The Clubber Community and the Role of Fashion in Belonging: A Comparative Analysis of the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro Scenes

Comunidade *Clubber* e o Papel da Moda no Pertencimento: Uma Análise Comparativa das Cenas Paulistanas e Cariocas

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This study aims to analyze the clubber scene and its relationship with fashion in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, using a comparative approach. The research seeks to understand the main events linked to the clubber culture in the Rio–São Paulo axis and investigate how its attendees relate to fashion and to the clubber identity itself, grounded in the concept of "neotribalism". The theoretical framework is based on the works of Maffesoli (1988/2000), Bourdieu (1991/2001), Thornton (1995), and Barthes (1967/1979), which help explain the symbolic, social, and aesthetic processes involved.

To achieve its goals, the study employed three methodological strategies: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and a survey. The analysis of the collected data reveals that fashion plays a fundamental role in shaping clubber identity, serving as both an aesthetic and social language. The clubber scene emerges as a space for experimentation, transgression, and constant reinvention. Furthermore, the research highlights how its signs and symbols are appropriated and redefined by the market, illustrating the dynamic of capitalist incorporation. In this way, the study sheds light on the complex relationship between style, belonging, and consumption within the contemporary context of urban cultures.

Keywords: fashion, clubber, neo-tribalism, communication, urban culture

Comunidade Clubber e o Papel da Moda no Pertencimento: Uma Análise Comparativa das Cenas Paulistanas e Cariocas

Este trabalho tem como objetivo analisar o cenário clubber e sua relação com a moda nas cidades de São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro, a partir de uma abordagem comparativa. A pesquisa busca compreender os principais eventos voltados à cena clubber no eixo Rio-São Paulo e investigar como seus frequentadores se relacionam com a moda e com a própria cultura clubber, tendo como base teórica o conceito de "neotribalismo". As referências centrais utilizadas são os estudos de Maffesoli (1988/2000), Bourdieu (1991/2001), Thornton (1995) e Barthes (1967/1979), que contribuem para entender os processos simbólicos, sociais e estéticos envolvidos.

Para alcançar os objetivos propostos, foram adotados três métodos de pesquisa: observação participante, entrevistas em profundidade e aplicação de survey. A análise dos dados obtidos revela que a moda exerce um papel fundamental na construção da identidade clubber, funcionando como linguagem estética e social. A cena clubber se apresenta como um espaço de experimentação, transgressão e constante reinvenção. Além disso, destaca-se a forma como seus signos e símbolos são apropriados e ressignificados pelo mercado, evidenciando uma dinâmica de fagocitação capitalista. Assim, o estudo aponta para a complexidade das relações entre estilo, pertencimento e consumo no contexto contemporâneo das culturas urbanas.

Palavras-chave: *moda, clubber, neotribalismo, comunicação, cultura urbana*

Introduction

The emergence of a so-called clubber[1] culture is linked to the development and distribution of electronic music, which began in the mid-1980s. Genres such as house, techno, and trance, among others, gained popularity through clubs, where individuals gathered around a shared interest: music.

According to Sabóia (2009), the turning point beyond music occurred in the mid-1980s in Great Britain, where a set of practices linked to the consumption

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[1]Term used to describe people who build and spread clubber culture.

of electronic music began to be adopted within a defined location and at a specific time. DJs also emerged, individuals responsible for organising and selecting the tracks that would be played on a given night, playing a fundamental role in the propagation and dissemination of the culture itself. In addition, behavioural patterns emerged, such as substance use and the dissemination of values, including P.L.U.R. (peace, love, unity, and respect), which reached its peak through the Love Parade in Berlin in the early 1990s and continues today, as exemplified by Lorenz (2014).

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the clubber movement began, given that, with the popularisation of electronic music, behavioural patterns and the development of this culture began to occur independently in various parts of the world. Some of the most prominent locations include Detroit, where the genre now known as techno[2] emerged in the early 1980s within the African-American community on the outskirts of the city (Albiez, 2005). Another city that stands out is London, following the introduction of acid-house music, which led to the promotion of events associated with the genre. Later, Berlin, Germany, became a hub for techno, where the genre became a symbol of the city's reintegration after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Seeking a better understanding of what it means to be part of clubber culture today, we can draw on Lima (2013), who states that clubbers are marked by a great difference between their everyday habits and their habits at clubber events, creating a dual lifestyle. While in everyday life, there is coexistence with the responsibilities and tribulations of routine, during significant events, the concept of "non-time" emerges, in which leisure assumes extreme relevance for maintaining one's identity.

> It is a time to simultaneously find pleasure, belonging, ordeal-like risk, dreamlike experiences, sexuality, inner life, and extensiveness... ultimately, the limits that lead back to reality. It is a time shared in places that, due to their functionality, aesthetics aimed at everyone and no one, and visual weight, is similar to Marc Augé's non-places (1998) and the banal emptying of meeting spaces. (Melo, 2007, pp. 31–32)

Thus, this study explores the communicative potential of fashion for clubber culture, analysing fashion manifestations at events in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and, based on this analysis, understands how different types of consumption permeate the maintenance of social relations within the group.

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[2]A musical style characterised by fast, strong and accelerated beats.

Theoretical Basis/Literature Review

Fashion, Identity and Belonging: Neo-Tribalism Applied to Club Culture

It is impossible to dissociate clubber culture from youth culture itself. Guerra and Figueredo (2020) demonstrate that, in the 1970s, youth culture was characterised by affiliations associated with different classes, races, religions, and other demographic factors, with these subcultures linked to a resistance expressed through style. Elements such as fashion and music were ways of defining groups, but they were also consequences of other unifying factors rather than the cause of a group's unity.

