growth is concerned, to 'need'. Thus the creation of 'need', or, using the distinction between needs and satisfiers introduced earlier by Max-Neef, the endless production of *new satisfiers* for fundamental needs, and the complementary process of creating dissatisfaction with existing satisfiers, is a vitally important motor of the growth economy.

Just as satisfiers change, so do definitions and perceptions of poverty. In this light, poverty cannot be expressed solely in terms of the lack of hard and fast physical necessities, such as so many calories of food per day. It also depends on people's ability or otherwise to participate fully in the normal life of the society in which they are living, where norms are continually changing.

A simple example illustrates these points. In 1983 London Weekend Television and the MORI market research organisation conducted a survey into the nature of poverty in Britain.[1] Their results showed that more than two-thirds of people classed as 'necessities' items which only a half-century ago would certainly have counted as luxuries, including a refrigerator and a washing-machine. More than half put television in the same category – less than fifty years after the BBC established the first regular television service in the world. Thus, in a very real sense, the 'need' for a television has been created in the years since 1936. Other such 'needs' are doubtless being created now.

It is a process that merits close scrutiny, for while there can be no dispute that the creation of such 'needs' is necessary for the economic system, it is by no means certain whether this process contributes to the overall well-being even of the consumer seeking to satisfy these new 'needs', while it certainly diverts resources from those in greatest need as far as their most basic material subsistence is concerned.

'NEEDS AND COMMODITIES'
by Jeremy Seabrook

Those who propose economic alternatives often refer to them as though the problems were mainly technical. If these can be solved, it is felt, people will see the logic and necessity for change, and everything will fall naturally into place. The truth is that this takes no account of the real relationship between the majority of the people and the existing structures; and that, far from being a technical or intellectual problem, the habits of attachment to, and

the fear of loss of, what already exists are deeply emotional and irrational.

If the status quo survives relatively unscathed, it is not because of apathy, as is sometimes asserted, but because of the creation of *dependency*, which is an essential part of its project.

Fear of change and loss is not necessarily a response that gives proof of people's 'natural' conservatism. For in spite of the recession, many people have found within consumer capitalism real relief from an older poverty. This predisposes them to look upon the system as progressive; and they are the more inclined to accept its version of common sense, its logic in pursuit of ends which – unlike, perhaps, at earlier times – now look benign. The system has not been slow to take advantage of this more general public acceptance of the exigencies of capital; and it has been swift to present all its products, services and commodities, through the cleansing power of advertising and promotion, as examples of shining innocence and benevolence. This means that all the violence that occurs in their production has been suppressed. For example, the clearance of subsistence farmers for the sake of beef-ranches in Central America is scarcely of concern to those whose function it has become to buy the results of this process, when they appear in the form of succulent hamburgers, dispensed through the transparent cleanliness and honesty of some Western hamburger bar. We have been led to live a divorce between what we buy in the West and its provenance. The appearance of such a vast range of goods and services has still a quasi-miraculous quality to people lately haunted by insufficiency; it retains something of the insubstantial aspect of a mirage. And we have permitted ourselves to be persuaded that the exchange of our money for these things represents freedom: 'What the People Want' sounds like a clarion call to liberation. Indeed, it has become sacrosanct: In other words, a taboo has been created.

We have to confront this prohibition. Our much-vaunted freedom of choice does not occur in a void. If freedom of choice has any meaning, it must surely imply choosing in the full knowledge of the foreseeable consequences, implications and effects of our choices. But we have given ourselves, or have been given, permission to live them only at the point of consumption, dissociated from any of the disagreeable consequences, like children carefully shielded by those who know best from any awareness that death and disease exist in the world. And these consequences which have been severed from our choices take their toll, not only in the lives of the poorest on earth, but equally within the rich societies of the West. The most urgent purpose of

any real alternative must be to demonstrate the necessity of disengagement from these processes; and in such a way that it can be shown to be not impoverishment or loss, but liberation. For we are dealing with what Rudolf Bahro has called 'the occupied regions of our consciousness' (Bahro, 1982).

