereotypes and promoting cultural exchange, kuduro has made a lasting impact on the music scene and the social landscape of Lisbon.

What can be considered the contemporary evolution of kuduro is batida.

Originating from the instrumental elements of kuduro tracks, batida has developed through an increase in tempo and the incorporation of vocals, rhythms, and diverse sounds. Both kuduro and batida are a reflection of Lisbon's rich Afro-diasporic heritage, influenced by musicians of Angolan, Bissau-Guinean, Cape Verdean, or São Toméan descent (Delaportas 2023).

DJ Marfox describes batida as a genre where producers have complete freedom in selecting samples and constructing melodies, allowing for a unique and personal touch in each creation. This freedom has enabled batida to evolve, integrating elements from kuduro, tarraxinha, and other Angolan music styles with contemporary production techniques (Delaportas 2023).

The post-colonial context has played a crucial role in the development of this music scene. The resurgence of Lusophone African relations through music has reshaped both the cultural and sound landscapes of the city (Delaportas 2023).

Artists like Nidia and Nigga Fox have gained international recognition for their contributions to the batida genre. Nidia, who started producing music as a teenager under the name Nidia Minaj, a tribute to the famous singer Nicky Minaj, has crafted a unique sound characterized by polyrhythmic beats and disorienting loops. Her 2017 album, "Nídia é Má, Nídia é Fudida", was acclaimed by *Rolling Stone* as one of the best electronic albums of the year (Crisp 2018). Similarly, Nigga Fox, whose name pays tribute to DJ Marfox, has garnered critical acclaim for his experimental rhythms and genre-blending tracks, that have been featured in sets by prominent artists like Aphex Twin (Crisp 2018).

The increased incorporation of Afro-Portuguese sounds into Lisbon's electronic music scene in recent years and the growing recognition of these sounds have led artists like DJ Nervoso, DJ Lilocox, DJ Maboku, and DJ Firmeza, key players in this transformation, to witness firsthand the changing perceptions and increasing openness to African sounds. Firmeza, in particular, notes the shift from segregated musical experiences to more inclusive and appreciative audiences (Bulut 2016).

Despite the progress, there is still work to be done in promoting and recognizing the full spectrum of Lisbon's music scene. Branko, a member of Buraka Som Sistema, emphasizes the need for a robust local scene to support international success and highlights ongoing efforts to draw attention to emerging music in Portugal (Bulut 2016). Lisbon's

unique position as a cultural crossroads continues to nurture a vibrant and innovative music scene that celebrates its Afro-Portuguese roots and global connections.

3.4. Ritmo Fulcral: The DJ Management Division

As previously outlined, the DJ management, event production, and programming and artistic direction consultancy divisions are inextricably linked to Lisbon's distinctive cultural milieu. Although, as indicated in the first chapter, the event production division could be considered a subcategory of the DJ management division, in this context, we will treat them separately. Each division plays a distinct yet interconnected role within the agency's operations, contributing to the city's thriving music scene while being shaped by its unique characteristics. The following sections will provide a comprehensive analysis of these three divisions, examining their individual functions, their collaborative efforts, and their significance within the broader context of Lisbon's musical landscape.

The DJ management department is the main division of Ritmo Fulcral agency.

Erica Pegoraro, production assistant of the agency, is in charge of this department together with Maurizio Clemente. She has been my supervisor throughout the entire internship and the person who introduced me to Ritmo Fulcral.

Pegoraro began her professional journey in Italy's fashion industry, transitioning from a sales assistant to a Visual Merchandiser over ten years. She later relocated to Portugal, continuing in fashion but eventually left due to unsatisfactory conditions. Pegoraro then worked as a Subject Matter Expert for a consulting multinational, focusing on training and coaching. In 2020, she opened a Yoga and Cooking studio, but the pandemic hindered its success. She eventually transitioned to the music industry, collaborating with Maurizio Clemente on projects involving party creation and an event guide-platform. Ultimately, they focused on developing the former project, which continues to the present day.

In my interview with her, Pegoraro recounted that Maurizio Clemente had long represented various internationally renowned artists, almost none of whom were Portuguese or based in Lisbon. When they began collaborating, they agreed to revamp his roster by introducing new emerging DJs from the local Lisbon scene, both Portuguese and non-Portuguese. This was Pegoraro's first role upon joining Ritmo Fulcral, as well as the agency's first foray into engaging with the Portuguese artistic landscape.