In the 1990s, postmodernism, individualisation and the emergence of a global culture prompted young people to define their groups not only in terms of social demographics but also in terms of the cultural logic of consumption, that is, around common tastes and preferences. For this reason, the factors that unite these groups ultimately become more volatile and unstable (Huq, 2006). Subcultures often end up having their boundaries blurred, causing the term "subculture" itself to lose its traditional meaning. This term is unable to keep pace with the rapid paradigm shifts occurring within youth groups (Guerra & Figueredo, 2020). The same view is defended by Bennett (2011), who posits that consumption is a multifaceted phenomenon that should be seen as central to the construction of these current groups. Therefore, understanding the consumption habits of a group involves examining various other issues, including working from the perspective of group membership and the maintenance of specific forms of capital, as Bourdieu (1991/2001) points out.

In this study, it is important to analyse the consumption of clubbers in order to understand the complex relationships of belonging within the group. Therefore, we understand the role of fashion and clothing as representative of consumption.

This new form of organisation, through which youth culture has been studied since the 1990s, is called "neo-tribalism", a concept that contrasts with the previous notion of "subculture" (Maffesoli, 1988/2000). The former term conveys the idea of a hegemonic dispute and the strong maintenance of social roles. In contrast, in neo-tribes, it is understood that there is greater fluidity, where the sole purpose of the encounter is to experience and enjoy (Castro, 2016). The new definition aligns with Huq's (2006) perspective on the instability of urban tribes since 1990 and also with the ideas of Guerra and Figueredo (2020), who argue that the term "subculture" is insufficient to encompass the rapid changes occurring in these tribes fully. In addition, neo-tribes are based on the idea of "togetherness", where sharing common emotions is the focus of relationships, with a strong emphasis on enjoying the present moment, known as presentism (Maffesoli, 1988/2000). There is no guarantee of long-term maintenance in this organisation, nor any reason beyond sharing a common passion or taste.

Hebdige (1979/2018) notes that these so-called youth subcultures or urban youth

tribes are subject to a cyclical process. This process involves differentiation based on creativity, seeking a specific and identifiable style, which will soon be subsumed by the profit-driven logic of capital and quickly transformed into a mass-produced product. Massification encourages tribes to continually reinvent themselves, which explains the ephemeral nature of their styles.

Analysing clubber culture, we understand that it fits the definition according to certain criteria: a love of electronic music, a love of nightlife, aesthetic concerns, clothing and comfort in the environments in which the specific scenes of each location unfold are some of the factors that unite the neo-tribe as we know it today. Clubs[3] were, and still are today, a space for the manifestation of different types of capital, according to Bourdieu's definition (1991/2001). Understanding the clubber scene as a field where there is a power struggle based on different types of capital, mainly social and cultural, and more than that, as Thornton (1995) points out, on the possession of subcultural capital.

Subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) is an idea derived from Bourdieu's (1991/2001) concept of different types of capital that confer power in social relations. When we talk about tribes, especially the clubber tribe, subcultural capital refers to the specific knowledge about social norms, behaviours, references, and other elements of clubber culture that an individual may have access to. This concept highlights the guiding role of fashion, dress, and consumption in clubber culture, as access to spaces may be contingent upon a certain appearance that signifies the possession of specific subcultural capital.

Capital is defined as the accumulation of a significant characteristic of power (Bourdieu, 1991/2001). Fashion can serve as a means of expressing different types of capital, including economic and cultural capital. Thus, clubber fashion is a materialisation of the power conflict present in that field. Hence, the understanding of the communicative potential of fashion is extrapolated, understanding it as responsible for generating a sense of belonging to the tribe and also as representative of a dispute in the field. This sense of exclusivity, based on different capitals, is addressed by Braga (2018) when discussing the Nation Disco Club, referencing the work of Calil (2000).

> Belonging to the Nation group also seemed to follow certain admission criteri a. In a section entitled "Rules", Calil states about arriving at the nightclub: "(...) it was essential to show your clothes, gestures, personal tastes, and good manners, all at once, to make a good impression. (...) Anything that suggested that the interlocutor understood travel, art, decoration, clothes, music". (...) According to her, these "outsiders" sometimes reacted to Nation's regula rs with "disgust or indignation". (Braga, 2018, pp. 90–91)

This debate gives rise to the paradox of belonging versus differentiation, already extensively discussed by sociologists Georg Simmel (2008) and Pierre Bourdieu (1997/2001). The concept, explored from a contemporary perspective by Santos

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[3]Nightclubs or dance clubs.

(2019), shows us that there is a contradictory duality in which the means of capital drive a search for individual subjectivity and the individual, detached from their family ties and the social norms that bound them in the past, seeks a true expression of themselves through a new look[4]. On the other hand, the logic of fashion, based on trends and mass production — that is, the standardisation of products and aesthetics — guarantees the individual a degree of belonging to the environment based on a similarity of tastes, ideas, and consumption.

Fashion as a Communicative Element

According to Barthes (1967/1979), fashion and clothing convey specific meanings that are interrelated with time, space, culture, social class, and other aspects. Fashion is, therefore, a network of meanings and significances. Based on these ideas, Marques and Rosa (2016) argue that fashion, in a postmodern world, is an integral part of a system of meanings. Understanding it from the clothes worn by a group allows us to know not only the relationships between the sender and the receiver of the message, which is transmitted through the garment, but also allows us to understand the relationships between consumers and the products they consume and, above all, the relationships between consumers that are crossed by the products they consume.

It is important to emphasise that, like all non-verbal communication, fashion conveys different meanings depending on the interpretation of its recipients. (Knapp, 1992, as cited in Quintas Froufe & Quintas Froufe, 2010). This is why the context of groups becomes so relevant in this issue, since different groups, with different experiences and different accumulations of capital (Bourdieu, 1991/2001), interpret the fashion they see in different ways.

