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Awake, asleep, adult, child: An a-humanist account of persons

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Abstract

Sleeping persons do not seem to be agents, to express identity or to give voice. On one view this means that social research on sleep would do best to focus on the social context of sleep rather than sleep 'itself'. If the only analytic vocabulary at our disposal consists of abstractions that assume the existence of self-conscious, self-present individuals, this conclusion is probably correct. This paper, however, builds on the work of some contemporary childhood researchers to offer an account of the 'person' as an emergent property of distributed interactions between heterogeneous elements. The account is built through a discussion of 'transitional objects' and 'affects'. It is argued that this version of the 'person' could help social research to make sense of both sides of the awake/asleep threshold. The potential contribution of this approach to the emerging bio-politics (Rose 2007) of childhood and states of un/consciousness is discussed.

Introduction

Considered as a focus for social research, the emerging topic of 'sleep' poses certain difficulties (Williams, 2005; Williams, 2007). Schutz and Luckmann's views (1974) notwithstanding, sleep is various, differentiated by its own cycles and intermittencies (Horne, 2006). Even so, experientially and conceptually there is a clear threshold between wakefulness and sleep. Once this threshold is crossed, some of the abstract analytic terms which social scientists routinely apply to persons lose their pertinence (Williams, 2005). It seems reasonable, for example, to doubt that a sleeping person could qualify as an 'agent'. Similarly, the sleeping body gives little sign of being actively concerned with matters of personal 'identity'. Naturally, a sleeper's bed, posture and clothing can be read as indications of active, constructive engagement with the social world, but they read clearest as traces of past, waking agency and of past, waking engagement. Likewise, a heavy sleeper may present an effective 'anti-program' in the manner of Latour's heavy hotel key fob (1992), but this is a relatively thin version of agency that, for good reasons of its own, has little place for persons.

What, then, can a social researcher say about sleep? It seems that as social researchers approach the topic of sleep they are presented with at least two opportunities. There is the opportunity to stick to familiar terms of sociological account-making and make the most of them within the existing boundaries of their productive application. This would imply treating the awake/asleep threshold as a proper limit of social scientific discussion. Williams (2005) has argued persuasively for such a limit and has envisaged a rich and viable programme of research into social contexts of sleep that largely leaves 'sleep itself', in all its variety and intermittency, to the biological sciences. On the other hand, if routine analytic terms cannot be applied, there is an opportunity to re-think terms of analysis and to develop a vocabulary which can be

used either side of the awake/asleep threshold. I would suggest that both of these responses to sleep have potential and that there is no compelling reason to see them as mutually exclusive.

Over the last two decades, comparable questions of how to respond to a threshold have been met by social researchers of childhood. Until relatively recently, the empirically questionable idea that there is a clear child/adult threshold has been able to standardise life-courses and to shape research establishment without effective challenge. Educational institutions and practices, for example, have long modelled the young primarily as ‘pupils’, constitutionally in need of guidance and shaping (Austin et al, 2003). As Qvortrup (1994) has it, minority world life-courses are shaped by a taken for granted contrast between human becomings, who should be instructed and spoken for, and human beings, who can speak for themselves and who deserve to be heard. This division in practice has been paralleled by a division of academic labour between developmental psychologists, qualified to study and to decide upon childhood’s variety and peculiarity, and sociologists of family and education who could restrict themselves with confidence to discussing the plans, successes and failures of the ‘ordinary’, adult persons who surround children and attempt to guide and to shape them. In a strikingly bi-univocal pattern (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), Sociology has, historically, been comfortable to study ‘beings’, understood as full members of the social world, while Developmental Psychology has studied the ‘becomings’ each of which is understood to have at least a toe in raw, unprocessed nature.

In recent years, however, a ‘new paradigm’ of childhood studies (James and Prout, 1997) has emerged. It challenges the being/becoming distinction and its consequences in at least two quite distinct ways. One strategy refuses the being/becoming distinction by abolishing the category ‘human becomings’ from its terms of reference. It builds on the view that key terms such as ‘voice’ (Alderson, 2000) and ‘agent’ (James et al, 1998) can be applied to children as well as to adults because this single lexicon of abstractions fits all human beings well. The ethico-political aim of this strategy is to provide grounds for greater recognition of children’s agency and points of view in societies’ decision making processes. This strategy tends to imagine children’s ‘voice’ and ‘agency’ as essences (Fuss, 1990) expressions of which are typically overlooked by the adult world. It aims to correct these oversights. It draws much of its appeal from the contemporary web of associations between voice, recognition and democracy that currently conditions political debate (Cameron, 2000).

