What's a Little Monotony?:
The Mundane Foundation of Isaac Asimov's Robot Stories

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It is instructive to note that the billionaire Elon Musk's endeavours to colonise Mars are heavily influenced by Isaac Asimov's science fiction. Musk lists Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy as one of the favourite series of his childhood (in Vance, 2016: 33), and he chose to send a digital copy of it into heliocentric orbit along with his Tesla Roadster in 2018 (Gartenberg, 2018: online). The statement this launch made is apparent; Musk considers himself to be engendering the telos of Asimov's SF writings in our contemporary world by paving the way for the colonisation of the solar system by humanity. As far as Musk seems to be concerned, Asimov's SF visions are becoming reality, and this perspective draws a productive parallel with Asimov's own reflections on the prognostic qualities of his SF works in his introduction to *The Complete Robot*.

Asimov confesses his surprise that Joseph Engelberger, the owner of what was then the largest robot manufacturer in the world, had grown "interested in robots in the 1940s when [...] reading the robot stories of his fellow Columbian Isaac Asimov" (Asimov, 2018a: 3). Although he was unaware of the influence they would subsequently exert on speculative currents of thought at the time he wrote them, by writing his robot stories Asimov, as he himself realized, started "a chain of events that is changing the face of the world" (Asimov, 2018a: 4). Certainly, the influence which popular texts of the SF genre bear upon the technological future of our species is plainly significant. Fiona Hobden astutely emphasises that the past of our species is "not a real place we could visit, if only we had a time-machine [...] Rather it is the malleable, increasingly nuanced, and ever-changing product of our imaginative engagement" with the contemporary and surviving representations of history which comprise the only permanent artefact of the past (Hobden, 2009: 149). As she states, via their positions as popular cultural productions, SF texts set in the past of our species actively intervene in the recorded histories with which their narratives are interfaced, and so imaginatively and substantially alter their viewers' understanding of the history of Homo Sapiens.

In this article, I argue that the converse is true for texts set in the future of our species, such as Asimov's robot stories. Specifically, a parallel and analogous process results from readers' imaginative engagement with SF texts in respect to their perspectival outlook upon both our species' present and future. Via their cognitive engagement with futuristic SFnal (or science-fictional) discourses such as Asimov's future history series, readers are encouraged to recognise the profound extent to which their own contemporary situation within a technologized everyday lifeworld informs the prospective cognitive frame of reference of our species. Through their conspicuously mundane qualities, Asimov's robot stories dramatise a movement beyond the technological present, and contribute towards a post-humanistic conception of humanity. As

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I shall demonstrate in this article—through the close textual analysis of *The Complete Robot*, *The Positronic Man*, *The Caves of Steel*, *The Naked Sun*, and *The Robots of Dawn*—the "consciousness-expanding" (Hobden, 2009: 149) or post-humanistic aspects of Asimov's robot stories are cognitively grounded, via those texts' reinscription of mundane aspects of their readers' lifeworlds into their SFnal ones. The sense of wonder evoked by the robots of these texts is not displaced by Asimov's emphasis upon the mundane, rather, he demonstrates that the mundane lifeworld forms the essential foundation of their SFnal nova.

The Complete Robot: Everyday Beginnings

As Asimov suggests in the introduction to his extensive short story collection *The Complete Robot* (1982), the influence of his SFnal stories contributed towards the eventuation of our present lifeworld, in which algorithmic technologies are commonplace. Asimov's benevolent rendering of robots therefore contributed to their genesis in physical reality. As Adam Roberts states, whereas "robots had previously been, almost exclusively, insensate or dangerous embodiments of the threat of technology, Asimov imagined artificially constructed and intelligent robots as not only humane, but in many ways as *more* humane than humanity" (2005: 198, original emphasis). This is not, however, to suggest that Asimov's rendering of robots centres around an intractable binarism. As Roberts clarifies, Asimov is not interested in theorising that robots are superior to humans; he is interested in the interstices formed through the heterogeneous interactions between the two supposedly distinct entities, and at times, with problematising the ostensible naturalness of the robot/human dichotomy, to show the two categories teetering on the brink of "collapsing into a unity" (2005: 199).

