

CHAPTER 18

ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BOREDOM ¹

By *Otto Fenichel*

[Passage omitted.] ²

IT IS PROBABLE that the conditions and forms of behavior called "boredom" are psychologically quite heterogeneous. . . . Here we will attempt to characterize only a certain type.

Let us take our point of departure from Lipps's ^{3*} definition. . . . Boredom "is a feeling of displeasure due to a conflict between a need for intensive psychological activity and lack of stimulation or inability to be stimulated thereto." Let us add that, besides the need for, there is simultaneously an inhibition of, intensive psychological activity; the inhibition is experienced as such—one does not know *how* one should or could be active; and as a result of this conflict, stimulation by the outside world is sought. Let us add further that "the lack of stimulation" often does not correspond to an external reality; this is indicated in the addition of "inability to be stimulated." Boredom is characterized by the coexistence of a need for activity and activity-inhibition, as well as by stimulus-hunger and dissatisfaction with the available stimuli. Thus the central problem of the psychology of boredom is the *inhibition* of both the drive to activity and the readiness to accept the craved-for stimuli.⁴

1. Fenichel (179), also in "The Selected Papers of Otto Fenichel" (in press, Norton, 1951). The reasons for including this paper here are: (a) its consistent application of the psychoanalytic conception of the drive-thought relationship is unique in the psychoanalytic literature; (b) it is an unusually felicitous example of the investigative method combining clinical observation, clinical experiment, and theoretical inference, characteristic of psychoanalysis; (c) it touches also on the issue of time-experience, which is a

significant and very obscure area of the psychology of thinking.

2. In the omitted section Fenichel refers to the only previous psychoanalytic study of boredom, by Winterstein (774).

3.* Lipps (477).

4. The "pleasure-principle," the fundamental and most familiar explanatory concept of psychoanalysis for drive-processes, demands that existing drive-tensions be reduced by gratification. See Chap. 15, note 9, above. The re-

Phenomenologically, the psychological state of boredom is best described as "the displeasurable experience of a lack of impulse." This formula poses a problem which must first be solved: we assume that the tension-state of the psychic apparatus is heightened by internal and external stimuli, and that this increased tension elicits impulses, that is tendencies, aiming at reestablishing the tension-free state.⁵ Thus we ought to expect displeasurable drive-tensions and pleasurable drive-gratifications, that is to say, displeasurable impulses and pleasurable lack of impulses. The problem that pleasurable impulses nevertheless exist has often been discussed.^{6*} The corresponding problem of a displeasurable lack of impulses is that of boredom. But boredom, the definition shows, is not just a lack of impulses, but also a "need for intensive psychic activity"; "lack of impulses" and "freedom from tension" by no means coincide here. Rather, we are faced with the problem: why does this tension not result in impulses, why does it—instead of manifesting itself as drive-impulse—require a stimulation from the outside world to indicate what the person should do to decrease his tension?

Naturally, "stimulus hunger" that turns toward the outside world is also encountered outside the realm of boredom. It arises the moment the small child recognizes that stimuli arising in the outside world can be used for drive-gratification. Pleasurable stimuli, once experienced, give rise to a craving for

lation of "stimulus-hunger" to "pleasure-principle" is stated by Fenichel (176, p. 35) as follows:

The first acceptance of reality is only an intermediary step on the road to getting rid of it. This is the point at which a contradiction of basic importance in human life arises, the contradiction between longing for complete relaxation and longing for objects (stimulus-hunger). The striving for discharge and relaxation, the direct expression of the constancy principle, is necessarily the older mechanism. The fact that external objects brought about the desired state of relaxed satisfaction introduced the complication that objects became longed for; in the beginning, it is true, they were sought only as instruments which made themselves disappear again. The longing for objects thus began as a de-

tour on the way to the goal of being rid of objects (of stimuli).

Compare Lewin's (464) comment on boredom, Chap. 5, pp. 115-16, above. Translated into Lewin's terms, Fenichel's formulation would read as follows: In boredom counter-needs isolate the tension-systems of the drives from the motor sphere, and these counter-needs also embed them in such a manner that the objects which are their intended occasions are not experienced as such, that is, as objects having a valence for the drive-tension.