A second strategy is equally concerned with the greater recognition of children (Komulainen, 2005, 2007; Lee, 2001, 2005; Motzkau, 2005, 2006; Prout, 2004). However, it refuses the being/becoming distinction on different grounds. It builds on a sceptical approach to the notion of adulthood as a state of completed ‘human being’. This approach treats the abstractions that are often taken to ground ‘human being’, such as ‘voice’ and ‘agency’, as sources of questions rather than of answers. This approach could be described as ‘a-humanist’. On this view, for children as for adults, ‘voice’ and ‘agency’ are not essences awaiting discovery, but are instead emergent properties of processes of construction. If and when there is ‘voice’ or ‘agency’, it should, in principle, be possible to account for their emergence or, at least, to recognise and account for differences in the way they are performed. Such accounts

have the potential to help to build 'recognition' and opportunities for children to have 'voice'. Komulainen (2005; 2007) exemplifies this approach in her empirical work on the negotiated production of 'voice' in the case of young children with communication difficulties, as does Motzkau's (2005; 2006) comparative study of the construction of child witnesses' 'voice' in German and English judicial systems. Crucially for the present discussion as this strategy has developed it has drawn on an increasingly heterogeneous list of significant elements of construction. Familiar terms of the social scientific lexicon, are present, but so are 'actor network', 'assemblage' (Lee, 2001, 2005; Prout, 2004) and 'hybridity' (Prout, 2004). This non-humanist strategy is no longer a *social* constructionism but is a *generalised* constructionism (Lee and Hassard, 1999) that discusses childhood as an emergent property of interactions between persons, discourses, technologies, objects, bodies etc. Some researchers in childhood studies, then, are currently developing analytic vocabularies to cover both childhood and adulthood despite the experiential and conceptual thresholds that separate them.

In this article I aim further to develop the a-humanist analytic vocabularies that are already being used to cross conceptual thresholds in childhood studies. I will treat the coincidence of the two troublesome topics 'sleep' and 'childhood' as an opportunity to stretch and test these new vocabularies. There are two tests. First, although the analytic vocabulary I will be using is a-humanist, its purpose is not to dismiss 'human' effects like 'voice', 'agency' and 'personhood' as illusory but to gain greater understanding of the conditions of their emergence and performance. Given this, to pass the first test, the a-humanist strategy presented here must be able to accommodate questions of personhood and of the value attached to persons by others. Second, I have suggested that, by virtue of its generalised constructionism, an a-humanist analytic vocabulary should remain pertinent on both sides of conceptual thresholds such as those between awake/asleep and childhood/adulthood. Given this, to pass the test, the non-humanist strategy must be able, in some fashion, to address 'sleep itself'.

The main product of this exploration will be a view of the 'person' as an emergent property of certain open-ended interactions between a hybrid assortment of elements. I will describe an instance of 'becoming-person' (Lee, 2005) taking care to describe elements and their interactions in detail. I will suggest that this concept of the 'person' may be of value when considering children and sleep because it has the ability to remain pertinent on both sides of the awake/asleep and the childhood/adulthood divisions. Most of the conceptual work that follows concentrates on two key terms; 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1971) and 'affect' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). The first term will tie the discussion to issues of personhood and value, the second to the possibility of making sense on both sides of the existing conceptual and experiential sleep/wake threshold. Clearly these key terms come from different traditions of thought, each with their own response to personhood, so I will spend some time drawing these traditions together. First, however I need to introduce a child and an episode of sleep.

After the sleep-over

Six year old Pas slept over at her friend Jenny's house on Friday night. She visited the cinema with Jenny and her mum Carleen on Saturday morning, and spent the rest

of Saturday afternoon playing. Pas has around twenty soft toys, many of which share her bed at home. When her mum Liz had taken her to Jenny's after school on Friday, Pas had chosen just one toy to take with her. Betty is a soft, brown toy monkey about 20 cm in length and is Pas' favourite. Liz had picked Pas up from school and taken her straight to Jenny's, bringing a pre-packed overnight bag containing, amongst other things, Betty.

It is now 5.00 pm on Saturday, time for Pas to come home to eat and to get ready to go to bed around 7.00 pm. For various reasons, Pas cannot walk back on her own. Carleen has no car and also has to look after Dennis, her baby son. Liz is busy cooking and has had a couple of glasses of wine. Nick, a grown-up, is Liz's friend and has helped look after Pas since she was a baby. He is due to visit Liz's house about 6pm to see Pas and, later on, to eat. Liz phones Nick and asks him to collect Pas from Jenny's.