In this article, I argue that the converse is true for texts set in the future of our species, such as Asimov's robot stories.

Since Asimov repeatedly underscores the extent to which robots are a banal aspect of the lifeworlds of many of the characters who inhabit *The Complete Robot*, the novel figure of the robot necessarily decays in novelty as the collection proceeds. Although Donald M. Hassler proposes that the Three Laws of Robotics "seem hardly profound or a great invention of the imagination", and adds that "[t]hey are neutral" speculative devices, their author certainly gets a huge deal of cognitive mileage out of them (1991: 42). Asimov reworks the robotic novum throughout the dozens of stories in the collection (written between 1939 and 1977) by making the robotic characters of each specific story distinct from those of others, in some manner which becomes a fundamental component of that story's distinct plot. In each story, the Three Laws are either reworked, broken slightly, or exemplified in a new context.[1]

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1 The Three Laws of Robotics are as follows: *First Law*; a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. *Second Law*; a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. *Third Law*; a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second laws. Neither Asimov nor John W. Campbell, the editor of many of his early stories, wanted to take full credit for the formulation of the Three Laws. As Asimov comments within *In Memory Yet Green*, ultimately, per-

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Thus, Asimov demonstrates that the Three Laws are not entirely prescriptive, but rather, their ostensibly deterministic fundament actually gives rise to many different behaviours and responses in practice. This complexity formulates something akin to a robot "psychology" (Auger, 2009: 22), whose elucidation is drawn out over the course of the robot stories and novels. As the robot novum inevitably decays throughout these stories accumulatively, the rhetorical and narrative positionality of robots antithetically becomes more complex. Yet, where the complexity of robots increases in the series, human psychology becomes a signifier of the banal in parallel, as the cognitive capacities of our species become increasingly inferior comparatively.

In his earliest robot story "Robbie" (1940), Asimov emphasises the eponymous robot's situation within the cultural gestalt of the diegetic world by laying particular emphasis upon characters' phenomenological perspectives. When Robbie spins his eight-year-old owner Gloria around in the air, the narrative notes that "*for her* the world fell away for a moment" (141, emphasis mine), highlighting that there are two characters with a perspectival outlook on the event, and hence, implying that hers and Robbie's phenomenological positions are dissimilar. For Mrs Weston, whilst Robbie was "a novelty [...] a fashionable thing to do" (146) when he was initially bought, the thought that her neighbours might disapprove of her daughter's close friendship with a robot when she has to "meet them every day" (148) is a greater determinant of motive. The fashionable novelty that Robbie once personified has faded, from her phenomenological perspective, and she subsequently convinces her husband to return the robot.

Gloria's father, meanwhile, is preoccupied with ensuring that he has a "good hearty dinner below the hatches; a nice, soft, dilapidated couch on which to sprawl; a copy of *The Times*; slippered feet and shirtless chest" (145) every Sunday afternoon. As Joseph F. Patrouch Jr. correctly states, all George Weston wants "is to be left alone so he can read his paper" (1978: 38), and he therefore ignores his wife's concerns about Robbie's capabilities in order to pursue his bourgeois routine. Despite him living in a technologized society where positronic robots are not only affordable, but advanced enough so as to be capable of undertaking childcare duties, they are a technology unworthy of sustained attention, from his habitually preoccupied mindset. Therefore, Gloria's desire to be reunited with her robotic friend seems insignificant to him, since he considers robots to be nothing more than practical contrivances to facilitate the smooth performance of menial tasks. When Gloria unexpectedly mentions Robbie a month after he has been returned to his manufacturer, George cannot suppress "a strangled gasp [...] then a bout of choking coughs" (153) at the realisation that his daughter continues to expend thought upon a robot; the banal has turned sour in his mouth.