5. See note 4, above.

6.* See Freud [213, pp. 605-8, particularly the footnote on p. 607; and 244, p. 256. Cf. also 241].

them in states of drive-tension.⁷ These cravings are accompanied by a rejection of available objects and stimuli unsuited to bring about discharge, and when more suitable ones are unavailable they lead to introversion, fantasy-activity, and in final analysis to actual-neurotic phenomena due to a damming-up of libido.⁸ Can such a state of craving for adequate objects, and the displeasure at available inadequate ones, be called "boredom"? Correctly speaking it cannot; yet at times it is that. Of objects and stimuli which do not give us the "aid to discharge" we legitimately expect, we are accustomed to say that they "bore" us.⁹ We shall come back to this point. But the person who "is bored," in the strict sense of the word, is searching for an object, not in order to act on it with his drive-impulses, but rather to be helped by it to find a drive-aim which he is missing.¹⁰

The drive-tension is present, the drive-aim is missing. Boredom appears to be a state of drive-tension in which the drive-aims are repressed; yet the tension as such is experienced, and therefore one turns to the external world for help in the struggle against repression. The person who is bored can be therefore compared to one who has forgotten a name and inquires about it from others.

This formula, which is correct but not specific, makes the "inability to become stimulated" somewhat more comprehensible. When a bored person is looking for stimulation because he has lost his drive-aims to repression, it is understandable that, to stimulations which could bring about the desired discharge, he will offer the same resistance which resulted in the repression of the drive-aims; and that if the "stimulation" offered by the external world is too distantly related to the original drive-aim, there cannot occur displacement of the cathectic-energy onto the activity suggested by the stimulation.¹¹

7. See note 4, above.

8. The conception of actual neuroses originated early in the development of psychoanalysis, and though it still survives (176, pp. 185-88) it is something of a foreign body in the present-day structure of psychoanalytic and psychiatric theory. For the original statements of the conception see Freud (207, p. 240, and 203).

9. Compare Fenichel's phrase "legitimately expect" with Hartmann's conception of the individual's adaptation to

his "average expectable environment," Chap. 19, notes 37 and 72, below.

10. For the definition of drive-aim, drive-object, drive-impetus, see Freud (232, p. 65): "The *aim* of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by abolishing the condition of stimulation in the source of the instinct." Cf. also Chap. 27, notes 13, 21, and 89, below.

11. Here Fenichel implicitly states the psychoanalytic conception of the relation of thought to drive. It is the direct

He who wards off a drive-demand is in conflict; the Id wants drive-action, the Ego does not. The same conflict repeats itself in relation to the stimuli of the external world. The Id takes hold of them as "drive substitutes," while the Ego—even though it would discharge its tensions—does not wish to be reminded of the original drive-aim, and seeks therefore "diversion" or "distraction" of its energies which are fixated on the unconscious drive-goal. Thus if the original drive persists, one resists diversion and distraction; but one also resists substitutes too closely related to the original aim.¹²

We know of various conditions of high tension accompanying repressed drive-aims. We expect in such cases a condition which differs very considerably from boredom. Everybody knows the general "jitteriness," inner and/or motor restlessness, seen in such cases. Though this state of restlessness is very different from the manifest quiet of boredom, we recognize that the two conditions have an inner relationship. *The difference between states of boredom and motor restlessness is that in the former the cathexes are tonically bound, while in the latter their binding is clonic.* We are left with the question, what condi-

relation of these which Fenichel is concerned with here. Thus he can disregard the ego aspects of thought-organization which have been repeatedly discussed in this volume.

The conception may be sketched as follows: Stimuli and/or ideas are, from the point of view of the drive, representations of the drive-satisfying object. Their appearance serves as a signpost on the way toward tension-discharge, that is, gratification. These representations may be closely or distantly related to the drive-object. If the drive is repressed, the close representatives of the drive-objects are also repressed, and the stimulus even if objectively present is not experienced as a drive-representative; while the distant representatives of the drive-object, though not necessarily repressed, are not experienced as such either. For instance, if one represses a drive which is consciously experienced as a wish for suc-

cess in a profession, the major opportunities for success will be tabooed and shunned, and the everyday inconspicuous drudgeries which are prerequisite to any success will not be recognized as a means to the end, will offer no attraction, and yield no pleasure. This is the point at which interpersonal communication can attain catalytic role in drive-dynamics.