Pegoraro eventually oversaw all operational aspects of the agency. She explained that concerning the management of local emerging DJs, who she personally scouted and persuaded to join the agency, she acts as their agent, booker, and point of contact for all

matters. Alongside Clemente, she organizes strategic meetings with them, but on a day-to-day basis, she handles communication, advises on accepting gig proposals, and negotiates fees.

For Ritmo Fulcral's DJ bookings, either they receive an offer, and in such cases, Pegoraro handles approval and negotiation, or she proposes DJs for gigs that interest them. The larger and more significant the opportunities, the more time it takes, as building relationships with bookers, who receive numerous requests, requires patience. Towards the beginning of 2024, for example, they received a booking request for one of the emerging roster DJs for a well-known festival in the city, a result of Pegoraro cultivating relations with the festival organizers for a year.

If they propose a DJ to a venue, the venue's approval is needed before Pegoraro negotiates the fee. For venues in Lisbon, the process is straightforward, but for international bookings, Pegoraro handles flight arrangements, payment processing, and event promotion. She now uses Gigwell software to streamline contract and invoice creation, ensuring timely payments and simplifying booking management.

As for the management of the agency's most prominent artists, Clemente takes the lead, although Pegoraro has recently started assisting with scheduling tools and managing the movements and stays of guest DJs in Lisbon ahead of events.

Additionally, Pegoraro handles the booking of international DJs not managed by Ritmo Fulcral. This organizational role involves contacting their agency, making offers, and negotiating prices. This is followed by arranging everything for the DJ's arrival in the city, from transportation to any extra equipment specifically requested by the agency for internationally renowned artists.

The DJ management division is therefore of fundamental importance to the agency, and this also applies from a financial point of view, as it generates a substantial percentage of Ritmo Fulcral's profits, unlike the discography division, which in today's electronic music landscape generally does not guarantee significant income when compared to the income of other more popular genres, or even simply with the income it generated before the advent of digital streaming.

The booking and management of artists also allows the agency to have contact with the active realities in the Lisbon electronic music scene, both in terms of Portuguese or Lisbon-based artists who rely on the agency to be represented and entrust their bookings to

experts, and in terms of local clubs and discos that turn to Ritmo Fulcral to have the agency's DJs perform at their events, or to whom the agency turns to showcase their talents.

3.5. Ritmo Fulcral: The Event Production Division

The event production arm of Ritmo Fulcral, intrinsically linked to the DJ management and booking division, revolves around Whoopee, the Lisbon-based party series launched in late 2022.

Whoopee originated from Maurizio Clemente's proposal to Erica Pegoraro and Christian Vismara to create a party. Coincidentally, Pegoraro and Vismara were already contemplating organizing a music-focused event. The shared vision of the three led to the party's swift inception.

Vismara recounted how Whoopee initially started as just a party, or rather, a "container" for the parties he, Clemente, and Pegoraro wanted to organize. Subsequently, they decided to create the Whoopee Records label, linked to the party and the artists on Ritmo Fulcral's roster. Vismara also shared how Whoopee was conceived with the ambition to establish it as a reference point for house and disco music. He emphasized that until a few years ago, Lisbon's scene was primarily dominated by genres such as techno and tech house, making house music a relatively new niche for the city. According to Vismara, when he first arrived in Lisbon, there were no parties dedicated to house and disco music, and in fact, he was one of the first DJs to play disco and Italo disco in the city. He clarified that they didn't import this sound, but he believes Whoopee has certainly become synonymous with it and is one of the few parties that continues to champion it.

Pegoraro recounted how the creative process that led to the birth of the party was swift and almost natural, culminating in the creation of the name, "Whoopee," and the logo, a golden tapir on a purple background. The party's communication style was also established from the outset, a friendly and playful style that views the dancefloor as a big playground and the audience as many playmates ready to have a blast at a fun-filled party. The description of the party found on Resident Advisor captures this spirit well: "Whoopee is fun, Whoopee is wild, Whoopee is the party that starts when all the adults are gone. On our dancefloor everyone is welcome, just bring a smiling face and comfy shoes".⁶ The inaugural event took place at the Micro Music Club, a venue located inside LX Factory, with approximately a hundred attendees. After replicating the format in the

⁶ <https://it.ra.co/promoters/114903>

following two months and finding it successful, they decided to continue and expand the scale of future parties. To date, they have organized dozens of events across numerous clubs in Lisbon and have even reached other European capitals like Barcelona in June 2024.



