

As I said, socially adjusted individuals also exhibit these 'tics' from time to time. Usually they occur in stress situations and here, too, they act as comforters. We know all the signs. The executive awaiting a vital phone call taps or drums on his desk; the woman in the doctor's waiting-room, clasps and unclasps her fingers around her handbag; the embarrassed child swings its body left and right, left and right; the expectant father paces back and forth; the student in the exam sucks his pencil; the anxious officer strokes his moustache. In moderation these little anti-exploratory devices are useful. They help us to tolerate the anticipated 'novelty overdose'. If used to excess, however, there is always the danger that they will become irreversible and obsessive, and will persist even when not called for.

Stereotypes also crop up in situations of extreme boredom. This can be seen very dearly in zoo animals as well as in our own species. It can sometimes reach frightening proportions. What happens here is that the captive animals would make social contacts if only they had the chance, but they are physically prevented from doing so. The situation is basically the same as in cases of social withdrawal. The restricted environment of the zoo cage blocks their social contacts and forces them into a situation of social withdrawal. The cage-bars are a solid, physical equivalent of the psychological barriers facing the socially withdrawn individual. They constitute a powerful anti-exploratory device and, left with nothing to explore, the zoo animal begins to express itself in the only way possible, by developing rhythmic stereotypes. We are all familiar with the repetitive pacing to-and-fro of the caged animal, but this is only one of the many strange patterns that arise. Stylised masturbation may occur. Sometimes this no longer involves manipulation of the penis. The animal (usually a monkey) simply makes the back and forth masturbatory movements of its arm and hand, but without actually touching the penis. Some female monkeys repeatedly suck their own nipples. Young animals suck their paws. Chimpanzees may prod pieces of straw into their (previous healthy) ears. Elephants nod their heads for hours on end. Certain creatures 126