Nick drives to Jenny's and is met at the door by Carleen who asks him in and offers him a cup of tea, which he accepts. Pas and Jenny are still playing, but come downstairs and start to show Nick the cardboard boxes they have decorated. Over the course of about 30 minutes, play is reported, continued and adapted, snails are inspected, Nick and Carleen discuss the housing market and, gradually, it becomes clear that it is time for Nick and Pas to leave.

Nick, Pas and Carleen gather Pas's coat and overnight bag, checking that nothing has been left behind, then Nick and Pas leave and drive back to Pas's house. When they reach Pas' house, Nick notices that Betty is not in Pas's overnight bag. Nick concludes that Betty must still be at Jenny's. He tells Pas and Liz that he thinks Betty has been left behind and that he will go and collect her straight away. He goes straight back to his car to drive back to Jenny's. When he arrives and knocks on the door, Carleen opens the door with Betty in her hand. Nick collects Betty and takes her back to Pas.

Commentary

Later on I will unfold the implications of the episode above for the concepts of 'transitional object' and 'affect'. For the moment, however, I want to highlight a number of features of the events reported.

Firstly, even though Pas has many soft toys, Nick immediately returned to Jenny's once he noticed Betty's absence. This was not the only course of action open to him. He could have ignored Betty's absence and delayed the issue, perhaps till after he had had a glass of wine, rendering him unfit to drive. He could have ignored Betty's absence till Pas' bedtime, making it impossible for him to return to collect Betty 'in time' for bed. He could have pointed Pas to some of her other soft toys and encouraged her to think of them as temporary replacements for Betty. He could have promised that he or Liz would collect Betty the following day. Above all, he could have responded to Betty's absence by first testing Pas' response to Betty's absence. He could have asked Pas whether she was likely to need Betty that evening. He could have asked her to choose whether he should stay with her and play or return to Jenny's. Given this range of alternatives, why did Nick go back for Betty at all? Further, why did he decide to go back without first finding out Pas' preferences?

It may already be clear that one factor to be borne in mind in understanding the episode is that Betty is Pas' 'favourite' soft toy. This raises the possibility that Nick has guessed that most of the alternative responses above will strike Pas as sub-optimal. He does not consult her because he can already guess the answer. But, how did Betty get to be Pas' favourite in the first place? What is it for a soft toy to be thus favoured? Further, how did both Nick and Carleen independently come to the conclusion that Nick would return soon to collect Betty? I will return to these issues once I have outlined the concepts of 'transitional object' and 'affect'.

Winnicott, childhood and well-being

The psychotherapist and author D.W. Winnicott (1971; 1986) provides conceptual resources of great value to anyone concerned with the questions of favouriteness and care that I raised above. He developed these resources when considering states of psychological well-being and illness which, like many of his contemporaries, he saw as rooted in and developing from early childhood experience. Like other therapists of the UK based object-relations school (Gomez, 1997) he imagined psychological health and illness as the results of the various solutions available to infants and young children to manage tensions between the 'inner' life of the mind and the 'outer' world of reality. For Winnicott (1971), there are two main ways to become psychologically ill. One path begins when the claims of 'reality' in the form of socially prescribed roles, attitudes and expectations drown out the young individual's own desires and imaginings. Under these circumstances, the child assembles a socially compliant 'false self' to do her living for her and, as she grows, comes to experience life as meaningless. The second path begins when the claims of the 'inner world' in the form of desires and imaginings prevent the child from testing them against 'reality' in the form of socially prescribed roles, attitudes and expectations. Under these circumstances the child ages without building a stable 'self' and becomes, in Winnicott's term 'psychotic' (1984: 104). Both developmental pathways to illness involve a failure to allow for and to manage a productive tension between 'inner' and 'outer' worlds.

So far it is clear that Winnicott (1971) began his account of psychological development with some very firm ontological commitments:

- there is an inner realm composed of desire and imagination
- there is an outer realm composed of shared expectations
- these two realms are frequently in tension with one another
- the two realms are related by an inner/outer threshold.

We may, with some versions of critical psychology (Gergen, 2000) or some versions of cross-cultural anthropology (Geertz, 2001), seek to question this ontology even as we acknowledge that it may have a good deal of experiential resonance and that it is consistent with accounts of personhood that have long been key to minority world cultures (Lee, 2005; Taylor, 1992). As I develop Winnicott's ideas however, it should become clear that he has more to offer than a binary account. For Winnicott, 'inner/outer' plays the role of a dualistic puzzle that must be solved in some way if we are to secure health and well-being. For him, psychological well-being is a matter of maintaining communication across the inner/outer threshold. Such communication is

impossible without ‘play’, and ‘play’ always involves ‘transitional phenomena’ (Winnicott, 1971) that belong both to the inner and to the outer realm.