Clubber Fashion: Consumption as Use and Enjoyment

Consumption can be understood as a mediator of relationships, that is, the relationship between the consumer and the product consumed and how this consumption directly affects the consumer's relationship with other consumers, transcending the product itself. In this context, consumption is understood not only from the perspective of purchase but also from the perspective of use and enjoyment of the product, a phenomenon of an identity-related nature (Berlim, 2016). Such enjoyment links the use of clothing and accessories to the consumption of possibilities for constructing appearances that distinguish themselves as belonging to a particular group. Santarelli (2003), when addressing the relationship between fashion and tribes, explains a little about the communicative relationship between fashion and belonging:

> clothing serves as a mediator between the individual and the crowd: there is no need for interactivity because, with a simple glance, we can see which group that person belongs to or aspires to belong to.

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[4]A stylised visual composition (clothing, makeup, hair, accessories) used as a form of identity expression and aesthetic distinction.

> In addition, some clothing styles or brands contribute to creating a discourse or a false discourse, whether in the case of counterfeit brands or individuals who attempt to appear to be something they are not. (p. 100)

Consumption as use and enjoyment is, therefore, closely linked to belonging. It is common for members of an urban tribe to dress in a specific way only when meeting with their tribe and not at all times. This implies a greater group identity than individual identity, as well as ephemerality in group membership, as explained by Maffesoli (1988/2000). This dual characteristic between the individual and the group is also what allows the same individual to participate in different groups, a phenomenon that Maffesoli calls "butterflying". This is one of the most prominent characteristics of postmodern social organisation, according to the author. This trend is especially applicable to the clubber tribe, as the clubber identity itself is imbued with a dichotomy that can be simplified as day/night but cuts across fields such as work and leisure, moral and immoral, among others.

Methodological Approaches

Participant Observation

As the clubber scene is an environment where group identification and a sense of belonging prevail, certain behaviours are not reproduced in the presence of strangers (Brandão, 1984, as cited in Mónico et al., 2017). Participant observation is recommended in the early stages of research, as it is associated with a strong exploratory and descriptive character (Mónico et al., 2017).

The following criteria were established to define the events analysed: (a) length of existence: at least two years; (b) frequency of events: at least four events per year; (c) number of followers on Instagram: at least 2,000 followers. Upon completion of the study, five parties were analysed, two in Rio de Janeiro and three in São Paulo. This difference is justified due to the smaller size of the alternative electronic music scene in Rio de Janeiro.

Semi-structured Interviews

Boni and Quaresma (2005) argue that semi-structured interviews are those in which the interviewer follows a script of questions but also allows the interviewee to digress on the topic. Thus, it is a form of data collection that focuses on providing greater direction to the subject without sacrificing subjectivity. A total of six individuals were interviewed (Table 1), three from Rio de Janeiro and three from São Paulo, distributed equally among the following three groups: (a) two clubber event producers; (b) two fashion entrepreneurs from brands associated with clubber culture; and (c) one iconic figure from the clubber scene in Rio de Janeiro and one from São Paulo.

Characteristics of respondents in semi-structured interviews

Respondent	Age	Gender	City	Category	Acronym
1	25	Female	Rio de Janeiro	Fashion entrepreneur	FERJ
2	24	Female	São Paulo	Fashion entrepreneur	FESP
3	24	Male	São Paulo	Event producer	EPSP
4	36	Female	Rio de Janeiro	Event producer	EPRJ
5	30	Non-binary	Rio de Janeiro	Iconic figure	IFRJ
6	46	Male	São Paulo	Iconic figure	IFSP

Thematic Analysis

For the treatment and analysis of data obtained from the interviews, aiming for empirical freedom, the most appropriate method is thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Within this universe, a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach (Freire, 2012) is considered appropriate, as it focuses on a thorough analysis and interpretation of phenomena related to human experience. Its objective is to gain a deep understanding of the essence of these phenomena, identifying the hermeneutic-phenomenological themes that define and distinguish them. Furthermore, the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is characterised by the active and reflective participation of the researcher, who should not seek neutrality and impersonality during the investigation. Since the researcher belongs to the urban neo-tribal group being analysed, understands its codes and signs, and, therefore, has the subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) appropriate for data analysis, the approach becomes cohesive.

Survey

The survey method is characterised by collecting data that will undergo quantitative treatment through a specific and structured collection instrument, usually a questionnaire (Freitas et al., 2000).

A non-probability sample was used for convenience, given that the niche nature of the tribe impedes obtaining perfectly randomised responses. The total number of responses was 274, with 267 valid respondents.

Findings and Discussion

The three proposed collection methods provided an overview of the problem. Some of the main insights and the data that corroborate them are presented here. For identity preservation purposes, Table 2 summarises some data and acronyms about the participants in the participant observation.

Characteristics of the informants from the participant observations

Acronym	Gender	City	Occupation
Informant 1	Female	São Paulo	DJ
Informant 2	Female	São Paulo	DJ
Informant 3	Non-binary	São Paulo	DJ
Informant 4	Male	São Paulo	Unknown
Informant 5	Male	Rio de Janeiro	Costume designer

The participant observations were conducted at the ODD, Sangramuta, and Blum events in São Paulo, as well as at the Festa até as 4 and Kode events in Rio de Janeiro. In the participant observations in São Paulo, a conversation with two local DJs revealed the reasons that drive the city's greater relevance in maintaining clubber culture. Informant 1 raised the point of the lack of interest that passers-by show towards each other in the city, saying that she does not experience judgmental looks when she goes "montada"[5] (all dressed up) to events, which allows her to do so more comfortably. Complementing this, Informant 2 points out that São Paulo is a hub of culture, fashion, and aesthetics and that there may also be a greater concern with looks and aesthetics in the state capital. She said that she feels a great sense of freedom to dress and behave the way she wants without being judged for it.

In another conversation during the observation with Informant 3, we discussed the "look constructions"[6] and their reasons. In their view, the city of São Paulo is a big city that demands a lot all the time. So, clubber events are a way for these people to express their personalities and tastes without being judged.

We can analyse this reflection from the perspective of the "VUCA" world, a term coined in 1987 by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus. The "VUCA" world is characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, which represent the current configuration of society in which we live and have serious impacts on the mental health of individuals (Luthans & Broad, 2022). The "look construction" becomes a means of escape, allowing individuals to experience life through a new persona, one that is separate from and unaffected by the responsibilities of the VUCA world.