Figure 7. Anya b2b Dazion. Super Whoopee x Fandango at Mirārī, Lisbon. March 8th, 2024.

Figure 7. Adam Purnell. Super Whoopee x Fandango at Mirārī, Lisbon. March 8th, 2024.

Following the first Whoopee event, Pegoraro decided to dedicate herself fully to this project, having previously juggled three jobs and being unable to manage the resulting stress.

She initially considered freelancing alongside Clemente and Vismara but ultimately decided to focus on managing the entire agency with Clemente. Together, they dedicated themselves fully to all projects, acquired clients for artistic direction, revamped the agency's roster, branding, and website, and established a strong social media presence.

Regarding the practical tasks required for successful party organization, Pegoraro handles the DJ bookings and proposes lineups, always in consultation and collaboration with Vismara and Clemente. Additionally, she oversees the communication aspects, including social media promotion, flyer designs, music for promotional content, and engaging videographers and photographers. Throughout her work, she maintains constant communication with Clemente, who provides timely feedback and additional requests. On the day of the party, she oversees the sound check and all aspects related to hospitality and welcoming guest artists, especially internationally renowned ones.

As for the party's long-term projection, Vismara mentioned that the natural progression, once a project like Whoopee stabilizes and the sound it proposes gains a following, is to produce that sound and become a reference point for it, which is exactly the work being done through the Whoopee Records label. He explained that by doing so, the Whoopee project can transcend the borders of Lisbon, because releasing a successful track can reach millions of listeners worldwide, expanding their audience. In contrast, throwing a successful party in Lisbon, while impactful, remains limited to a few thousand people who know and are aware of their work.

Referring to Whoopee's relationship with the city of Lisbon and its specificities, including issues of skyrocketing rents and scarce funding for the arts, Vismara stated that Whoopee aligns itself with the city. He expressed their intention to understand the city's direction and find a balance between their creative aspirations and financial considerations. He emphasized the importance of understanding the tastes of the city and their followers, acknowledging that while their current audience and format are successful in Lisbon, the goal is to gradually expand beyond the city. Vismara expressed confidence in Whoopee's strong brand and recognizable sound, believing it can resonate with audiences

outside of Lisbon, but acknowledged that it's a challenging step that will require time and effort, with the label playing a crucial role in this endeavor.

In summary, the Whoopee party, which embodies the entire event production division of the Ritmo Fulcral agency, can be considered a successful experiment, being the agency's first launched party. The series of events has garnered increasing and gradual approval and recognition from the Lisbon public, taking place in various venues across the Portuguese capital and boasting internationally renowned guests. By moving between various venues offered by Lisbon, the party has interacted with diverse spaces in the city, from urban locations like Pavilhão Carlos Lopes to seaside spots like Praia Irmão, expanding across the cityscape and experimenting with different audiences.

3.6. Ritmo Fulcral: The Programming and Artistic Direction Consultancy Division

The last and smallest division within Ritmo Fulcral's structure is artistic direction and programming. Erica Pegoraro is responsible for curating the music section at Mona Verde, a rooftop bar offering nightly music and DJ sets. This involves meticulously selecting artists to balance musical genres and create an authentic musical storytelling experience for each evening. She carefully considers both an artist's reputation and their ability to draw a crowd, aiming to achieve a balance between artistic quality and economic viability.

This service is deeply connected to Lisbon's socio-cultural context, not only because Mona Verde caters to the local population, but also because the venue's artistic programming mainly features local or Lisbon-based artists.

This concludes the examination of the divisions that comprise the Ritmo Fulcral agency.

The following section will analyze the tasks I undertook during my internship at the agency, their placement within the company structure, and their relevance to the agency's goals. The chapter will conclude with a thoughtful exploration of my personal reflections on the internship, including expectations, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the six-month period.

3.7. Responsibilities and Takeaways, Expectations and Challenges

This section delves into the tasks I undertook during my internship at Ritmo Fulcral, their significance within the company structure, and their contribution to the agency's overarching goals.

While my primary focus was on the discography division, I also dedicated significant time to assisting Erica Pegoraro within the management division. This involved drafting and organizing comprehensive artist dossiers, which served as catalogs containing detailed information about each DJ on the roster, including biographies, past performances, relevant releases, and links to their social media and projects. Additionally, I prepared press kits, condensed versions of the dossiers tailored for media outlets, and technical riders, outlining the DJs' specific requirements for equipment, hospitality, and travel arrangements for each performance. These documents played a crucial role in promoting the artists and ensuring smooth and successful performances, aligning with the agency's overarching goal of providing top-tier management services to their talent.