Whilst George Weston is content with his material conditions, and positively fixates upon his quotidian routine, it is Robbie himself who harbours dreams beyond the mundane, and is capable of imagining life within alternative material conditions—to the extent that he has asked Gloria to read him the speculative tale Cinderella "a million times" (Asimov, 2018a: 144). Despite his request to hear Cinderella having been repeated *ad nauseam*, he still evidently finds the fairytale inexhaustibly novel, and consequently appears far more capable of imagining life beyond his present situation than George does. Whereas George desires a repetitive routine

haps 'both of [them] invented the Laws' collaboratively (1980: 287).

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which functions to maintain known quantities, Robbie desires repetition which entails the imagination of otherness. As this suggests, the everyday activities of George and his wife are far more programmed and machinic than Robbie's utopian striving is.

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Humans, Asimov implies, are considerably robotic in their performance of routines, yet in contrast, Robbie is a person to the extent that he can, and does, dream. Although "Robbie" is the earliest of all his robot stories, it evidences Asimov already making patent his project to problematise the ostensibly dichotomous opposition between human and robot. Roberts claims that through the different interpretations of the Three Laws over the course of his robot stories, Asimov "casts light on the ethical dilemmas of ordinary human life" (2005: 199). Yet, whilst Roberts interprets this overarching thread as an affirmation of the Kantian moral imperative, it is more accurate to read it as a problematisation of purported human rationality, and so, as a critique of humanism. Patently, the Three Laws are fundamentally based on human social codes, and so, by demonstrating that there is no essential underlying rationality to human behaviour—unlike the conditioned rationality possessed by robots—Asimov's robot stories critique the pivotal humanist principle of rationality, the fundamental "postulate connecting ancient Greek culture together with [contemporary] European culture" (Apostolopoulou, 2016: 119).

The phenomenological is once more underscored in *The Complete Robot* in "Runaround" (1942). Stunningly, Mike Donovan describes his and his partner Gregory Powell's mission whilst stationed on Mercury—using "ultrawave equipment" (222) to produce a report on "the advisability of reopening the Sunside Mining Station" (223)—as a "purely routine job" (223). There is a huge gulf drawn here between Donovan and Powell's phenomenological perspective and that of the presumptive reader. In this same vein, the two consider the technological capability of their sophisticated insosuits to "stand a measly eighty[ºC] indefinitely" (229) utterly commonplace, demonstrating that although the technological texture of their lifeworld is vastly different to the reader's, the hi-tech elements which comprise it appear just as bland and unremarkable to them as those in the reader's own do to them. Accordingly, it is specifically the carelessness with which Donovan orders the robot Speedy to collect some selenium which facilitates the impending catastrophe—'death by slow broiling' (223)—which the two humans barely succeed in averting.

Precisely because giving Speedy this order "was pure routine" (232) to Donovan, he only makes the Second Law potential implicit in his order "rather weak" (233). Because the Third Law conditions robots to protect their own existence, and Donovan has not made the order to collect the selenium sufficiently strong, Speedy fluctuates between the two competing impulses. His programming prevents him from being able to get sufficiently close to the dangerous selenium pool to re-

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cover it, so he runs perpetually in circles, rather than performing the important task. As is implied by the problematic corollary that strength of command supersedes the hierarchy of the Three Laws, there is no such entity as a pure routine. Although Donovan orders Speedy entirely routinely, the resultant near-disaster proves that the repetitive or mundane always contains the seed of the extraordinary or unique.