Furthermore, in a conversation with Informant 4 during the Blum event, it was mentioned that in techno parties, people do not need to spend a lot to dress well and that he feels there is greater use of creativity and freedom of expression

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[5]Condition of a person who is dressed in a specific way to attend clubber events, derived from drag queen culture.

[6]The practice of crafting a performative and expressive look for clubber events, involving makeup, costume, and attitude, as a form of aesthetic and identity affirmation.

compared to more heteronormative parties and events, which place greater value on brands. At techno events, it's much more about the aesthetic adopted than the products themselves.

Regarding the aesthetics observed at the events, some notable elements worth mentioning include the trends of the 2000s, such as low-rise trousers, belly button piercings, tank tops, strappy tops, and cropped tops. These items were observed in men, showing a strong genderfuck trend[7]. There were also football shirts, black leather clothes, fetish clothing, trousers and T-shirts, as well as more neutral outfits. Men wore only underwear, face masks, chains, and various metals, along with short skirts and trousers layered over each other, collars, and other elements.

At the events observed in Rio de Janeiro, the number of people dressed up was significantly lower. As for women's clothing, many wore looser, wider and lighter clothes, unlike in São Paulo. Many men wore caps and simpler silhouettes. People wearing glitter and sequins, as well as crochet tops and animal prints, were also observed. At the Festa até as 4 events, in a conversation with Informant 5, he agreed that in São Paulo, there is a distinct energy, and the city's vibe is completely different, which also influences the way people dress.

In São Paulo, at ODD, there were many more dark, grotesque, surreal and disruptive elements, with a greater departure from the type of clothing worn at mainstream parties. In addition, São Paulo is influenced by the emo and punk movements, characterised by heavy makeup, multiple layers of black clothing, and distinctive haircuts. At parties in Rio de Janeiro, there was a much greater tendency towards genderfuck, largely motivated by the presence of men wearing so-called feminine items, such as low-cut and cut-out clothes, printed second skins, cropped tops, baguette bags, panties with straps showing and platform boots.

For the semi-structured interviews, a total of six respondents were interviewed, comprising three from Rio and three from São Paulo, in various roles.

In one of the responses provided, an example of the concept brought up by Lima (2013) was mentioned, highlighting that a dual lifestyle characterises clubbers.

> Most clubber moment? Man, I think the most clubber moments for me are after-parties[8]. When everyone goes out, all dressed up, with their clothes, makeup, and stuff. And we stop by a bakery to buy something to eat, something like that. Everyone looks at us. (...) When you go out into the real world, it seems to stand out in a very different way. Especially when everyone is all dressed up. (In-depth interview 1, FERJ)

The account given by the Rio fashion entrepreneur uses the term "real world" to

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[7]Genderfuck is an aesthetic where bodies considered feminine wear masculine clothing and vice versa. It is a cultural manifestation that challenges gender impositions through fashion.

[8]A moment after the party, when everyone gathers somewhere else to keep the party going.

refer to the environment outside clubber events, contrasting it with the feeling of detachment from reality provided by the clubber scene, where individuals are removed from their daily struggles and are free to explore another way of existing and behaving (Melo, 2007).

In another response, the iconic Rio figure (IFRJ) said that their most "clubber" moment was "dancing naked on top of the sound system at Gop Tun[9] during Carnival, wearing only a fanny pack". This experience also exemplifies what Arvidsson (2007) has said, classifying the productions and behaviours resulting from an underground[10] culture as rebellious. "Transgression" was also mentioned, as explained below: "the most clubber moment has to do with transgression. It has to be a non-judgmental space where people can let loose, that's it" (In-depth interview 5, IFRJ).

One can also observe the relationship between community formation, diversity, belonging and inclusion within the clubber scene in Rio and São Paulo. Based on the question "what do you like most about the dancers at your event?" asked of the Rio event producer, it is possible to reflect on the change in relation to diversity that has occurred over the last few years.

> Definitely, diversity. It is about seeing a crowd, like discovering oneself and finding a place where one belongs. It happens a lot with people who are coming to terms with their own gender identity and sexuality. They attend the event and talk to me: "wow, I felt welcome here; I felt that there really are people like me". I think that's the goal. That's how it was; it became the goal of it all, you know? (In-depth interview 4, EPRJ)

The scene in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo brings peripheral groups into the organisation and production of events within it. In this way, the formation of a community within the clubber scene is strengthened, given that there is a coming together not only due to similar tastes, as postulated by Huq (2006) but also due to the union of the socially marginalised group finding a support network to combat oppression in their dissident experiences of socially imposed norms. It can, therefore, be said that there is a mixture between what was observed in the second half of the 20th century, as postulated by Guerra and Figueredo (2020), where there was a sense of belonging associated with different classes and races, among other factors independent of psychographic issues, and what was postulated by Maffesoli (1988/2000), that common tastes group urban neo-tribes. In the clubber scene, the two theories converge, creating a hybrid sense of belonging that is based on multiple factors.

Next, the concept of group belonging is explored through the question: "do you view the clubber scene as a community?". The answers below illustrate the perception of the IFRJ and IFSP interviewees on the subject.

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[9]São Paulo clubber event.

[10]Opposite of mainstream. Everything that happens culturally away from the masses and is typically associated with specific neo-tribes.

Yes, the clubber scene is like a family, like we help each other. If there's a party, it'll call people they know. We always help those in need. If I'm throwing a party and I know someone who needs work, we'll call that person. We always help each other. This goes for everything: DJs, bouncers, everything. (In-depth interview 6, IFSP)

Today, I have a network of people that I know that if I need a job, I'll get help, and my friends will help me. (...) I think there's such good care. Being in contact with the public during the party, I realised that I needed to be well to take care of others. There's this thing of collective care; I feel like it's really strong among us. I've never witnessed any extremely unpleasant situations. (In-depth interview 5, IFRJ)

Given that there is a community within the clubber scene, we can analyse how fashion plays a role in maintaining ties within this community. There is a strong association between creative freedom and the clubber community, as well as an understanding that this space is ideal for experimenting with new aesthetics and pushing boundaries. Thus, we seek to understand the inspirations and references behind these looks, as dressing is crucial for the maintenance of this group and is loaded with freedom and experimentation. The statements below illustrate this argument.