Furthermore, my main responsibility in the event production division was to contribute to the successful promotion and execution of Whoopee parties. This multifaceted role encompassed several key tasks. I was entrusted with crafting engaging newsletters designed to inform and excite our network about upcoming events, including carefully timed email campaigns that began ten days prior to each party. As the event drew closer, my focus shifted to meticulous guest list management, involving extensive communication with potential attendees and coordinating complimentary passes for friends and industry colleagues. This entailed not only sending out invitations but also responding to inquiries and ensuring a seamless entry process for those on the guest list.

On the day of each party, I actively participate in the setup process, ensuring that the space was ready to welcome guests. Throughout the event, I remained highly attentive to the needs of both the attendees and the performers, addressing any issues that arose and making last-minute adjustments to the guest list as needed. My involvement extended beyond the conclusion of the party, as I assisted with post-event tasks to ensure a successful wrap-up. Overall, my role in the event production division was integral to creating a positive and memorable experience for everyone involved in Whoopee parties.

My work routine at Ritmo Fulcral was largely structured around the demands of the discography division, with specific tasks assigned to each day of the week to ensure the seamless and timely distribution of releases every Friday. This involved meticulous planning and coordination to meet deadlines and maintain the agency's high standards for quality and efficiency. In addition to these core responsibilities, I actively contributed to external projects that expanded the agency's reach and influence within the music industry. I also took on various tasks related to party organization, supporting the event production team in their efforts to create memorable and successful experiences for the audience.

While the majority of my work was conducted remotely from my computer, affording me flexibility and autonomy, I recognized the value of in-person collaboration and communication. Therefore, I made it a point to visit the office approximately once a week. These visits proved invaluable, providing opportunities to connect with my colleagues on a more personal level, brainstorm ideas, receive real-time feedback, and stay abreast of the latest developments within the agency and the broader music scene. This hybrid approach allowed me to leverage the benefits of both remote work and in-office collaboration, ultimately enhancing my overall experience and contribution to Ritmo Fulcral's success.

Regarding the expectations I had before starting the internship, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. I only knew that the agency was operating in the electronic music sector and had launched the Whoopee party – nothing more. Certainly, my ideas became clearer during the first introductory interview, where I was explained that, among the various areas of competence at Ritmo Fulcral, I would primarily, but not exclusively, be handling the discography - a field entirely new to me. It was also mentioned that, besides that division, I would have to assist wherever help was needed, gradually understanding the functioning of all agency divisions. Thus, I anticipated gaining insights into the realms of music distribution and promotion, along with interfacing with the artists managed by the agency and learning about the intricacies of organizing a party – everything imperceptible to ordinary attendees. In essence, I looked forward to delving into the behind-the-scenes aspects of electronic music.

However, it's crucial to underscore that this marked my inaugural professional experience. Consequently, my expectations were also related to gaining the ability to successfully fit into a professional environment, to regularly attend an office, to relate to

supervisors, to take responsibility, and to adhere to a different set of rules than those prevailing in the academic field.

I can affirm with contentment that my expectations regarding skill acquisition were comprehensively met. I adeptly learned to navigate music distribution and promotion platforms, plan music releases, and cultivate relationships with artists and industry professionals. To accomplish these outcomes, I had to assimilate a working methodology with the guidance of my superiors, crucially making it my own by adapting it to my needs. This step proved pivotal in facilitating a seamless workflow without undue obstacles, errors, or oversights that occasionally marked the initial stages of the internship. Furthermore, even though event production was not my specialized domain, and despite parties being less frequent than record releases, I feel that I gleaned valuable insights. I acquired the ability to plan and execute all the essential steps leading up to an event and, on the day of the party, contribute to its overall success.

Concerning expectations related to the novelty of the work experience, I am pleased to have seamlessly integrated into the work environment and mastered the art of managing relationships with my superiors, aided by their understanding and tolerant personalities. Simultaneously, however, I had envisioned a more regular presence in the office environment and closer collaboration with the team, at least during the initial stages of my internship. Unfortunately, this was not feasible primarily due to the nature of my work, which was predominantly carried out remotely.