As I illustrate ‘transitional phenomena’ over the following sections, I will argue that these phenomena do not grow from any one individual’s agency or intentions but instead have their origins in a distributed interactions between plural elements. To build this case I will now examine transitional phenomena in more detail. This examination will pave the way for the introduction of ‘affect’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

What is a transitional object?

As I have suggested so far, Winnicott proposes that internal and external realms exist, that they are frequently in tension with one another and that the management of this tension is vital for well-being. For Winnicott, however, ‘inner’, ‘outer’ and the threshold between them do not exhaust human experience. He draws our attention to, ‘...the third part of the life of a human being...an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute.’ (Winnicott, 1971:2). This ‘third part’ is the realm of transitional phenomena. Transitional phenomena build a path to psychological well-being by allowing ‘play’ between the otherwise static and opposed inner and outer realms. Transitional phenomena reply ‘both/and’ to a dualistic ontology’s ‘either/or’. They provide the alternative to being ‘psychotic’ or living through a ‘false self’. Though transitional phenomena are to be found throughout culture (Winnicott, 1971), Winnicott’s key example of a transitional object is a baby’s favourite object, usually a cloth or a soft toy, that is frequently to be found ‘...complicating an auto-erotic experience such as thumb-sucking...’ (Winnicott, 1971:3).

According to Winnicott, babies’ and young children’s relationships with their favourite object have a number of special qualities. The object ‘...must never change, unless changed by the infant...’ (Winnicott, 1971:5). If it is taken away, the baby may become distressed. If an older child knows that it has been taken away to be washed they may become angry. As Winnicott writes of the transitional object, ‘...parents get to know its value...the mother lets it get dirty and even smelly, knowing that by washing it she introduces a break in the continuity of the infant’s experience...’ (1971:4). Further, the baby’s relationship with the object is emotionally charged, sometimes with love and sometimes with hate. It is ‘...affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated...It must survive instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression’ (1971:5). Finally, baby and carers will all act as if the object belongs to the baby in ways that distinguish it from other objects. The baby ‘...assumes rights over the object, and we agree to this assumption...’ (1971:5). This means that the baby is likely to complain if the object is taken away from them and that carers comply by respecting what seems to be the baby’s claim of ownership. For Winnicott, each one of these special qualities adds to the transitional object’s ability to cross the threshold between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, thus to its ability to act as resource to manage the ‘inner/outer’ relationship so as to build the baby’s path toward psychological health and well-being.

How do these qualities make the object ‘transitional’? Let me address the contributions that each quality makes in turn. Why might the object’s smelliness

matter? If the object has a smell of its own then it can be seen by the baby as having a life or 'vitality' (Winnicott, 1971:4) of its own. This means that, being no mere psychological projection on the part of the baby, it clearly belongs to the 'outer' realm. Yet the object acquired its smell while it was being used by the baby. So the smell also marks the object out as, partly, a creation of the baby, and thus as belonging to its own 'inner' desires and imaginings. The smelly object connects and communicates between 'inner' and 'outer' realms because it is both part of the 'inner' and part of the 'outer' at the same time. Turning to the baby's emotional relationship with the object, a similar threshold-crossing can be discerned. When the baby reaches for the object for comfort, the object brings that comfort from the outside. Yet, it can also be treated as nothing more than a passive screen for the externalisation of the baby's emotional states.

The final quality of the transitional object is that carers and children are somehow complicit in its production and maintenance. Winnicott suggests that carers will often treat a baby's protest at the removal of the object as a claim of possession. Unless they do this, the transitional powers of the object will be degraded since any object that can simply be removed by an 'outer' power will swiftly lose any trace of being also 'inner'. In other words, the production and maintenance of the transitional object requires that babies' and carers' treatment of it be coordinated. Winnicott provides two quite different accounts of how this coordination comes about. One account of coordination depicts crisply defined agents with clear identities reaching agreement through discussion. Another appeals to carers' intuition.

Child-Carer Coordination: Prior agreement and intuition

Here is one of Winnicott's accounts of child-carer coordination in the production and maintenance of a transitional object:

'Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?' The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated.'