I think [the clubber scene] is a space where people experiment a lot with their looks; you know, they're not ashamed to show their bodies, even if they don't fit the standard. So, I see it as a very free space where people feel comfortable. (...) Like, it's a way, I don't know, to experiment, sometimes even to try out this look here that has nothing to do with anything or "oh, I want to be naked" or "oh, I want to wear this costume", I want to. I think people feel comfortable doing that. (In-depth interview 4, PERJ)

Once, I was working at the candy stand at a party. And then, someone walked by wearing an outfit that looked like a cupcake. Very colourful, cute, you know? With frills and all. Very exaggerated but very beautiful. Then the guy at the party looked and said, "Oh, what's that for?" You know? So I looked at him. Then I said, "Why? What bothers you?" "No, it doesn't bother me. I just wonder what's that for". So I looked at him. Then I said, "Can you imagine if this person showed up at work looking like that?" Then he said, "no way, whatever". I said, "Imagine if this person showed up looking like this, I don't know, at a wedding, at a family gathering?" "Oh, no way". "So, do you know why this person is dressed like this? Because this is where she can be dressed like this. So, like, that's what that is for. It's so she can wear this look that she couldn't wear anywhere else. Here, she will be embraced and adored. "She looks beautiful; she looks like a cupcake!". Then he laughed and said, "You're right.". (In-depth interview 1, FERJ)

The market undeniably exploits all this creative potential. It is well known that the capitalist system incorporates underground aesthetics (Hebdige, 1979/2018), but how does this system then maintain its differentiation after the massification of its symbols?

> Fashion, for me, is much more about our daily lives, living the night, living the street; that's what fashion is for me. I think that's my reality of fashion, but I have many references; I always look at those canons out there. It's definitely art; it's still an inspiration, but it doesn't fit my reality. My reference is my own community. (In-depth interview 5, IFRJ)

> I think I influence my little bubble. I think there is an influence. Several people I know have come up to me and said that because of my brand or because of the things I do, they started dressing differently. Or they want to produce and stuff. Friends of mine who worked in other types of art are saying they want to put things on clothes. I say, "like, go for it, you know?". (In-depth interview 1, EMRJ)

It is understood, then, that there is feedback within the scene, where, based on this incorporation, there needs to be creative power to reinvent its signs and symbols, aiming to keep the community structured around relatable elements. This logic aligns with Hebdige's (1979/2018) proposal regarding the cyclical nature of the underground, where constant reinvention is a necessary condition for its existence.

If this reinvention exists, what are the signs and symbols of fashion within the clubber community? It is interesting to note that, when describing what a "clubber look" would be like, the term "Berlin" was used by two respondents. The idea portrays the use of black, chains, fetishist elements, and leather, among other aesthetics commonly associated with the clubber scene in the city of Berlin, which is very focused on techno (Braga, 2018). There was no consensus regarding the clubber look, or they even said that it is a discussion that should not be held since, for these people, being a clubber is about freedom, experimentation and reinvention, and not about an identifiable aesthetic. Finally, it is worth mentioning a statement by IFRJ, which sheds light on the reasons behind their way of dressing, as this practice is a connection to the clubber community.

> Wearing less clothes says a lot; it is direct, objective, subjective communication; it is expression; it is being able to say something just by being there. It is very connected to communication, to what I want to express. (...) I think it is an idea of collective communication with the community. I think that's how it is, you just dedicate yourself to what you like, if you meet a clubber from another part of the world, you will understand that person, it's not something that I think I am and others are not, it's a collective thing, you just have to participate in that culture. Then you can call yourself a clubber.

It's a culture that has already emerged in a global world. It's not a specific group; it's a global community. (In-depth interview 5, IFRJ)

As already postulated by Barthes (1967/1979), fashion is a communicative element, and this interviewer's statement highlights this point when he says that his clothes, and often their choice to show more skin, communicate with his own group. It is interesting to revisit what Marques and Rosa (2016) stated, arguing that within the context of groups, the products consumed serve as a means of contact between consumers, possessing a unifying power. This perspective also encompasses understanding consumption as a combination of use and enjoyment (Berlim, 2016).

For the survey, the actual number of respondents was 274, of which 267 were qualified respondents. Of these, 159 are from the city of Rio de Janeiro and 108 from the city of São Paulo.

In comparative analyses, a 5% difference is considered the minimum for significance in this study. Here, only data relevant to the comparison between the two markets analysed will be presented (Figure 1).

"I feel that the way I dress connects me to the clubber community"

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Partially disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree
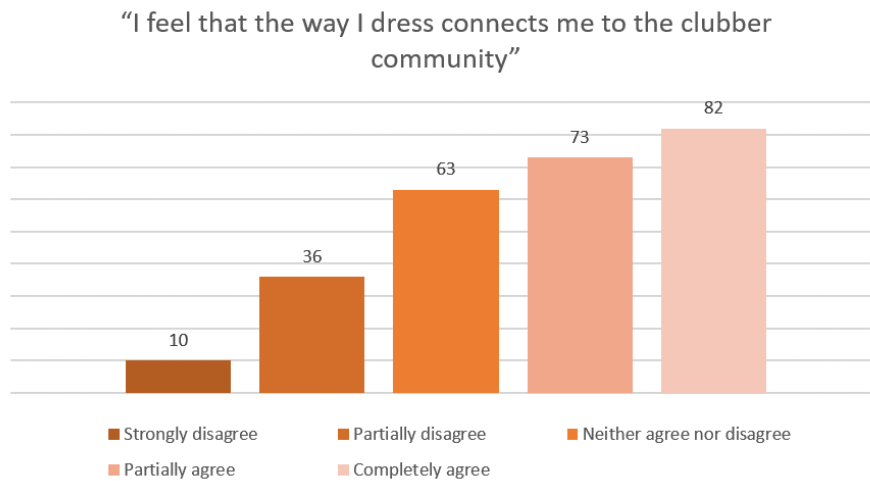■ Partially agree   ■ Completely agree