The major challenges I faced during this internship were closely tied to the fact that this was my first true professional experience. I had to learn a work methodology and familiarize myself with an industry from scratch, engage with superiors, and meet and adhere to commitments, deadlines, and responsibilities.

Another challenge was associated with the nature of the work I found myself doing, primarily remote. In a professional sector built on human relationships, I mistakenly expected there to be more hands-on work and direct interaction with people rather than on the computer. Especially in the initial phase of the internship, I sensed a distance from my team members for this reason, facing difficulties in integration.

However, over time, I began to appreciate the flexibility of the assigned tasks and the autonomy granted to me, learning to manage my time and freedom independently.

In conclusion: At Ritmo Fulcral, the work environment is anything but formal, fostering a relaxed yet dynamic atmosphere in the office. With a small team, collaboration thrives effortlessly. I maintained daily communication with all team members via email or phone, and their consistent kindness and understanding made every interaction pleasant.

Tasks were imparted with meticulous care and patience, and any mistakes I made were met with support rather than criticism. Instead of feeling burdened by errors, I was encouraged to reflect on them and find ways to overcome them.

Creativity was always encouraged, and my input was valued in every task I undertook. Throughout the team, there's a tangible sense of passion and dedication towards our work. Enthusiasm and creativity are welcomed from all members, including myself, making for a truly inspiring work environment.

3.8. Final Remarks

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of Ritmo Fulcral's multifaceted role within Lisbon's dynamic electronic music scene. The agency's three core divisions were explored: DJ management and booking, event production (with a particular focus on the Whoopee party series), and artistic programming.

Through interviews and firsthand accounts, the inner workings of each division were revealed, highlighting the specific tasks and responsibilities involved, as well as the unique challenges and rewards of working in the music industry. The agency's activities were shown to be deeply intertwined with the cultural and social fabric of Lisbon, both shaping and being shaped by the city's vibrant electronic music landscape.

The internship experience at Ritmo Fulcral offered a unique vantage point from which to observe these interconnected processes. It was a journey of learning and growth, marked by both triumphs and setbacks. The hands-on experience gained in music distribution, promotion, event organization, and artist management was invaluable, providing a solid foundation upon which to build a future career in the music industry.

While the predominantly remote nature of the work initially presented challenges in terms of collaboration and integration, the flexibility and autonomy it afforded were eventually appreciated. The supportive and creative environment fostered by the agency, coupled with the understanding and encouragement of colleagues, enabled me to overcome these challenges and thrive in this role.

Overall, the internship at Ritmo Fulcral was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of the electronic music industry and the unique cultural context of Lisbon. It was a journey of discovery, both professionally and personally, that has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of the music world.

Conclusion

When I began designing this internship report during the concluding months of my traineeship, my aim was to present a comprehensive overview of the contemporary electronic music scene and its cultural milieu. This initial concept, the contours of which were not perfectly defined at first, matured over time, culminating in both the report and in a number of elements that can serve as insights for future extensions of the research.

Aware of the fact that my analysis would be that of a European white young male, in my approach I considered both contemporary time, drawing upon firsthand experiences and observations garnered during my internship, and the past, through the analysis of existing literature, to delve into the cultural foundations of electronic dance music trace the genre's historical trajectory and evolution, and its relevance in the current Portuguese cultural scene.

Moreover, besides analyzing the electronic music division of the recording industry, I sought to comprehend the historical and cultural factors that have shaped the dance music culture as it is currently perceived. In more specific terms, I aimed to explore the motivations underlying the behaviors of modern club-goers, the rationale behind the design and management of nightclubs, and the broader societal context that fostered the rise of electronic music. These were the inquiries that concerned me during my internship, and through a judicious combination of practical experience at Ritmo Fulcral and rigorous academic research, I have endeavored to provide cogent responses.

The research indicates that the dance music industry remains open for further interdisciplinary analyses bearing in mind the changes the interests of the various publics may bring in the future. As the text demonstrates, there is often a discrepancy between the analysis reported in the press and that conducted by the protagonists and experts in the field, what paves the way for the development of more academic works that fills in the existing scarcity of academic sources that discuss electronic music in its specificities. I do hope this report has contributed to further the knowledge of dance electronic music in Europe and in Portugal, in particular.

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Annex

A.1. Interview to Maurizio Clemente

Andrea Delle Monache: “Maurizio, can you share your professional journey in the electronic music industry?”

