1. ‘Need’ is a social category. Nature, the “drive” [Trieb], is comprehended in it. But the social and the natural moment of need are not capable of being split off from each other as secondary and primary moments, in order that we can then set up a pecking order of satisfactions. Hunger, conceived as a category of nature, can be satisfied with grasshoppers and gnat-cakes, which many savages consume. The concrete hunger of civilized people has however its own kind of satisfaction. They must get something to eat which they do not find disgusting; and in disgust and its opposite are reflected the whole of history. So it is with each and every need. The social mediation of every drive is so effective, that its natural object never comes to light immediately, but always and only as an object produced through and by society. The appeal to ‘nature’ as if this existed in opposition to some kind of need is never anything but the mask of denial and domination.

2. The distinction between superficial needs and deep needs is an illusion with social origins. The so-called superficial needs are reflections of the work process, which makes people into “appendages of the machine” and compels them, outside of work, to reduce themselves into mere reproductions of the commodity called labour power. These needs are the badges of a situation which compels its victim to flee, and at the same time holds him so securely in thrall, that the flight itself always degenerates into a convulsive repetition of the very situation from which he would flee. The bad thing about these so-called superficial needs is not their ‘superficiality’—a concept which presupposes [as its opposite] the no less questionable concept of ‘inwardness.’ The bad thing about these needs—which are not really needs—is that they aim toward a satisfaction which at the same time betrays them. The social mediation of need—its mediation through and in capitalist society—has reached a

point at which need contradicts itself. It is with this fact, and not with some predetermined hierarchy of values and needs, that criticism must make a start.

3. The so-called deep needs are for their part to a large extent mass products of the process of denial and fulfil a distracting function. To pit them against superficial needs is for that reason already dubious: the monopoly has long since taken the deep into its possession, just as it did the superficial. The Beethoven symphony conducted by Toscanini is no better than the next trashy entertainment movie [Unterhaltungsfilm], and every film starring Bette Davis is already the synthesis. It is precisely this synthesis that merits the most extreme distrust.

4. The theory of need finds itself faced with grave difficulties. On the one hand it must present the social character of need, and also the fulfilment of need, in its most immediate and concrete form. It cannot allow itself a priori any differentiation of good and bad, genuine and artificial, or true and false needs. On the other hand it must recognise that currently existing needs themselves are, in their present form, the product of class society. Humanity cannot be neatly separated from the consequences of repression [Repressionsfolge] by [our understanding of] any 'need.' The danger of domination [Herrschaft] migrating into humanity by way of monopolised needs is not some heretical belief that can be exorcised through excommunication, but a real tendency of late capitalism. This 'danger' refers not to the possibility of barbarism after revolution, but to the prevention of revolution through the agency of the total society. Dialectical theory must offer resistance both to this danger and to all the contradictions inherent in need itself. Dialectical theory is capable of this only insofar as it can properly recognise, in every question concerning need, the concrete connection of that question with the totality of the social process—this instead of 'need in general,' whether the latter idea be used to sanction need, regiment it, or even to suppress it as the legacy of evil. Today, under the monopoly, what is crucial is how individual needs stand in relation to the continued existence of the monopoly. The elaboration of this relationship is a fundamentally theoretical matter.
5. Needs are not static. The stasis in which they are apparently locked today—their fixation on the reproduction of the eternally same—is merely the reflex of material production, which itself assumes a stationary character in consequence of the elimination of markets and competition concurrent with the continued existence of class domination. The end of this stasis would mean that need would appear in a completely different light. The resolution of the contradictions of need is itself replete with contradictions. If production were instantly and without restriction converted into the satisfaction of needs—the satisfaction even, and precisely, of those needs produced by capitalism itself—the needs themselves would therewith be crucially changed. The impenetrability of genuine and false needs is fundamental to class domination. Under class domination, the reproduction of life and the suppression of life form a unity; and though the law of this unity is, to be sure, transparent in the whole, in its individual forms it is impenetrable. Once the monopoly had ceased to exist, it would quickly become apparent that the masses do not need [brauchen] the trash, the contemptible “first-classness” [Erstklassigkeit], that practical men deliver to them. The thought, for example, that the cinema, along with the home and nourishment, is necessary for the reproduction of labour power, is true only in a world which conditions people for the reproduction of their labour power and compels their needs to harmonise with the employer’s interests, namely, profit and domination. And the radical transformation even of this world is already prognosticated, just to make sure. But the thought that a revolutionary society would clamour for the execrable acting of Hedy Lamarr or the execrable Soup of Campbell is absurd. The better the soup, the more delectable the abstention from Lamarr.

6. It is hard to understand why the whole culture industry of today should continue in a classless society. Surely it is an absurdity that the capitalist crisis destroys means of production which do serve needs; but the idea that in a classless society the cinema and radio—which probably even now serve hardly anyone—would to a large extent be closed down, by no means leads to absurdity. It is not absurd because the character of many needs, in itself full of contradiction, would lead to the decay of cinema and radio as soon as these needs were no longer palmed off by direct or indirect terror from above. The idea that the state of the technical forces of production necessitates the further reproduction and
satisfaction of needs whose manifestation will dissolve together with capitalist society is simply fetishistic. In Soviet democracy, all the wheels must be made to keep turning; the demand itself implies fear of the unemployed, who vanish along with capitalist exploitation.

7. The question of the immediate satisfaction of needs [Sofortbefriedigung des Bedürfnisses] should not be posed under the aspects "social" and "natural," "primary" and "secondary," "true" and "false." Rather, it falls into the same category as the question of the suffering of the vast majority of all the people on earth. If what all people need most urgently here and now were in fact to be produced, one would be relieved of one's all-too-great socio-psychological worries concerning the legitimacy of their needs. These worries originate, on the contrary, when boards [English in original] and authorised commissions establish themselves, classify needs and, with the cry "man cannot live on bread alone," instead assign him a part of the bread ration (which as a ration is already too small) in the form of Gershwin records.

8. The demand for production solely for the satisfaction of needs itself belongs to the prehistory of a world which produces not for needs, but for profit and the establishment of domination, and where, for that reason, shortage dominates. If shortage disappears, the relation between need and satisfaction will be transformed. In capitalist society, the compulsion to produce in response to need (that is, in response to a form of 'need' mediated and then fixed by the market) is one of the chief means of keeping people hard at it. Nothing may be thought, written, done or made that would transcend this society, which clings to its power largely through the needs of the people at its mercy. It is unimaginable that the compulsion to satisfy needs could persist as a fetter to productive capacity in a classless society. Bourgeois society has to a large extent denied satisfaction to the needs immanent within it, instead holding production fast in the grip of its spell through animadversion on needs. It was a society as practical as it was irrational. Classless society, which abolishes the irrationality with which production for profit is tangled up, and which satisfies needs, will by the same token abolish the practical spirit which still asserts itself in the faraway aims of bourgeois l'art pour l'art. This society sublates [aufhebt] not only the bourgeois antagonism
between production and consumption, but also their bourgeois unity. It is then no longer a disgrace for something to be useless. Conformity loses its meaning. Productivity now for the first time has an effect—in a real, not in a disfigured, sense—on need: not through the unfulfilled need letting itself be satisfied with useless things, but through the satisfied need being capable of acting in the world without making a mess of the world through universal usefulness. When classless society promises the end of art through sublation of the tension between what is real and what is possible, it also promises at the same time the beginning of art, i.e. the useless, experience of which tends toward reconciliation with nature because it no longer stands in the service of usefulness for the exploiters.