

mucous surfaces permanently exposed, so that special muscle contractions around the mouth did not have to be maintained throughout the prolonged kissing contacts, but this is not the whole story. The exposed, mucous lips, evolved a well-defined and characteristic shape. They did not grade off inconspicuously into the surrounding facial skin, but developed a fixed boundary line. In this way they also became important visual signalling devices. We have already seen that sexual arousal produces a swelling and reddening of the lips, and the clear demarcation of this area obviously assisted in the refinement of these signals, making

subtle changes in lip condition more easily recognisable. Also, of course, even in their un-aroused condition they are redder than the rest of the face skin and,

simply by their very existence, without indicating "changes in physiological condition, they will act as advertising signals, drawing attention to the presence of .a tactile sexual structure.

Puzzling over the significance of our unique mucous lips, anatomists have stated that their evolution 'is not as yet clearly understood' and have suggested that perhaps it has something to do with the increased amount

of sucking that is required of the infant at the breast.

But the young chimpanzee also does a great deal of very efficient sucking and its more muscular and prehensile lips would seem, if anything, to be better

equipped for the job. Also, this cannot explain the evolution of a sharp margin between the lips and the surrounding face. Nor can it explain the striking differences in the lips of light- and dark-skinned populations. If, on the other hand, the lips are regarded as visual signalling devices, these differences are easier to understand. If climatic conditions demand a darker skin, then this will work against the visual signalling capacity of the lips by reducing their colour contrast.

□ If they really are important as visual signals, then some kind of compensating development might be expected, and this is precisely what seems to have occurred, the negroid lips maintaining their conspicuousness by becoming larger and more protuberant. What they have lost in colour contrast, they have made up for in size and shape. Also, the margins of the negroid lips are