12. Substitute formation is one kind of drive-derivative or -representation. Cf. Freud (234, p. 123):

Substitute formations are . . . highly organized derivatives of the unconscious; . . . these succeed in breaking through into consciousness, thanks to some favorable relation, as, for example, when they coincide with a preconscious anticathexis.

See also Freud (234, pp. 116-17; and 233, pp. 92-93). Cf. Lewin (464) on substitute consummation (Chap. 5, II, 1, c4), above.

tions will give rise to such tonic cathexes and when do they take the typical form of boredom? Obviously tonic-forms of acute drive-tensions with repressed drive-aims have yet other alternative manifestations.¹³

13. The conception of "bound cathexes," though it is central to the cathectic theory of psychoanalysis, refers to one of the least understood psychoanalytic observations. The concept was advanced by Breuer (259, pp. 139 ff.) in 1895, and Freud retained it throughout the changes of his theoretical conceptions, stressing that the process to which it refers is still little understood. In 1915 Freud (234, pp. 120-21) stated the concept, and the observations it refers to, as follows:

The processes of the system [preconscious] display, no matter whether they are already conscious or only capable of becoming conscious, an inhibition of the tendency of cathected ideas towards discharge. When a process moves over from one idea to another, the first retains a part of its cathexis and only a small part undergoes displacement. Displacement and condensation after the mode of the primary process are excluded or very much restricted. This circumstance caused Breuer to assume the existence of two different stages of cathectic energy in mental life: one in which that energy is tonically "bound" and the other in which it moves freely and presses towards discharge. I think that this discrimination represents the deepest insight we have gained up to the present into the nature of nervous energy, and I do not see how we are to evade such a conclusion. A metapsychological presentation most urgently calls for further discussion at this point, though perhaps that would still be too daring an undertaking.

Cf. also Freud (209, pp. 533-34, 535-36; and 241, pp. 35-36, 41-42).

The drive cathexes of the id and the

primary thought-process are characterized as mobile, striving for discharge in keeping with the pleasure-principle; and the cathexes of the secondary thought-process are characterized as "bound," their discharge delayed in keeping with the reality-principle. The process of "binding" thus provides the crucial distinction between the id and the ego organization of thought-processes. For attempts to clarify the concept of "binding," see Hartmann (303), Rapaport (596), and Chap. 22, note 30, and Chap. 23, pp. 477-78, 485, particularly note 11, p. 478.

The usual concept (Breuer's) is that of tonic binding, modeled after the tonus of the muscle, independent of voluntary innervation. Tonic binding of cathexes transforms them into energies not striving toward discharge. Fenichel's "clonic binding" is to my knowledge a new term in the literature. As I understand it, the term expresses that while in the states of motor restlessness under discussion, the drive-cathexes are bound, their binding is such that it allows for some spasmodic discharge. The cathectic conditions of such motor restlessness may prove similar to those of affect-discharge and -expression. Cf. Chap. 15, note 26, and Chap. 17, note 8, above.

Fenichel's conceptualization here is in harmony with accumulating evidence that there is no categorical difference between mobile and bound cathexes, but rather a continuum of cathexes bound in various degrees. The process of binding also divests the cathexes of the hallmarks of their specific drive-origin: it neutral-

The question of whether these considerations are valid for all forms of boredom will be left open. They are certainly so for a certain pathological type of boredom which can be clinically investigated. . . .¹⁴

In such boredom, while subjectively the intensive conflictful excitation seems to have disappeared, there are signs to show it is actually there. In this respect, boredom is a variant or sub-division of "depersonalization," where the libido is usually by no means withdrawn from internal perception; rather, it is counter-cathexed, as the increased self-observation indicates.^{15*}

Boredom makes some children cry. Such crying and restlessness break the tonic binding of cathexes, and then what these children call boredom is hardly distinguishable from manifest restlessness and jitteriness. That children call it boredom shows the relatedness of these conditions. Thus, the meaning of this boredom may be schematically formulated as follows: "I am excited. If I allow this excitation to continue I shall get anxious. Therefore I tell myself, I am not at all excited, I don't want to do anything. Simultaneously, however, I feel I do want to do something; but I have forgotten my original goal and do

izes them. See Hartmann (303) concerning the various degrees of neutralization of energies.