Figure 1: *Degree of agreement with the statement "I feel that the way I dress connects me to the clubber community"*

This question highlights the significance of clothing and clothing choices within the clubber scene. Nearly 60% of respondents agreed with the statement, indicating that this sentiment is shared by the majority. According to Simmel (2008, as cited in Santos, 2019), there is a paradox between belonging and differentiation: when trying to stand out from social norms, individuals end up approaching others with whom they share this desire, forming groups such as

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urban neo-tribes — like the clubber tribe, where belonging is sought precisely through difference. However, by acquiring the subcultural capital characteristic of the group, this initial difference tends to dilute, becoming part of a common pattern among members who share the same spaces and habits (Thornton, 1995).

Seeking to understand how the community itself perceives the looks presented at clubber events, the statement "at clubber events, I notice the clothes other people are wearing" indicates that the majority of respondents agree with the statement (Figure 2 and Figure 3).
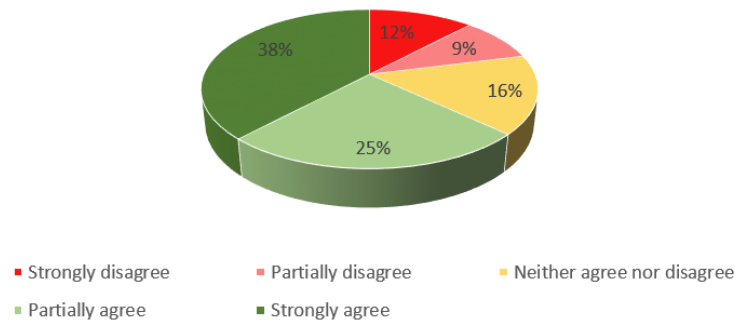

Figure 2: *Level of agreement, Rio de Janeiro, with the statement "at clubber events, I notice the clothes other people are wearing"*

"At clubber events, I notice the clothes other people are wearing" – São Paulo

- Strongly disagree
- Partially disagree
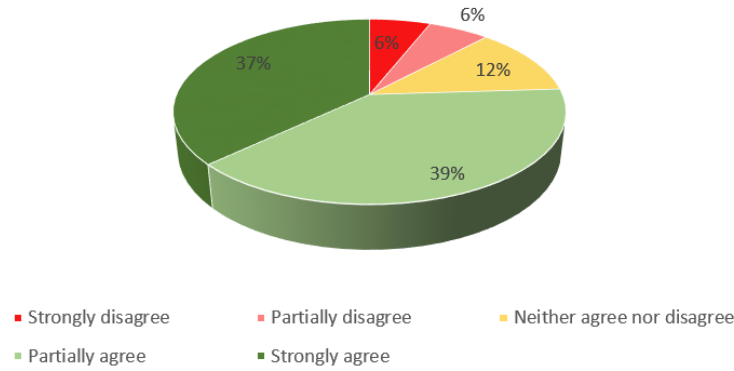- Neither agree nor disagree
- Partially agree
- Strongly agree

Figure 3: *Level of agreement, São Paulo, with the statement "at clubber events, I notice the clothes other people are wearing"*

This data demonstrates once again the importance of look in the construction of clubber aesthetics and identity, as well as the importance given to a well-constructed look within these events. In this question, it is also worth analysing the difference in responses between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. There is a significant difference in the percentage of agreement with the proposed statement. While in Rio de Janeiro, there is a 63% agreement, in São Paulo, this agreement is even higher, reaching 76%. The São Paulo character of valuing clubber aesthetics and culture becomes clearer from this response, given that the São Paulo scene itself is more interested in observing what is being proposed aesthetically by clubbers who attend these events. This difference can be explained by numerous factors, including the cosmopolitan nature of the city, where, as suggested by Informant 1 during the participant observation report at the ODD event in São Paulo, it is a place that encompasses a variety of urban neo-tribes, the most disruptive aesthetics end up going unnoticed by the general public. This is also reinforced by EPRJ's statement about the distinction between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in terms of looks.

> It is different. São Paulo has a nightlife culture that is much stronger than Rio. Yes, even because of the city's geography. Rio is a very daytime city, so perhaps in São Paulo, it's about being a big metropolis, the main metropolis in the country. So, maybe this fashion thing and everything is more present, stronger, in São Paulo. (In-depth interview 4, EPRJ)

Thus, it is worth analysing how individuals identify each other as clubbers and

how the sense of belonging is stimulated within the community. To this end, it is worth examining the degree of agreement with the statement: "just by glancing at someone's look, I can tell whether or not they usually go to clubber events" (Figure 4).
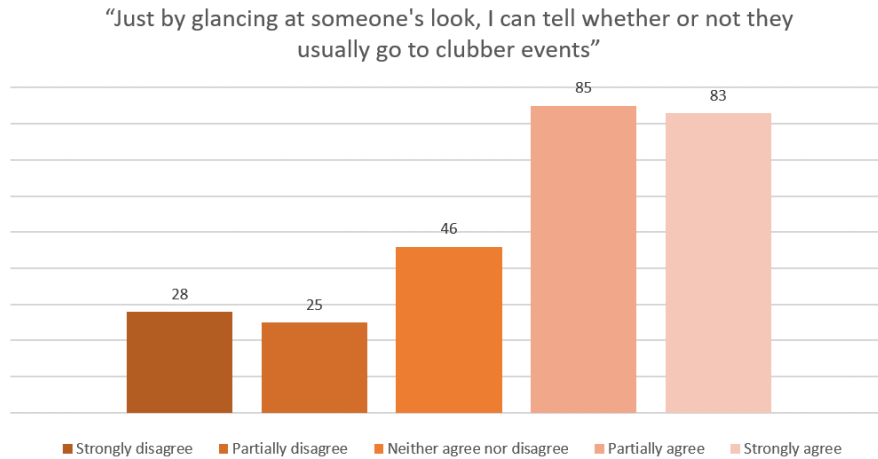