Similarly, in "Catch That Rabbit" (1944) Powell and Donovan have subsequently been stationed on an asteroid, in order to supervise a robotic mining team and identify a glitch in their programming which is stymieing the mining operations. The robot in charge of the mining operation on Mercury—DV-5—is "a half ton of metal and electricity [...] a mass of condensers, circuits, relays, and vacuum cells that can handle practically any psychological reaction known to humans", and is powered by "a few quintillions of positrons" (264-265). Although DV-5 is capable of directing six subsidiary robots—referred to as fingers—and capable of managing the mining operation on the planet singlehandedly, the pair refer to it by the casual name Dave, as roboticists apparently "never" (Asimov, 2018a: 264) refer to robots by their serial numbers. This is a symptom of their consummate habitualisation towards their objects of study; after years working with robots they no longer consider them technological marvels, but instead something akin to casual acquaintances. This is further apparent when Donovan wearily remarks that nothing "ever goes wrong when you watch them" (271). His turn of phrase here evokes the idiom 'a watched pot never boils', and therefore implies that, in his subjective experience, supervising robots is as picayune a task as boiling water on a hob or stove would be.

When the rationale behind DV-5 and his subsidiaries' failure to mine their quota of ore is elucidated, it revolves around an equally mundane principle. DV-5's fingers typically perform autonomously of his direct command; the mining operations they are required to complete are "routine" (Asimov, 2018a: 283), and so are completed with a high degree of automaticity on behalf of the fingers. As Donovan and Powell eventually discover, however, in the event of emergencies DV-5 is forced to take direct control of all six fingers simultaneously. This scenario, Asimov reveals, leaves his positronic circuitry overloaded, and causes him to spend "his time twiddling his fingers" (283) instead of working. Consequently, both the resolution and the plot mechanic of the story is unambiguously premised upon the absent-minded action of twiddling fingers, and the story's SFnal content therefore cannot, in the final instance, be fully understood independently of the reader's knowledge of that banal activity. DV-5 is just as bored as the roboticists who watch over him are, and so by the story's conclusion, it becomes evident that its SFnal plot has entirely been engineered as a result of the interstices of their respective sensations of tedium.

The figure of the humdrum is also evoked elsewhere in the collection. Although in "Escape" (1945) Powell and Donovan become "the first men out of the solar system" (Asimov, 2018a: 456), and so facilitate the beginnings of a human Galactic Empire, the story is pervaded by articles of banality. Eager to escape "the monotony" (442) of theoretical work, the pair unwittingly become the first passengers onboard the maiden flight of the first ship with a functional Hyperatomic Drive. Nevertheless, their first concern upon realising that the ship has entered space in preparation for the Jump is horror that they "haven't even seen a bathroom in the place" (448). They are initially thrilled to discover "baked beans" and "milk" (450) onboard, but soon begin to lament the lack of nutritional variety in the ship's pantry.

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Although their successful journey to a neighbouring star "means freedom for all humanity" (Asimov, 2018a: 456), the monumental achievement is further banalized by the first words Powell speaks on their return. Namely, he requests to be directed to "the nearest shower" (457), since there were none aboard. At the moment of this immensely significant scientific discovery, Asimov demonstrates that even the most marvellous scientific discoveries cannot be dissociated from the everyday. The pivotal breakthrough in interstellar travel is evoked, not in a spectacular, but rather, in a thoroughly grounded environ. This banalisation of the technology at the very moment of its inception satirises then-contemporary depictions of hyperspace technologies in the SF genre—which were already becoming "a stock-in-trade" (Bowler, 2017: 139) of the golden age pulps—critiquing the undiscerning ubiquity with which the novum had already begun to be deployed by authors. In this manner, Asimov derides the unbridled utopian social determinism of the "veritable torrent" (Bowler, 2017: 138) of space operas which began to appear in the aftermath of the Second World War. Our lives, he implies, will always be underpinned by aspects of mundanity, no matter how rarefied our technologies become.

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Throughout Asimov's robot stories the co-constitutive relationship between our species and technology comprises "a co-evolutionary spiral in which what we ma[k]e and what we bec[o]me" (Hayles, 1999: 164) have become intractably intertwined. Furthermore, since technologies are non-neutral objects, the nature of our species metamorphoses in parallel with technological developments, as technologies "are more than bundles of internal or external functions. They are materialized potentialities for generating new functions as well as modifiable strategies for integrating and reintegrating functions" (Roden, 2015: 162). We have reached the point where we cannot do without technologies; they are too firmly embedded in our mundane lives. We can therefore no longer be *we* without *they*, and hence the figure of the human can be seen to have been irreparably ruptured—as Asimov's robot stories exhaustively demonstrate.