In order to suggest ways in which these occluded debates may be opened, we must not flinch from examining the daily reality of our subordinate and dependent status. I'd like to look at one commodity that has recently appeared on a large scale in many metropolitan countries. It is a prohibited commodity, and its effects are the more shocking, not because it is officially banned, but because it throws an oblique, if lurid, light on the more normal processes of buying and selling, and suggests something of the uncontrollable power of 'free' markets. In recent times, there has been much concern in the poor areas of the cities, especially in London and Merseyside, about the manner in which many young people, some of them little more than children, have gained access to heroin. The passage of this forbidden substance causes such agitation because it is a metaphor, or perhaps a caricature, of the ways in which permitted commodities pass on to the market. It has been said that heroin is the perfect capitalist commodity: it illuminates the circuits of the system so starkly. First of all, it is a cash-crop which distorts the economies of the poor countries in which it is grown. It requires great entrepreneurial skills to harvest, refine and transport by smuggling. It calls forth all the powers of ingenuity and risk-taking that are so much part of the ethos by which we live. Above all, it creates its own demand because it is addictive. In other words, *it creates its own need* in a spectacular way, it is true, but one which is uncomfortably close to the fabrication of needs which underlies the dynamic of the mainstream economy. And those who are hooked on it will do anything to get the money to fulfil the need. It is outlawed because of its destructive influence; yet how akin it is to other substances, commodities, sensations that are regarded as normal and acceptable objects of selling. Not only the obvious things – those products and cash-crops that have overlaid and wrecked patterns of survival and self-sufficiency in poor countries; not only the older colonial products of tea, sugar, coffee, cocoa and the industries that depend on them; but more recent patterns of farming and ranching and implanted agriculture that turns whole countries into 'offshore production units' of Western companies, whether for strawberries, beef, cucumbers or cattle-food; also junk-food which has more to do with chemicals than nourishment, and cosmetics which have more to do with

nourishment than beauty, as well as the older stimulants and pacifiers: alcohol, tobacco. There are the more recent agents too, that have been introduced to modify human mood or consciousness, to make us accept the aberrant as normal: all the tranquillisers and somnifers, which also readily spill over into the forbidden territory of solvent abuse and glue. And this is before we even begin to look at the sensations that emanate from the entertainment industry, the crazes and fashions, the addiction to TV programmes which make people rush home each night for a rendezvous with shadows; the pop culture with its fantasies and images which become a substitute for real flesh and blood, the marketing of sexuality, the talent and youth of human beings harvested like corn.

The fear of loss, the anxiety of withdrawal – these must be the objects of attention for any alternative formulation. In the metropolitan Western countries, we, the people, have allowed ourselves to become markets – we have become capitalism's own need for growth and self-expansion. Our needs have become indistinguishable from those of the system. This is what gives it such strength and tenacity. For it means that we have internalised what was forced upon us at an earlier epoch, when we were essentially machines, labour for producing wealth; we have been transformed into the machines for consuming what we once produced: we have become like the very thing which oppressed us. This is the origin of our 'dependency', and it has its equivalent in the 'dependent' economies of the poor world. Indeed, both are an aspect of the same thing. And this is where we can identify our true interests with those of the poor. It is only through this recognition that a language of liberation will be forged. Our experience, as well as the experience of those who languish in poverty and disease, is a common one. What rich and poor alike have seen is the bypassing of human need, in order to perpetuate an autonomous and self-sustaining economy that knows nothing of human things. And the famished of the earth – brandished like a spectre to cow the rich into conformity – are our true allies and not our enemies.

What we need to say is that human needs are more complex and more intractable than the apparatus that purports to answer them through money. Money and human need belong to different realms of experience. And the dynamic of advanced capitalism depends upon exploiting this eternal mismatch, this shadowy approximation which, far from answering needs, merely distorts, evades and yet, because it cannot satisfy them, merely goads them on.