14. In the omitted section Fenichel discusses the relation of monotony to boredom: (a) monotony, with its lack of new stimulation, usually leads to withdrawal of cathexes and ultimately to sleep; (b) however, rhythmic monotony (such as that of primitive dance) may lead to excitement; in the course of psychoanalytic treatment, rhythmic equilibrium-experiences are often traces of infantile sexual excitations; (c) monotony-excitations may become intensely displeasurable, for instance in persons who can tolerate only a degree of sexual excitement without anxiety, or under conditions which do not provide a climax; (d) boredom, excitation, anxiety, and interruption-displeasure are closely related, and seem to differ from each other only quantitatively.

15.* Cf. Fenichel (177).

[The relationship between the dynamic conditions underlying boredom and depersonalization links the problem of boredom in yet another significant way with the theory of thought-processes. In our comments we have attempted to point up consistently the relationship between states of consciousness and form of thought-organization. We have had the opportunity to discuss repeatedly the problem of awareness (Chap. 13, note 56, and Chap. 17, note 18. above). States of depersonalization are characterized by a lack of "me-ness" in experience (Chap. 3); in a sense they are the opposite of certain states of consciousness observed in Korsakow patients (Chap. 27, note 43, below) characterized by a proneness to endow suggested contents with "me-ness" and to attribute reality to them. Concerning depersonalization states, see also Schilder, 653; and Oberndorf, 545, 546, 547, 548.]

not know what I want to do. The external world must do something to relieve me of my tension without making me anxious. It must make me do something, but so that I shall not be responsible for it. It must divert me, distract me, so that what I do will be sufficiently remote from my original goal. It should accomplish the impossible, afford a discharge without drive-action." ¹⁶

This meaning of boredom became particularly clear in a patient whose analysis was dominated by intense transference-resistance. The resistance manifested itself either in continuous motor restlessness or in boredom. The analysis indicated that both conditions, apparently so different, were expressions of the same latent psychic situation. The patient called his motor restlessness "being angry." He was continually angry, at times in a rage with the doctor; but all he had against him was that he had not miraculously cured him overnight. His associations were completely inhibited, and he raged that the analyst did not change this by a magic word. This "being angry" was accompanied by phenomena seen in acute libido-disturbances: general restlessness and the torturing subjective feeling that the psychic situation was unbearable. The sexual life of the patient revealed the meaning of this behavior. He suffered from an acute libido disturbance: when with a woman, he entered the situation in normal fashion; he experienced normal pleasure until the excitation reached a certain degree; then—often before, and at times even after, the penis was inserted—came a sudden change. He experienced intense displeasure of a general sort, did not know what to do next and became "angry" with the woman because, he felt, she should do something to free him of this disagreeable situation. In matters other than sexual he also displayed a masochistic character, con-

16. Under usual conditions, too, there are repressed drives and drive-aims; yet the struggle of repression is apparently less intensive than in boredom. It leaves a great variety of stimuli which are neither so close to the drive-aim that they must be repressed, nor so far from it that they are of no "interest." It is within this range that the autonomous interest- and attention-cathexes of the ego determine the course of thought and action. Cf. Freud, Chaps. 15 and 17, above, and Hartmann, Chap. 19, below. The width and variety of this range of

sustained interests is therefore one of the gauges of ego-strength. In other words, the amount of energy which the person can dispose of by investing it in objects, by becoming interested in activities, even when essential drive-aims and drive-objects are in abeyance, is an indicator of ego-autonomy and ego-strength. These interests, and the organization of thinking which corresponds to them, constitute one of the major areas of the ego-psychology of thinking. Cf. Lewin, Chap. 5, pp. 138-39.