Figure 4: *Degree of agreement with the statement "just by glancing at someone's look, I can tell whether or not they usually go to clubber events"*

The question deals with the visual identification of the clubber aesthetic, that is, how a person's appearance can convey whether or not they possess a specific subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) to validate their presence in that particular space: 62.9% of respondents believe that there is a way to identify, through observation of clothing choices, whether or not an individual belongs to that sub-tribe. This result justifies various behaviours adopted within the environment, such as the adoption of door policies through bouncers[11].

The statement "at the events I attend, I feel completely free to be who I really am, wearing whatever I want" was one of the statements with the highest percentage of agreement, with 85.4% of respondents agreeing to some degree (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Regarding the difference between cities, while 11% of respondents in Rio de Janeiro disagreed with the statement, only 3% in São Paulo disagreed. The same trend is observed in the degree of agreement, which increases from 82% in Rio de Janeiro to 90% in São Paulo.

[11]These are club employees who select who can and cannot enter on a given night. This practice is called "door policy" and is very common in several European capitals, especially Berlin, and was already practised in some Brazilian nightclubs in the 1980s and 1990s.

"At the events I attend, I feel completely free to be who I really am, wearing whatever I want" – Rio de Janeiro

- Strongly disagree
- Partially disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
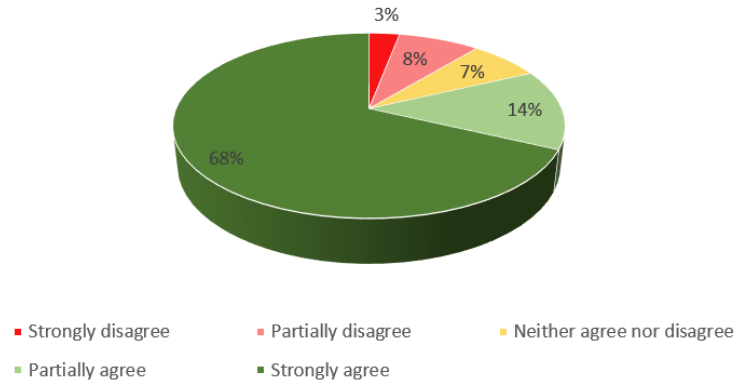- Partially agree
- Strongly agree

Figure 5:   *Degree of agreement, Rio de Janeiro, with the statement "at the events I attend, I feel completely free to be who I really am, wearing whatever I want"*

"At the events I attend, I feel completely free to be who I really am, wearing whatever I want" – São Paulo

- Strongly disagree
- Partially disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
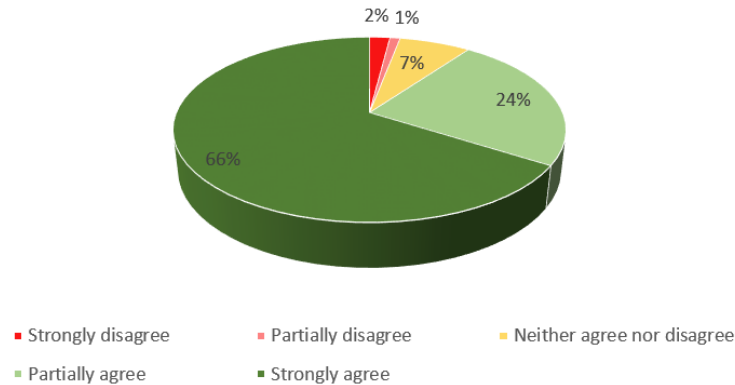- Partially agree
- Strongly agree

Figure 6:   *Degree of agreement, São Paulo, with the statement "at the events I attend, I feel completely free to be who I really am, wearing whatever I want"*

The results indicate greater freedom and comfort in attending clubber events in São Paulo, a characteristic related to the size of the clubber scene in the city

and the factor of 'invisibility' within the metropolis, as pointed out by Informant 1. These can be speculated to be the main reasons for the feeling of well-being that is more prevalent in the state capital.

The results regarding the statement, "at clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life" (Figure 7) are in line with what was postulated by Lima (2013), who identified a duality in the clubber experience, where everyday habits are far removed from those at a clubber event, characterising a contradictory lifestyle that can be expressed by various antagonisms such as day/night, moral/immoral, right/wrong, among others. It is observed that 44.5% of respondents agree to some extent with the statement. In comparison, 35.2% disagree to some extent, indicating a certain degree of confirmation of what is described in the literature. However, the issue becomes interesting when we observe the differences between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Figure 8 and Figure 9).
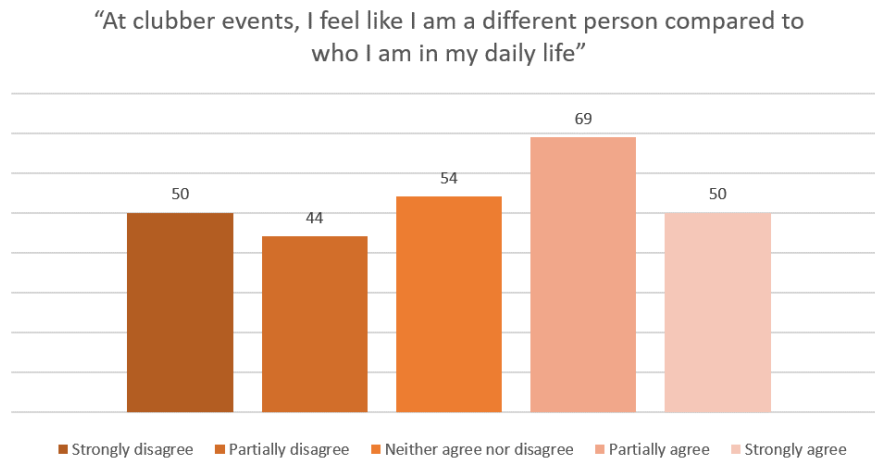