Maurizio Clemente: “I entered the fashion industry at 20, opened my own shop, and worked as a designer for various esteemed firms. In the '90s, I felt the need for a change and moved to London, where I spent five years collaborating with notable musicians like Kid Batchelor and his Warriors Dance Label, which was instrumental in inspiring The Prodigy. Upon returning to Rimini, I focused on house music, promoting it through local clubs and working with labels like Flying Records and UMM as A&R. I also founded my first label, Zippy Records, in the UK during the vinyl-only era, collaborating with David Piccioni from Black Market Records Distribution. Over the years, I organized music conferences in Italy and managed renowned DJs such as Tony Humphries and Kerri Chandler, expanding my reach to Spain and Portugal. After my time with Flying UMM records, I established my own company, Key Note Multimedia, to promote club culture through documentaries and books while managing DJ bookings. In January 2020, I founded Ritmo Fulcral Lda in Portugal, where I continue to offer management and consulting services for the music industry.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What is the purpose of Ritmo Fulcral?”

Maurizio Clemente: “Ritmo Fulcral is an agency based in Lisbon, focusing on DJs, record labels, and events. The name reflects our goal to engage with various aspects of music, bringing together musicians, DJs, and producers, all centered around our constant rhythm—the ‘Ritmo Fulcral.’”

Andrea Delle Monache: “How does an electronic music agency support artists?”

Maurizio Clemente: “It’s quite rare for artists to handle everything on their own; they often seek agency support. We take care of distribution and promotion, allowing artists to

focus solely on their music. I know several who initially tried independent distribution and, after realizing the limited benefits, turned to us for assistance. Agencies offer visibility and networks that individuals typically lack, especially with around 100,000 records released daily.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “Can you describe the mission and vision of Ritmo Fulcral?”

Maurizio Clemente: “Our mission is to promote the global culture of dance music while fostering a community of passionate creators. In Europe, we focus on DJ bookings, and on a global scale, we work on launching artists. These aspects are intertwined, as a hit often leads to worldwide bookings. Additionally, we’re committed to creating and promoting an alternative music scene in Lisbon through events like the Whoopee parties.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What is the structure of the agency?”

Maurizio Clemente: “We have three main divisions. The first is discography, handling all aspects of labels and record releases. The second is DJ management and event organization, closely linked to our artists. While event organization could stand alone, it’s integrated with management since our artists are central to the events we organize. The third division offers consultancy for venue programming and artistic direction, currently provided at Mona Verde in Lisbon. In summary, we offer discography, management (including events), and programming services.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “Can you elaborate on the discography division?”

Maurizio Clemente: “Ritmo Fulcral ensures that what the artist produces reaches the listener through a detailed process. It takes about five weeks from when the mastered track arrives at the agency to when it’s available for sale in digital stores. We facilitate this through six record labels.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What distinguishes each of your labels?”

Maurizio Clemente: “Each label represents a distinct concept. Whoopee Records showcases the signature vibe of the Lisbon sound through our party series. Album Only compiles successful tracks from other labels, serving as a collection of our top releases. Ritmo Fulcral Digital Factory provides a platform for young Portuguese producers who struggle to find outlets today. TR Records highlights the diversity of soulful dance music, while Jazz in Da House focuses on jazz and soulful genres. Finally, Major Underground, a joint venture with Sony Music, aims to blend 90s R&B dance sounds with fresh influences.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What led you to move to Lisbon?”

Maurizio Clemente: “In 2020, I noticed that Portugal, particularly Lisbon, was emerging as a hub for music and club culture. I believed the city would soon flourish in these areas. Although the pandemic paused everything, I can confidently say my choice has paid off, as Lisbon is now becoming an international center for disco music and our clubbing scene.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What does the future hold for Ritmo Fulcral?”

Maurizio Clemente: “We aim to cultivate relationships with local and international artists, establishing a musical hub with event spaces and recording studios. Our goal is to create a talent laboratory that can compete in the international market within the next five years.”

A.2. Interview to Christian Vismara

Andrea Delle Monache: “Christian, could you share your journey in the electronic music scene?”

Christian Vismara: “I’ve been a huge fan of electronic music and the clubbing culture for years. Between 2008 and 2012, before moving from Italy to Lisbon, I co-founded an electronic music project called Madmonk, inspired by the French duo Justice. After some time in the countryside, I struggled to find inspiration. When I moved to Lisbon in 2014, everything changed. I discovered new influences and expanded my horizons. Since late 2017, I’ve been focused on the Black Pomade project, producing and mixing house music influenced by various styles like disco and acid house.