(Winnicott, 1971:12)

The point he is making here is clear, in the sense of being consistent with his conception of transitional phenomena. If the transitional object is to do its work of crossing, playing across and thus managing the inner/outer threshold, the question of whether it really belongs to the inner or to the outer must be suspended. To ask that question would be to reinstate the threshold and to stop play. This account of coordination as a 'matter of agreement', however, calls an odd scenario to mind:

Two adults and a baby hold a meeting. For the duration of the meeting, the fact that the baby has limited linguistic fluency and would not normally be recognised as a competent negotiating partner must, somehow, be suspended. The only item on the agenda is whether adults and baby can agree never to raise a certain question. Proper deliberation would require that the question be tabled and examined. Since this is the question that must never be formulated, the fact that it is being formulated must, somehow, be suspended for the duration of the meeting and subsequently

expunged from memory. The result of the meeting is an agreement between a baby, who is in no position to make an agreement, and two adults that none of them will ever formulate, and indeed have never formulated, the question that has just been formulated and examined.

Taken literally, the ‘matter of agreement’ is nonsense. Here, nonsense is the result of the application of abstractions such as ‘agent’, ‘intention’ and ‘voice’ to circumstances and events that cannot support their weight.

Winnicott’s other account of coordination sees carers’ actions as led by their intuition rather than by prior agreement with the baby. At many points in Winnicott’s work it seems as if carers are led by their intuition. Much of his writing aimed at encouraging trust in that intuition. Observing that a lot of what mothers do with infants is ‘holding’, he writes; ‘...actual holding (is) very important, and a delicate matter that can only be delicately done by the right people...’ (Winnicott 1986: 107). Similarly in his concept of the ‘good enough’ mother (Winnicott 1986: 63), he deployed a strategically vague appreciation of maternal intuition as a bulwark against excessive professionalisation of child-care.

When the mother intuitively coordinates by ‘knowing’ not to wash the favoured cloth, or, perhaps, ‘knowing’ that it should be washed overnight while the child is asleep, Winnicott imagines her as the possessor of an intuition that derives from her relationship with this particular baby. She does not reason from general principles of good childcare, but knows what activities make sense in relation to the transitional object. The cloth can be taken away and washed because it is not part of the baby. Equally the cloth cannot unceremoniously be snatched away from the child because it is part of the baby. Somewhere in the particularities of this carer-child-cloth relation the sense that the baby has ‘parts’ beyond her body is available, along with an awareness that what affects the cloth or any of those other ‘parts’ can affect the child.

Two quite different facets of Winnicott’s thought shine through these two accounts of coordination. On the one hand, a writer with a lively appreciation of paradox who is content to express himself through nonsense and who has the skill to do so effectively. On the other, a deliberately vague, rather maternalist developmentalism that teeters on the brink of mystification even as it defends mothers’ autonomy from professional expertise.

At this stage in the present argument it would be quite legitimate for a reader to declare that they do not find it credible that babies and their carers are somehow drawn together into a compact around babies’ comfort, security and well-being that shows itself in the favouriteness of an object. But for any who, like me, have so far been happy to be guided by Winnicott, a new question may emerge. Winnicott has presented us with two accounts of the formation of that compact. One tries to fit babies, carers, sleep and love into the shapes provided by the abstractions shared by much social science where, crudely stated, every person must either be a conscious, voice-owning agent or be ignored. The result of this is nonsense. Another makes a great deal of carers’ intuition but does not promise much in the way of elaboration, greater detail or understanding. So how can we discuss the events ‘after the sleep over’ which draw a child, some carers, sleep and comfort together? What language is there for favouriteness, comfort and intuition between child and carers?

How do you make a person?

‘AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’affection* (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body...’

(Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: xvi)

One reason that abstractions of voice, agency, identity and even the model of deliberate action implied by the term ‘conscious’, generate nonsense in the area under consideration is that though babies may communicate and do things, at their early age their character as ‘persons’ has only just begun to be substantiated. Though even the youngest baby will often be called and considered a person, the number of situations in which their personhood finds material expression are, as yet, relatively few. For many adults their personhood is constantly substantiated in the many mundane circumstances in which they both are their body and not just their body and in which they are part of other persons, but also distinct from them. Social scientific abstractions seem useful and accurate when applied to such individuals whose status as persons is confirmed and stabilised by a broad and reliable network of relationships with other humans and non-humans, but they generate nonsense when applied outside those conditions. This is the nub of the problem for the routine analytic terms of social science when crossing thresholds into childhood and into sleep.

Fortunately, analytic terms that can make sense in these areas are available. Since the terms ‘affect’ and ‘affection’ are themselves ‘pre-personal’, they can be used to describe how a person is made. In this section I will discuss the role of transitional phenomena in making a person using these pre-personal terms. This discussion should not only exemplify the use of a a-humanist analytic vocabulary, but should also begin to make the term ‘intuition’ less of a mystification and to address the questions I raised above about what Nick and Carleen did with Betty the toy monkey.