tinuously demonstrating his unhappiness, and being “angry” at those present because they were not overcome by sympathy and did not perform some miracle to liberate him. Analysis showed that this general, but in the sexual sphere exacerbated, excitation repeated the infantile situation of lying in bed with his mother. Having repressed his active phallic wishes towards his mother, he expected her to intervene and give him both guiltless sexual gratification and diversion from his sexual thoughts. Characteristically, this action which he expected from his mother, and later from everybody, was conceived of as an oral gratification.¹⁷ On certain days his masochistically-colored excitement was replaced by a state of “boredom.” Though he could not associate on these days either, his feeling was quite different. He experienced no intolerable tension; allegedly he experienced “nothing at all,” but continuously asserted that analysis and everything in it was so boring that he did not feel like saying anything, or even know what he should say, and would soon give up the analysis. The manner in which this state alternated with the one described above left no doubt that it was primarily a successful defense against the *expectation-excitement* with which the patient otherwise awaited the craved-for magic (oral) intervention of the analyst. I shall communicate here a small association experiment carried out on such a day to demonstrate that the—other times manifest—excitation was present, but in tonic binding. When the patient declared he was bored, he was asked to follow with particular conscientiousness the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis, and to be sure not to suppress any idea as “too boring.”¹⁸ The patient began by relating that he was

17. Concerning the relationships of masochism, orality, and passivity, see for instance Bergler's (45) one-sided, yet challenging, presentation.

18. For the “fundamental rule,” see Chap. 12, note 51, above. It appears that the patient's inability to associate usually kept him from following the “fundamental rule.” What in this case appears as an isolated experiment is the usual procedure of psychoanalysis, which may be therefore viewed as a continuous series of such clinical experiments. The general theory of psychoanalysis provides the theoretical framework, the pa-

tient's general situation and the theory together provide the assumptions to be tested, and the concrete momentary situation provides the experimental conditions. It is true that, in the clinical-therapeutic setting, the assumptions and concrete situation are rarely discerned as sharply as in the example Fenichel presents here. But they are more often so discerned and discernible than the non-clinical experimenter would suppose. Such opportunities for clinical experimentation could be exploited more systematically. The reason they are not is that the therapeutic interest and setting

looking into the corner of the room and thinking, What if a cobweb were there? One could take a broom and brush *up and down* the wall, *always up and down*. Besides, he had a toothache; he had come directly from the dentist, who had run his drill *up and down* his teeth. His attention was called to the fact that the dimensions of sensations in the mouth are often misrecognized; therefore the idea of brushing off the wall showed that psychologically he was still at the dentist's, not at the analyst's, and that in his fantasy the analyst was doing something exciting in his mouth. "Now only nonsense comes to my mind," the patient continued; "I could say any random word, for instance, 'light switch' or 'chamber pot.'" "Light switch" and "chamber pot" are means by which adults attempt to quiet an anxious child at night. Thus the patient's state could be interpreted as follows: "I have anxiety, do something quieting (or disquieting) in my mouth!" The boredom which the patient experienced denied his excitation in the same fashion that depersonalization would have. . . .¹⁹

We cannot deny that all this does not solve the question we have raised: what makes "tonic binding" possible, and how is the tonic binding of "boredom" distinguished from that of other states? When does motor restlessness arise, and when a feeling of lack of impulses with a craving for diversion?

We cannot offer a final answer to this question. One thing must be kept in mind: tonic binding, hence also boredom, fends off *more* than motor restlessness does—it fends off the motor impulses themselves.²⁰ But this again is no

is not conducive to experimental thinking, rather than that the principal difficulties are too great. We discuss this method here because it seems that many problems of thought-organization will have to be studied first—if not altogether—in their natural setting rather than in laboratory experiment.

