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Reflections on Art, the Culture Industry, and the Boundaries of Critique: On the Debate Surrounding Fengaros Festival (Unsigned) (Online Article)

Historical Note

This online article was published on the blog [Cypriot Footnotes](#) in July 2026. It was originally posted on the Instagram account 'antifazone_cy' on July 26, 2026.

Content

Reflections on Art, the Culture Industry, and the Boundaries of Critique: On the Debate Surrounding Fengaros Festival

1. Some Initial Clarifications

Our page primarily publishes posts originating from the anarchist/ anti-authoritarian scene in the republic of cyprus. We often share unsigned contributions sent to us, without necessarily completely agreeing. Yesterday's post about fengaros festival was sent by antispe comrades in response to the festival being held on a farm. We believed it raised legitimate questions about human-animal relations, while also offering interesting reflections on the culture industry, and we take responsibility for sharing it. We diverge from the text in two ways. First, its critique of alternative culture, branding, and commodification focuses too narrowly on a single festival. Second, it implicitly holds fengaros to standards inappropriate for a commercial/ alternative music festival. Fengaros is not a movement festival, and cannot be judged as such. We shared these thoughts with the authors. However, we reject censorship within our own spaces. We chose to make room for a critique that we think deserves to be heard and debated. Since the discussion that followed quickly exceeded our ability to keep up, we contribute our own reflections on some issues raised.

2. Mainstream and Alternative Culture

The frankfurt school described the culture industry as a system of cultural production organised from above, driven by profit, standardisation, and repetition. Its packaging may vary to create an illusion of

choice, but the underlying message remains the same: social control through the production of passive consumers of ideas, aesthetics, products, and lifestyles. This broadly describes what we understand as mainstream culture. Alternative culture is more complicated. It usually refers to artistic or musical practices that challenge mainstream aesthetics, but aesthetic difference alone tells us very little. What matters is not whether punk is “better” than rock, but what kinds of social relations a scene creates. The relationships between artist and audience, producer and consumer, or organiser and spectator can be reproduced just as easily within alternative culture as within the mainstream. For us, art is another terrain of struggle, one where capitalist hierarchies can either be reinforced or challenged.

3. The Culture Industry and Consumption

The problem is not Fengaros itself. There is no ethical consumption under capitalism. Which commercial concert, festival, or film someone enjoys has little bearing on the broader struggle for social transformation, just as choices about clothing or shopping at a small shop versus a supermarket do not challenge capitalist relations. This does not mean all choices are morally equivalent, and the concerns raised in the original post deserve discussion. We are not outside capitalism; we are part of it. Questions about how we enjoy ourselves, create, and relate to one another are therefore politically necessary. We support efforts to build alternatives to the commercial culture industry and value practical critiques of the commodification of creativity and leisure. DIY and collective initiatives—concerts, parties, zines, and other grassroots projects have the potential to experiment with different social relations. Their political significance lies not in their aesthetic quality but in the relationships they create.

4. Art as a Divided Sphere

Everyone is an artist. Human beings are creative, even if this is suppressed or unrecognised. Art has become a divided sphere that reproduces capitalist ideas: (intellectual) property, separation of mental & manual labour, spectacle, commodity. Who is recognised as an artist is not determined simply by creativity or desire, but also by class position, institutional recognition, educational opportunities, funding, and social networks. Art is therefore deeply embedded in systems of privilege. We want to overcome art as a separate sphere altogether, to realise art through its integration into everyday life. We want lives defined by creativity, curiosity, and experimentation. Overcoming the separation between artist and audience is part of that broader project.

5. Artist as a Profession

Working artists deserve good pay, just like every other worker. Artistic labour is neither inferior nor inherently superior because of its creative or cultural significance. We aspire to a society where everyone can freely choose their callings and how to express their creativity, but until then, we want good working conditions for all. At the same time, an old question remains unresolved: are you using your band to promote revolution, or using revolution to promote your band? Those who combine political expression with professional artistic careers should also be willing to engage with criticism from the movements they speak to and for. Public visibility inevitably brings public debate, and that debate will not always be easy.

6. Expanding the Boundaries of Critique

If capitalism is to be overcome, everyday life itself must be transformed. We need to imagine and build new relationships, not only between people, but also between humans, animals, and nature. We

defend the legitimacy of political critique in areas often dismissed as secondary: leisure, culture, creativity, and the exploitation of animals. Who decides which issues deserve political attention? How can we create and imagine beyond capitalism when we recreate its hierarchies?

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Last update: **2026/07/30 10:25**