Winnicott’s transitional object is the baby’s first possession. It is marked as his possession by the smells and marks left upon it and, as we have seen, by a coordinated recognition of those smells and marks as significant. The transitional object is special and favourite because it is at once, by virtue of those smells and marks, part of the baby, and, being a separate thing, not part of the baby. When carers respect its special status, they allow that the baby may be more than just his body. The transitional object and the coordination, conflicts and compromises that surround it allow the baby to enter social life as a person; something more than body that may, first, possess a thing and, second, possess himself.

The transitional object and its involvement in a baby’s ‘becoming-person’ (Lee, 2005: 148) present a good opportunity to illustrate the use of the a-humanist, pre-personal concept of ‘affect’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). I will consider how the relatively

simple collection of interacting materials including baby, carer and transitional object becomes coordinated. It will become clear that, on my account, this coordination is driven by no single will or agency and yet gives rise to a localised transformation in value - the baby's becoming-person.

First, the baby encounters an object. It may have a soft texture that gives her sensual pleasure. This is a meeting of two affects; the baby's ability to sense softness and the softness of the object. Next, the carer notices this relationship and takes the opportunity it offers to occupy the baby and to minimize the baby's complaints when the carer is not holding or touching the baby. This converts the baby's sensual pleasure into 'comfort' by adding an affect of constancy to the softness that is already affecting the baby. The more the object is used, the more smelly it becomes and the more its texture changes in response to use, the greater the 'affection' between child and object. Here 'affection' does not refer to any sentiments we might imagine that the baby has about the object, but rather to the number of felicitous pairings of affects that obtain between baby and object. Notice that events so far have not happened by design or been shaped by a single conscious intention, but have been coordinated through a mutually agreeable interaction between key affects of the materials involved.

By the time that the carer has encouraged the use of the object for comfort, the baby is attached to the object, so that when the carer attempts to remove it, perhaps to wash it, the baby protests the loss of comfort. All the mutually reinforcing alignments of affects so far have led to the point at which the carer must now negotiate with the baby about the use and location of the object. Within the confines of this specific set of materials and interactions the child has been transformed into a person in the sense that it now makes sense to treat her as having plans, desires, even a viewpoint of her own which must either be guessed at or actively sought by carers. As a person, the baby's range of powers and sensitivities, abilities to affect and to be affected, has expanded beyond her body and its immediate environment. In this becoming-person two features of personhood have been locally and temporarily materialised. The baby is her body, but not just her body. Carer and baby are part of each other but are also separate.

It is important to note that events do not always unfold according to this scheme. Opportunities and sets of affects may vary. If the carer never leaves the baby's side, perhaps carrying the baby constantly throughout the working day, or if the carer is indifferent to the baby's level of comfort, things may be different. There is no suggestion here that this becoming-person is an inevitable progression through quasi-natural stages of development.

Going back to collect Betty

So far I have used the terms 'transitional object' and 'affect' to show how the locus of value known as a person may be produced through the interaction of pre-personal elements. Even though the vocabulary I have used is pre-personal and a-humanist, it has helped me describe persons and transformations in human value. My discussion, then, has passed the first test I set above. Within the limited topic area, I have used a-humanist vocabulary to understand the emergence and performance of a human effect - personhood. But this may yet seem too 'cold' a vocabulary with which to discuss

comfort, intuition, even sleep. It is time to answer some the questions raised above about Nick and Carleen's treatment of Betty.

First, we need to consider what it is for a soft toy to be a child's 'favourite'. If Winnicott's view of babies' relationship with special textiles makes sense, it takes only a little more work to imagine how Pas at age six may treat Betty as her favourite. Compared to a cloth, Betty is a relatively sophisticated 'transitional object'. She belongs to the world 'outside' Pas and can thus give comfort. She also belongs to the world 'inside' Pas as a figure of imaginative projection and as a receptacle for Pas's affection, aggression and concern, to be variously hugged, thrown across the room and carefully bandaged. But Betty also has a name. If someone accidentally sat on Betty, it is quite likely that Pas would complain, and do so in Betty's name. Just as the arrangement of affects around a simple transitional object provided the grounds for a baby's localised becoming-person, so a comparable, but in all likelihood more complex arrangement allows there to be a local and temporary becoming-person for Betty. In Betty's case, being Pas' favourite means, on occasion, being treated like a person. There is no suggestion here that Betty's occasional personhood is a mistaken attribution on the part of a single child. This is not an instance of childhood 'animism' (Piaget, 1927) in which the undeveloped mind mistakes the non-living for the living. Adult carers will also on occasion treat Betty as a person despite her being non-living. She may be sat upright on the table at dinnertime, spoken to, or 'tucked up' in bed just as carefully as Pas. Betty's becoming-person is part of Pas' ongoing becoming-person, in that it expands the range of material circumstances in which Pas' viewpoint must be imagined or sought by others.