19. The omitted section deals with the nature of those drives whose goal is passive.

20. Restless motor-activity may be regarded as affect-expression. The question Fenichel raises pertains therefore to the theory of affects. In psychoanalytic theory, affect-charge and idea—the matrix from which affect-expression and

thought arise in the course of ego development—are considered partly indicators and partly safety valves of drive-tension. Compare Chap. 15, note 26, and Chap. 17, note 8, above, also Brierley (92), and Rapaport (596). The problem of the process whereby cathexes become bound is closely connected with the control of drive-tension, and therefore also with the indicators of drive-tension, that is, affect-charge and idea. Affect and thought develop only after the development of the control of drive-discharge has begun. To what extent and under what conditions affect-expression (for example, restlessness) and thought-organization (for example, bored lack of

answer in principle, because, on the one hand, there are states of dammed-up libido, of complete motor calm, which cannot be characterized as boredom; and on the other hand, there are states of boredom accompanied by all kinds of restless activity. "Blasé" people are noted for more or less nonsensical activities due to "boredom." . . . This is a variant of boredom in which the bored ego does not wait for the stimuli of the external world, but thinks up its own "substitute actions" to release the tension, that is, to replace drive-action, to "divert" itself from it, and to deny it. The paralysis of the motor system is thus neither the sole nor the essential characteristic of boredom. It may be absent in boredom, and at any rate something must be added to it, namely, that mechanism which we consider related to depersonalization, whereby a person can manage completely to conceal from himself the presence of extremely high inner tension.²¹ It is well known that people endowed with fantasy are rarely bored, and those given to boredom produce no daydreams, because of inability or inhibition. (The patient I quoted had no fantasy life at all.) Apparently, rich fantasy makes for a certain amount of unburdening in daydreams, whereas its lack requires a massive counter-cathexis to block internal perceptions.²²

Is the internal perception of one's own excitation lacking, in such a state? We mentioned the outbursts of crying in boredom, and had to add that we cannot consider it characteristic. Apparently the transition from "jitteriness" to boredom is fluid; but extreme cases are characterized by feeling a certain degree of lack of excitation, which is what they call "being bored."

[Passage omitted.]²³

The relationship between boredom and lonesomeness is now easily under-

thoughts) complement or supplant each other, is as yet an unsolved problem of the theory of affects and thinking.

21. Fenichel seems to imply that the defense-mechanism of isolation, which appears to be the one involved here, is sufficient to account for these phenomena.

22. Concerning the role of fantasy in defense-processes, see Anna Freud (201). Cf. also Chap. 22, note 30, below.

23. The omitted section may be summarized as follows: (a) Fenichel raises

the question of whether any specific drives can be found, the repression of which leads to boredom. He concludes that drives whose goals are passive are not specific to it. (b) He stresses the relationship of boredom to mood-swings, and particularly to depressions coupled with such means of diversion as addictions or *Wanderlust*. He concludes, however, that narcissistic and oral-sadistic needs central to these disorders are not the only ones which when dammed up can lead to boredom.

stood. If the situation of a bored person is correctly described as a state of drive-tension which is not conscious to him, but represents dangers, to cope with which he expects help from external stimuli, then it is clear that the etiological conditions of boredom and lonesomeness must be identical. Their relationship to masturbation, like that of neurotics with an anxiety of being closeted, is of two kinds: the bored person, like the lonesome one, may fear actually the temptation to masturbate and combat it by becoming conscious of a craving for diversion rather than of masturbatory impulses; or else in an attempt to escape burdensome drive-tension, the aim of which is completely unconscious to him, he may resort to repeated acts of masturbation. There are many threads connecting boredom and compulsive masturbation.^{24*}

Let us recall in this connection Ferenczi's "Sunday neuroses."^{25*} There are Sunday neurotics whose symptom is merely that on Sundays, or during vacations, they *are bored*. While at work, these people succeed in what the bored person strives for in vain, namely "to divert themselves" while in a state of pent-up drives. When the diversion is unavailable, the tension is noted and the hitherto latent "boredom" becomes manifest. As a rule, memories of the Sundays of childhood play a role here; the damming-up of drives was artificially increased then, the great drive-hunger of children being particularly prevented from drive-manifestations.