At Christmas 1983, there was a dramatic example of this cruel

and bizarre process. The children of the United States were seized, spontaneously, it seems, by a rage for possession of what were called Cabbage Patch dolls. (These were dolls of cloth, each one slightly different, and were sold as foundlings; each child was expected to adopt his or her doll, and to sign papers promising to cherish it; the orphaned condition of the doll is a subtle symbol of a different kind of dispossession, with which American children can no doubt readily identify.) These dolls were soon sold out; and there were images of half-crazed mothers on TV, demanding tragically before the cameras to be told what they should say to their children, now that these artefacts had ceased to be available; were they expected to tell their children that Santa Claus had run out? Now there is no doubt that these dolls reponded to real needs of children: frightening, aching absences. But that these needs were for the items in question is another matter. And so it is with so many needs; yearnings and longings and desires that occur in a dimension inaccessible to those ubiquitous and intrusive markets.

We must look at the social production of need, and the mechanisms set in place to answer it. The definition of need has passed from human beings themselves, and has become vested in a limitless capacity to produce, which belongs, not to us, but to the vast and abstract productive power of capital. Confronted by a limitless range of marketed possibilities, we shall always remain dwarfed, diminished, inadequate. The familiar division of labour has its correspondence in a less recognisable fragmentation of need; so that the very abundance which the West has achieved becomes the raw material for strange new products, dissatisfactions and discontents, the manufacture of new forms of poverty and felt insufficiency. This is the mechanism whereby we clamour for a growth and expansion which has nothing to do with the human, but everything to do with capitalism.

The formulation of need requires to be reclaimed by human beings and disentangled from the confusion of commodities, symbols and images in which it has been caught up. The situation recalls those accounts of Engels, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844, where he describes a sequence of industrial accidents, in which the bodies of the operatives had been caught up in pulleys, belts and engines, whirled round until they were mangled by the machinery. We have lived through a similar analogue of inextricable mixing of humanity and the machine. We are taunted and tormented by the fanfares and the enclosed self-worship of the markets. They contain, locked up in their invisible machinery, so many of our expropriated real

powers and possibilities. Need has been turned against life.

This means that we are in the same business of liberation as those who have been pressed into the service of the same markets of the West, by exporting food they cannot afford to buy to nourish their children, those dispossessed of the means of subsistence and driven into the slums of Manila or Sao Paolo. For we are the other side of that oppression – we ARE the markets. We acknowledge this when we refer to human beings in terms of this abstraction – people talk of the teenage market, the youth market, the porn market, the luxury market. This process, which we are always encouraged to believe is a privilege, also involves a distortion and warping of our humanity; just as the absolute privations of the poorest of the earth do. But the difference is that the toll this takes on us has been effectively separated from all the marketed wonders and delights; and we have, in the West, lived in a collusive dissociation of all the ugly visitations of our own society from their social origins: not only the stress-related diseases, the sicknesses of over-indulgence and self-poisoning, but the loneliness, the pursuit of sterile fantasies, mental illness, violence, epidemics of crime or drug-abuse, alcoholism, the breakdown of human associations – these are some of the consequences of what we are asked to accept as a form of privilege. The sundering of all these ills from the social and economic processes which produce them has been the object of capitalism in our time. Above all, the connection has been concealed between the wasting of the flesh and muscle of the poor through undernourishment and overwork and the waste of the powers and energies of young people in the richest societies in the world, who are disabled by idleness and lack of skill and a sense of futility, when so much needs to be done in the world.