Starting out, I wasn't connected to the Lisbon scene, so I organized parties in an abandoned spot across the Tagus River. This led to bookings from clubs in Lisbon and even gigs back in Italy. The pandemic disrupted everything, reshaping the landscape—some figures vanished while new ones emerged. Throughout, I continued producing original singles, remixes, and edits in digital and vinyl formats. While music production may not yield significant income unless you achieve millions of streams, it’s essential for visibility, reaching new audiences, and securing bookings.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “Can you share how you bring your music to life?”

Christian Vismara: “Every music producer has their own process; it’s hard to generalize. My process starts with a cue, an idea that I develop using Ableton, my production software.

For an original mix, I usually begin with the synthesizer, exploring different combinations of drums, bass, or analog instruments that inspire me. From there, I start to build the track. Alternatively, I might be commissioned for a remix or feel the need to tweak a single to make it more club-friendly, enhancing its appeal for a venue. Once I find a satisfying blend of sounds and instruments, I dive into the details until I reach the arrangement stage. Here, various elements of the track evolve, the instruments mesh together, and I create tension and release, including the all-important drop.

After finalizing the arrangement, I work on the mix simultaneously. The mixing process ensures that all the elements fit together seamlessly; it's both a technical and creative endeavor. Once the mix is complete, I produce what's called the 'premaster' or 'final mix,' which is the file that needs mastering before distribution.

While some producers use AI or specialized software for mastering, the industry standard—especially for more established projects—is to consult a mastering engineer. So far, I've managed the mixing myself, aiming to create a mix I'm satisfied with before sending it to a professional.

Many artists, even those well-known, often create a satisfactory product on their own, refining it further by delegating both mixing and mastering. The main reason for this is to avoid mistakes; having an expert double-check is always a smart move. It's crucial to note that mastering engineers don't perform miracles; they can't transform a poor final mix into something exceptional, but they can enhance an already solid product. Ultimately, the master is the finished piece, ready to be pressed onto vinyl or uploaded to streaming platforms.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What is your role at Ritmo Fulcral?”

Christian Vismara: “My role at Ritmo Fulcral is quite fluid. Primarily, I handle the art direction for the Whoopee project and serve as A&R for Whoopee Records. I helped shape Whoopee's communication style and logo. Once we established the foundation, graphic designers took over content and flyer creation. I also curate lineups for our events, collaborating with Erica on this. We balance skill and audience response when selecting artists, ensuring quality remains the priority. For Whoopee Records, I scout artists to produce releases.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “Can you explain the Whoopee party concept and how a label benefits artists?”

Christian Vismara: “Whoopee started as a party—a container for our organized events. Once a project gains traction, the natural progression is to produce that sound, establishing a reference point. Successful tracks can reach millions, while a successful party only reaches a few thousand. We aim to position Whoopee as a reference for house and disco

music in a city that previously focused mainly on techno and tech house. I was one of the first to bring disco and Italo disco to Lisbon, and now Whoopee is synonymous with this sound.

As for labels, their benefits have diminished compared to a decade ago. Previously, labels could provide financial resources for production, but today, it's easier to connect with distributors. Still, a label offers exposure to audiences you might not reach independently. Releasing on Whoopee Records means tapping into our audience, giving you credibility. Labels like Toytonics add value to artists by promoting quality sounds, enhancing their reputation, and helping secure bookings. A reputable label's endorsement can significantly impact how bookers perceive an artist."

Andrea Delle Monache: "What advantages does an agency offer artists like you?"

Christian Vismara: "While I continue as a DJ and producer, the agency helps manage bookings and secure dates, but I maintain independence. Until you're established with a flood of booking requests, it's vital to actively seek your own dates. Some artists rely heavily on agencies, but the reality is that while agencies can reach out to promoters, genuine connections are key.

The agency's value lies in being a collaborative partner for artistic growth, helping to strategize and manage the commercial side of your profile. They can promote you and introduce you to new audiences, but ultimately, it's the artist's effort that drives success."

Andrea Delle Monache: "What's your vision for the future of the music scene in Lisbon and Whoopee?"