Figure 7: *Degree of agreement with the statement "at clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life"*

"At clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life" – Rio de Janeiro

19%

17%

21%

24%

18%

- Strongly disagree
- Patially disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
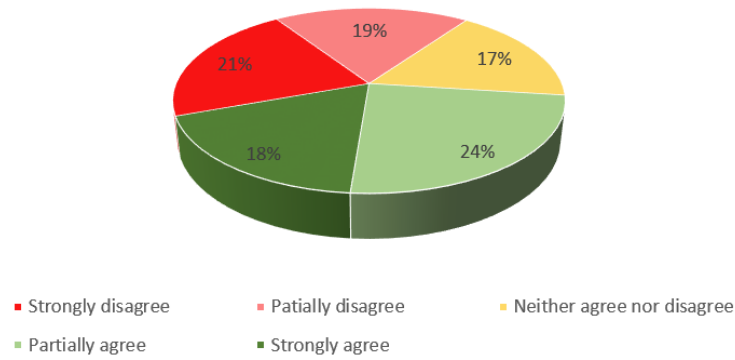- Partially agree
- Strongly agree

Figure 8: *Degree of agreement, Rio de Janeiro, with the statement "at clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life"*

"At clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life" – São Paulo

12%

25%

15%

19%

29%

- Strongly disagree
- Partially disagree
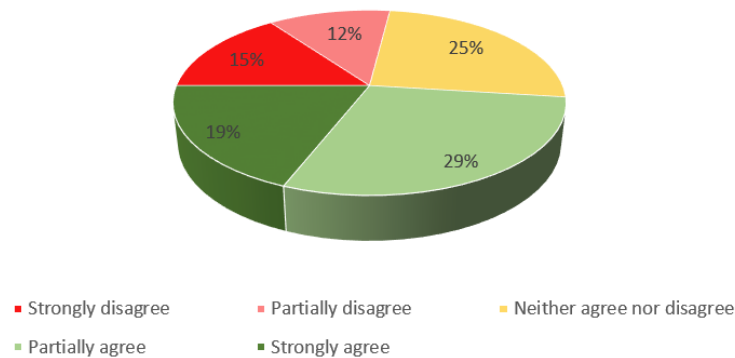- Neither agree nor disagree
- Partially agree
- Strongly agree

Figure 9: *Degree of agreement, São Paulo, with the statement "at clubber events, I feel like I am a different person compared to who I am in my daily life"*

In Rio de Janeiro, the degree of disagreement was 40%, whereas in São Paulo, it was 27%. São Paulo is confirmed by the survey as a city that aligns closely with current observations in the literature on clubber lifestyle habits, making it

a promising city for the development and maintenance of this urban culture in a globalised world.

Final Considerations

Clubber culture is diverse and complex and expresses itself through signs that are difficult to interpret. It is also changeable and subject to constant experimentation and innovation. Like all avant-garde movements, the clubber movement unfolds far from the eyes of most society and invites only those who possess specific subcultural capital to understand its meaning, values, and manifestations of its experience (Thornton, 1995). Fashion, as a group bonding factor, is relevant due to its high communicative potential (Barthes, 1967/1979). It can generate interest, belonging, acceptance, and well-being within an urban core in a volatile, unstable, complex, and ambiguous world (Luthans & Broad, 2022). Based on the principle that looks and outfits are part of clubber culture, there is a mutual observation that can be perceived in two ways: on the one hand, a careful and protective gaze from the community itself, and on the other, a judgemental and analytical gaze towards the individual artistic veins of its frequenters, seeking elements that generate identification and belonging. Therefore, fashion plays a significant role in acting as a unifying tool for the community, which is relevant to understanding belonging and community.

The events analysed behave in accordance with clubber events around the world. they show a high degree of association with clubber culture, a phenomenon defined by Maffesoli (1988/2000) as neo-tribalism. It is essential to acknowledge the significant diversity in the expression of clubber culture globally. However, some commonalities are observed in the communities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The diversity of attendees, their behaviours and psychographic characteristics, widespread acceptance of individual freedom, and an appreciation of individual artistic expression are some of them. Another point of convergence is the space-time of clubber events, which prove to be unique moments where care, freedom, acceptance, experimentation and new experiences, both individual and collective, are present. This non-place or non-time, associated with the logic of escapism, is glimpsed throughout the work and is one of the key points of this culture, in line with Melo's (2007) proposal.

The clubber aesthetic is, above all, changeable. Experimentation and breaking paradigms are part of the clubber experience, where the eyes consume as much as the ears during events, generating immersive experiences and atmospheres that cannot be reproduced in other conditions, which produces a feeling of detachment from reality. It is, therefore, difficult to outline a standard aesthetic for the clubber community: it is defined by reinvention. We can, however, outline some strong elements, such as the use of black clothing, chains, and fetishist elements, among others. These aesthetic choices are those that most closely resemble the view of the clubber by those outside the neo-tribe, being a commercialised view of what the community is.

It is up to the movement, then, to reinvent itself in order to maintain the group's unique identity. This reinvention is, in most cases, based on the movement itself, as pointed out by IFRJ, and it is not possible to outline aesthetics that are prominent for all clubbers due to their ephemeral nature. Although changeable, the co-opting of the underground by capitalist logic shapes the community's view of itself. Thus, there is a direct association with elements such as dark colours, silver chains, fetishist elements, exposure of body parts, nudity and heavy makeup with alternative hairstyles. This association stems from numerous previous movements, such as punk and hippie, as well as the generation that demonstrated to the mainstream[12] the existence of counterculture and alternative ways of life.

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[12]Opposite of underground.

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