Now that we have sketched the mechanisms of a pathological form of boredom, the question is: are these the essential mechanisms of all boredom? How does a differently structured "normal" boredom look? It arises when we must not do what we want to do, or must do what we do not want to do. This "harmless" boredom appears at first to be entirely different from that so far described, but the common features of the two are easily recognized: *something expected does not occur*. Here it fails to occur because the structure of the real situation does not allow the expected discharge; there it fails to occur because one represses the drive-action to prevent anxiety. (Similarly, in a state of ungratifiable tiredness, the sleep-hindering external world is experienced as boring.) It is difficult to predict, however, when a frustrating external world will mobilize aggressions and when it will be merely experienced as "boring." One should not forget that we have *the right to expect* some "aid in discharge" from

24.* See Fenichel (175 pp. 290-91, 301-3). 25.* See Ferenczi (185).

the external world. If this is not forthcoming, we are, so to speak, justifiably bored.²⁶ To characterize this situation, Winterstein^{27*} quotes Field Marshal Ligne: "I am not bored,^{28*} it is the others who bore me." This is why an "affect-inhibited" person, one equipped with strong characterologically-anchored counter-cathexes—as for instance a particularly correct or otherwise rigid person—is so boring. His emotional aloofness does not correspond to people's drive-expectations of each other. Often such people are anxious lest they prove boring, and we must say that their anxiety is well-founded. Analysis of this anxiety shows that this quality of boring people, so feared by the patient himself, may harbor a great deal of sadism.

One other aspect of boredom, which clearly bears upon its nature, is its relationship to *time*. The German word "Langeweile" itself . . . indicates a change in subjective time-experience.²⁹ When we experience many stimulations from the outside world, the time—as we know—appears to pass quickly. Should the external world bring only monotonous stimuli, or should subjective conditions prevent their being experienced as tension-releasing, then the "while is long." This basic propensity of subjective time-experience, which gave the phenomenon of "Langeweile" its name, seems to be but a secondary consequence of the mechanisms described. However, the possibility cannot be rejected that a primary disturbance of the subjective time-experience facilitates the emergence and play of these mechanisms. Precisely this is the case with people who have sexualized their time-experience, a particularly frequent occurrence in certain types of anal character.^{30*} In this light we can agree with Winterstein's^{31*} description of certain anal characters as particularly disposed to boredom, and his relating the phenomenon of boredom in general to that of "stinting with time."³²

26. Cf. note 9 above.

27.* Winterstein (774).

28. The German for "to bore" is a reflexive verb.

29. *Langeweile*, German for "boredom," literally means "longwhile."

30.* Cf. Harnik (300).

31.* Winterstein (774).

32. For other psychoanalytic considerations concerning time, see Spielrein (700), Hollos (335), Ferenczi and

Hollos (187), Bonaparte (81), Schilder (651), Dooley (148).

The issue of time-experience seems connected by many threads with those observations to which the concept of "delay" refers. For the concept of "delay," see Freud, Chap. 15, particularly note 29, above. Poor tolerance for "waiting" (and exaggerated punctuality) attended by mounting tension, exaggerated adolescent impatience to grow up

The rest of Winterstein's remarks on the disposition to boredom is also in agreement with our considerations. He writes: "Two types may be distinguished here: the blasé, who becomes callous through overstimulation, who craves for pleasure but is unable to enjoy it (such boredom may have a physiological foundation); and the one who escapes painful boredom by working, because he finds everything boring which is not fulfilment of a duty." These two types appear to us essentially as two variants of a chronic damming-up of libido, taking the form of tension with the drive-goal repressed. The first type is orgasmically impotent, "craving" because unable to enjoy pleasure. (We do not believe that his "callousness" is due to "overstimulation." We would rather assume that the psychogenic damming-up of libido is the cause of both his craving after stimuli and his becoming callous.) The second is the "Sunday neurotic" mentioned above. We believe that in both cases boredom has a physiological foundation, namely that of the damming-up of libido.³³

(with the later experience of never having grown up), fantasies implying a short life-span, impatient urge to complete some work, overintense wishes for a pleasant situation never to end, are significant time-experiences of great individual variability. A preliminary collation of data concerning such experiences, with life-histories of the subjects collected by Dr. Alfred Gross and myself, suggests a relation between "ability to

delay"—that is, quality of "drive control"—and time-experiences of this sort, including boredom.

33. It seems that libido is used here in the broadest sense as "drive-energy" in general.

Since the delay of drive-discharge is the cradle of thought (Chap. 15, note 29, above), time-experiences, normal and pathological, are significant subject-matter for the psychology of thinking.