All this implies something quite intriguing. In this account favouriteness and Betty's personhood are not willed into being by any single agent or even by a spoken agreement between a number of single agents. It has emerged through an affective interaction involving persons, things, and pre-personal elements. If we wanted a grammatical case with which to discuss such matters, it would have to be the 'fourth person singular' (Motzkau, 2006: 358). Nick did not need to ask Pas whether she would miss Betty or whether she wanted him to go and get Betty. That Betty needed to be collected was intuitively available to him. This intuition was equally available to Carleen. The two adults did not need to have a discussion to coordinate their treatment of Betty. They did not need to perform as voice-owning agents in order to 'agree' because they were both already caught up in the 'fourth person singular', the dense field of interactions that makes Pas, and sometimes Betty, into persons.

Persons, sleep and social research

So far, I have described a highly localised instance of becoming-person that, according to Winnicott, typically occurs in infancy. I then used the vocabulary of transitional objects and affects to explore the means by which care for a child and for that child's bedtime comfort was coordinated. In the course of this explanation I made a number of points that bear repetition. First, the coordination of care was not, in the instance I described, achieved through the decisions and communications of clearly defined agents, but was a result of a field of pre-personal interactions the implications of which were intuitively available to the adult carers involved. This coordination hinged on the personhood of Pas and on the favouriteness of Betty. Second, Betty's

favouriteness meant that in some limited circumstances she became a person, this despite her relative inactivity and lack of expressed intention.

The terms ‘affect’ and ‘affection’ may be unfamiliar to many social scientists. The term ‘person’ surely is not. Amongst other things I have argued that becoming-person, an emergent property of some affective interactions, can involve babies, children, even soft toys, marking them as both their body and more than just their body. I have assumed throughout that becomings-person are a mundane feature of many adults’ waking lives. Can the terms ‘affect’ and ‘person’ offer any assistance when we turn to consider ‘sleep itself’?

Even if a sleeper exhibits no agency, few indeed would take the view that the sleeper is not a person. One way to explain this would be to identify the attribution of personhood to a sleeper as an article of common sense. But how does such an intuition, along with all that it implies for the treatment of the sleeper by others, become available? If we follow the lines of enquiry that this article has sketched, more questions arise. How is the attribution of personhood substantiated in the case of a given sleeper? Further, if we consider personhood as an emergent property of a set of affects that constantly transit and exceed the limits of the flesh, we can ask what affects and interactions enable personhood to persist across the awake/asleep threshold. Arguably, these questions offer a fresh perspective on people’s responses to sleep. For example, they might guide an enquiry into how it can make sense to be angry with someone who is asleep, or how one decides how often to check on a sleeper to make sure that all is well with them. Nevertheless, the persistence of personhood across the awake/asleep boundary does more to question the pertinence of the boundary than it does to address ‘sleep itself’. The second test (addressing ‘sleep itself’) has proved more difficult than the first. Fortunately, the a-humanist account of persons given here has another interesting feature. It uses pre-personal analytic terms. This may be of some consequence when considering the inter-disciplinary nature of contemporary sleep studies.

Sleep is studied by medics, biochemists and psychologists as well as social researchers. ‘Sleep itself’ seems to be the province of natural science. Here the difference between natural and social science is marked by the analytic terms in use. The abstractions of social science (agency, identity, voice) have no counterpart in biochemistry or neurophysiology. This makes it difficult for social sleep researchers to accommodate natural scientific sleep research into their work. The line of enquiry developed in this article, however, bases itself in the pre-personal. The first affect I discussed above was a baby’s sensual pleasure at softness. This affect clearly has direct links to the neurophysiology of sensation. I would not suggest that a neurophysiologist would have much to learn from my account, nor is there any obligation to translate each of the baby’s sensory affects into a neuro-physiological statement. But, at the very least, a pre-personal vocabulary should make it possible to establish analytic correspondence across disciplinary boundaries.