Our project must be to make connections that have been allowed to lapse, or have remained in shadow. Perhaps we have been afraid of bringing into the open an examination of those dependencies because we don't want to alienate those whose support we seek. But we must not permit alternative formulations to fall into pietistic generalities about the poor on the one hand, or into an avoidance of upsetting deep-rooted dependency on the other. We must illuminate the way we live and the plight of the poor for the common oppression they are. When these come together, they will make an explosive sense, and we shall see that our interests truly coincide with the interests of those whose lives are a daily witness to spoliation and loss.

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The question of human needs is clearly related to perceptions of value and to human motivation. People will be likely to value most whatever they consider they need. Similarly they will be more motivated to satisfy needs than to achieve other goals. To illustrate the psychological complexity of the ground now being covered, four preliminary points can be made, taken from Robertson (TOES, 1985) but, again, differentiating between needs and satisfiers.

1 One human need is to be useful and valued. We have a need to develop and to use our capacity to contribute to the satisfaction of our own and other people's needs.
2 Satisfiers of needs are subjective and to that extent they cannot be objectively defined by experts. One human need is the freedom to define our own satisfiers.
3 Satisfiers of needs are culturally and socially determined. One human need is to live in a society whose dominant ethos does not impose satisfiers that conflict with the satisfaction of other needs for oneself or for others.
4 Satisfiers of needs are relative, in the sense that we are dissatisfied if we are much worse off than others. To that extent, one human need is to live in a society of equals.

Conventional economics takes an extraordinarily limited and simplified view of human motivation, as reflected in its concept of Financial Man, a quintessentially competitive human archetype, who orders his entire world to conform to the conditions of maximum monetary gain. Now probably no economist would try to equate Financial Man with real people. It is too obvious that the motivations of real people spring from far more complex sources than mere financial advantage: family, friends, neighbourhood, country, the capacities for love, loyalty and worship, to name only a few. But, and this is the crucial point, our economic institutions, the businesses, banks and corporations which exert such a strong influence on every aspect of our lives and society, are almost invariably run *as if* maximum monetary gain was and should be their sole valid criterion of operation. The vast majority of executives who ruthlessly enforce the dictatorship of the bottom line accept no such tyranny in their personal lives. The workers, including the executives, who submit their skills and employed hours to the gods of profit and productivity, will often devote those same skills in the rest of their working lives to quite different, yet just as productive ends, whether of personal development or social service or both.

This inconsistency in our economics is not an inevitable nor an immutable state of affairs. There is no imperative for the economic system to be geared to profit rather than people. This is a political question which could and should be determined according to the needs, values and motivations of the people whom the system is supposed to serve. Modern psychology and market research show these to be infinitely more complex than the Pavlovian responses of Financial Man.

VALUES, GOALS AND MOTIVATIONS

Christine MacNulty (TOES, 1985) describes a classification of values and attitudes based on Social Value Groups, as a means of understanding social change.

> This approach to social change starts from the assumption that one of the main determinants of a society's structure and dynamics is the individual's values, beliefs, attitudes and concerns. In other words, any change in individual values and attitudes will manifest as changes in all aspects of society – the home, the workplace and the community – which will, in turn, affect all existing organisations and institutions.
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> Social change can be measured and analysed in a variety of ways. In the work of my company, Taylor Nelson Monitor, in the UK and Europe, we have taken a three-pronged approach. We have developed, tested and validated a psychological model, based on theories of motivation; we have taken a long-term historical, socio-cultural perspective, looking at the transitions from agricultural to industrial to post-industrial societies; we have collected data on social change from more than 20,000 respondents in twelve years and have factor-analysed and then clustered the trends. All three approaches have shown remarkable internal consistency, and have converged on the same conclusions.
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> At present the UK population can be divided between those with Sustenance values, Outer-Directed values and Inner-Directed values:
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> - Sustenance values relate to the basic necessity of survival and security. People holding such values live just to get by, and heed the rule 'safety first'.
> - Outer-Directed values relate to the desire for prosperity and status. The Outer-Directed person is motivated by a desire to get on and get ahead.
> - Inner-Directed values relate to the need for personal