Christian Vismara: "Over the past decade, I've seen Lisbon evolve significantly, with a surprising number of DJs, record shops, and clubs for a small city—its scene rivals those of much larger cities. Clubbing and electronic music are integral to Lisbon's culture, reminiscent of Berlin, though perhaps that's a bit of an exaggeration. Many DJs and industry

professionals, including Maurizio Clemente, have relocated here, indicating a vibrant and growing electronic music scene.

However, the future is uncertain. The rising cost of living could threaten artists' ability to thrive, which would affect the city's artistic quality. The relatively low living costs previously fueled growth, with venues like Lux Frágil playing a key role in nurturing local talent and quality programming.

Lisbon is now a significant clubbing destination, and if the living costs don't deter creative minds, it might become the new Berlin. But if it attracts a less adventurous audience, the scene may lose its vibrancy, with fewer parties and diminished quality. Unlike Berlin, which has space for everyone, Lisbon may struggle to maintain its appeal.

Whoopee aligns itself with the city's trajectory. We'll adapt our approach based on the evolving tastes of our audience while aiming to gradually expand beyond Lisbon. We believe our strong brand and recognizable sound can resonate outside the city, though it's a challenging endeavor that will take time. The label will certainly help in this process!"

A.2. Interview to Erica Pegoraro

Andrea Delle Monache: “Erica, could you share your professional background with me?”

Erica Pegoraro: “I began my career in Italy’s fashion industry, starting as a sales assistant and eventually becoming a Visual Merchandiser. I spent about ten years working for various well-known brands. After relocating to Portugal, I continued in fashion but left due to unsatisfactory working conditions. I then joined a major consulting firm as a Subject Matter Expert, focusing on training and client engagement.

In 2020, I opened a Yoga and Cooking studio, but the pandemic hindered its success. I took on secondary jobs until I decided to pursue a project in the music industry. With several contacts in the field, I embraced the opportunity when Maurizio Clemente proposed we collaborate on a party and a guide-platform for events in Lisbon. We worked on both projects simultaneously, eventually deciding to focus on the party’s development, which has led us to where we are now.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What is your role at Ritmo Fulcral?”

Erica Pegoraro: “Maurizio Clemente has represented various internationally renowned artists for a long time. When I joined Ritmo Fulcral, we agreed to refresh his roster by introducing emerging DJs from the local Lisbon scene. This was my first responsibility.

Currently, I oversee all operational aspects of the agency. For the local DJs I scouted, I act as their agent, managing communication, advising on gig proposals, and negotiating fees. For DJ bookings, we either receive offers, which I handle, or I propose our DJs for gigs we’re interested in. Building relationships with bookers can be time-consuming, but it’s essential. Recently, for example, I cultivated a relationship with festival organizers for a year before receiving a booking request for one of our emerging DJs.

When proposing a DJ, we need venue approval first, after which I negotiate the fee. For international bookings, I handle travel arrangements and event promotion, utilizing software like Gigwell for contracts and invoicing—an essential tool for managing bookings.

I also assist with scheduling for our more prominent artists and handle the booking of international DJs not managed by Ritmo Fulcral.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “Could you tell me more about the event production aspect, especially for the Whoopee party?”

Erica Pegoraro: “For Whoopee, I handle bookings and propose lineups in collaboration with Christian and Maurizio. I manage communication aspects, including social media promotion, flyer design, and engaging videographers and photographers. I stay in constant contact with Maurizio for feedback and additional requests. On event days, I oversee sound checks and hospitality for guest artists, particularly for international acts.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “How did the Whoopee party come about?”

Erica Pegoraro: “Maurizio approached me while I was considering organizing a music event with Christian. We realized our goals aligned, and the collaboration felt natural. We quickly developed the name and logo, and our first event at Micro Music Club attracted about a hundred people. After a successful replication of the format in the following months, we decided to expand.

Initially, I was juggling three jobs and realized I needed to focus on this project fully. While I considered freelancing for Whoopee, Maurizio invited me to manage the agency. I chose to dedicate myself to that, leading to our work on branding, website updates, and restructuring the agency from the ground up, including creating an Instagram page.”

Andrea Delle Monache: “What about your responsibilities in artistic programming?”

Erica Pegoraro: “I oversee the artistic programming for the music section at the Mona Verde venue. This involves meticulously selecting artists to maintain a balance between genres and creating a cohesive musical storytelling experience for the evening. I consider an artist’s reputation alongside their audience-drawing ability, aiming for both qualitative and economic balance in my selections.”