Childhood and Sleep: the bio-political context

This article has not so much passed its second self-imposed test of addressing ‘sleep itself’ as elaborated on the difference between ‘persons’ and ‘agents’. Agents as they are often narrated face an environment of constraints and opportunities which they

navigate/resist/change according to an inner kernel of autonomy. This persistent figure has received critical examination within a number of mutually informative and intertwining philosophical (Derrida 1976, Heidegger 1996) and psychological traditions (Taylor 1992, Curt 1994). But persons, on my account, emerge through interactions of affects and are persons in so far as they can both affect and be affected. They don't have to be conscious human adults in order to do so. Experiences of autonomy – for some, moments, for others, whole lifestyles in which real existence closely approximates the agentic abstraction – might best be understood on the model of the Spinozist 'common notion' (Deleuze 1988) a mutually strengthening meeting of affects. Not all assemblages of materials and affects are persons, but as we have seen in Betty's case, 'drawing the line' between the human and the non-human is sometimes the least informative analytic strategy. I have, however, suggested that this vision of persons may be useful in future attempts to tackle the wake/sleep threshold and to give social science a language in which to make sense to itself and to others of whatever passes for 'sleep itself'. Maintaining the relevance of the social sciences in a rapidly changing bio-political context is one good reason for trying to do this, but there are other reasons beyond social sciences' self-preservation.

First, wherever children are identified primarily as pupils, their levels of consciousness and cognitive performance are readily identified as sites of potential intervention. In the last decade UK government has approached the treatment of pupils as a key mechanism for addressing concerns for the future economy. Contemporary pupil-hood increasingly occasions a competitive consciousness and amongst care-givers and children composing a struggle for future economic well-being that is understood as a scarce resource. As more consciousness altering pharmaceuticals and food-stuffs are brought to market (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005) and as demographic change turns UK children into a relatively scarce resource, it seems likely that motives and means for intervention into children's levels of un/consciousness will intensify and diversify.

Second, if we treat the recent past as a guide to the near future, we might expect a good deal of consideration of childhood and levels of un/consciousness to be organised by the contrast between well-marketed intervention programmes designed to 'make the most' of a given child and a rejection of intervention strategies that seem too novel on the grounds of a preference for a more 'natural' state of unplanned variation. If this is the case it would be a shame for social science to give up the terrain of 'sleep itself' to the expertise of, say, a pharmaceutical industry that has already developed a sophisticated array of techniques for preserving its low-risk, high-effectiveness image. Humanist abstractions, I would suggest, will be no match for the detail and complexity of neurobiological accounts.

At first glance the second side of the contrast – the appeal of the 'natural', the unplanned and the element of chance in forming an authentic human life – offers nothing more than a reactionary mystification. The 'natural/artificial' distinction however may be more interesting and productive than this. It could be considered and investigated as the mobile trace of the disappearance from view of once novel materials and affects as they are drawn into becomings-person. Following this line would allow research to chart becomings-person as people produce the 'natural', the 'appropriate', the 'normal', the 'desirable' or even the 'autonomous' within the

emerging bio-political context. A focus on persons offers a personalisation of sleep concern that multiplies practices of normalisation.

Conclusion

This article began by recognising that it is difficult to see how some standard terms of social research and account-making, such as ‘agent’, ‘identity’ and ‘voice’ can be fruitfully applied to sleepers. It seemed that social research would have to stop at the threshold of ‘sleep itself’, and confine itself to studying the social context of sleep. I then outlined an alternative strategy, by drawing a parallel between the difficulties the awake/asleep threshold poses for the social scientist and the difficulties posed by the child/adult threshold. One of the strategies that childhood researchers have developed in response to the child/adult threshold is to use an a-humanist analytic vocabulary. This allows the study of children and adults to proceed through the same terms since a a-humanist approach has no prior commitment to adults’ adequacy or children’s deficiencies with regard to such figures as ‘agency’, ‘identity’ and ‘voice’. Through a discussion of ‘transitional phenomena’ and ‘affect’ that focussed closely on a sleep related episode, I then developed a concept of the ‘person’ as a localised and temporary emergent property of certain affective interactions. My discussion of becoming-person was not intended as an exhaustive description of all possible ways of becoming-person, nor was it an attempt to produce a generalised account of child development. Instead, I worked toward making the recognisably ‘social’ term ‘person’ into a sensitising concept for sleep and childhood researchers that was capable, by virtue of its pre-personal bases, of remaining pertinent on both sides of the awake/asleep and child/adult thresholds. In the end, the awake/asleep threshold in the form of ‘sleep itself’ resisted my frontal assault, but the vocabulary of persons and affects suggested a personalisation of sleep concern that could offer a third option beyond the defence or critique of normalisation strategies.

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