The Positronic Man: The Birth of the Post-human Robot

Perhaps the apex of Asimov's project to demonstrate the co-constitutive nature of our species and robots—and hence to repudiate the notion that the two categories can be understood in dichotomous terms—is the novella "The Bicentennial Man" (1976), which was later reworked into the novel *The Positronic Man* (1993) in collaboration with Robert Silverberg. By virtue of its extended length, it proves conducive to analyse the latter of these two versions of the text, rather than the more succinct version of the story in *The Complete Robot*, since the two are near identical otherwise. In *The Positronic Man*, the robot Andrew Martin endeavours to become more and more human by degrees, until he is 'irrefutably' the human Andrew Martin. Yet whilst Asimov ostensibly uses the term hu-

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man in this context unproblematically, much of Andrew's trouble in effecting the transition arises from the indeterminacy of the distinction between robot and human, and hence, it becomes patent that each category can only attain any degree of verity whilst it remains in dichotomous opposition to the other.

Andrew's indeterminacy thus draws conspicuous parallels with the discourse of numerous humanist philosophers. As Michel Foucault states, the ruptures which create new varieties of phenomena are "always a discontinuity specified by a number of distinct transformations, between two particular positivities" (1972: 175). Likewise, as David Hume asserted centuries earlier in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), when "we gradually follow an object in its successive changes, the smooth progress of the thought makes us ascribe an identity to the succession", yet when "we compare its situation after a considerable change the progress of the thought is broken" (1978: 220), and we see it as a distinct object. Andrew's development proves that fallacy of perception which Foucault and Hume describe.

As here, Asimov perceptibly uses his robot stories to draw upon Cartesian humanist concerns—such as René Descartes' seminal proposal that 'I think, therefore I am', which relocated the innate essence of the human within the ontological categories of mentality and cognition—in order to revise them into a new post-humanistic framework of implication. As Andrew's surgeries progress, he generates an ontological quandary, precipitating legal redefinitions of the terms human and robot on numerous occasions. This narrative thread resonates strongly with Francesca Ferrando's statement that thinking in pluralistic terms "is a necessary step in the final deconstruction of the human" and provides crucial means of post-humanistic thought, since if our societies "do not address the rigid form of dualistic mindset that allows for hierarchical sociopolitical constructions, then new forms of discrimination will emerge, such as portraying robots as the new 'others'" (2019: 60).

Via the challenge which Andrew's development poses to the supposedly stable categories of mind and body, the novella solicits an anti-Cartesian critique of the definite figure of the human. Accordingly, by the end of the novel Andrew can be considered neither human nor robot, having ruptured the fortified boundaries of both categories. He has simply become post-human, by virtue of that formulation's rejection of categorical thought. James E. Gunn asserts that "[r]eaders read the robot stories incorrectly when they begin to care more about what happens to the robots than what happens to the people" (1996: 53), yet Andrew disproves the binarism which structures Gunn's thought. Readers are interpellated to care about him precisely because, having become a non-human born person, he is neither a human nor a robot; he exceeds both categories.

The mundane aspects of Andrew's lifeworld, and the mundane lifeworlds of those around him, are thoroughly implicated in the realisation of Asimov's post-humanistic objective. When Andrew is manufactured as NDR-113—in the text's 2007—robots on Earth are "still far from everyday sights" (Asimov & Silverberg: 1993: 14), and it is markedly unusual for a robot to be tasked with such a varied "formal household routine" (17) as the Martin family asks him to perform. He accordingly begins his servitude as "an item of household machinery" (27), and is even initially required to store himself away after finishing his "day's chores" (29). However, once it is discovered that he has a prodigious talent for woodwork, he is relieved from performing his established daily routine.

By demonstrating an ability to create art which is deemed aesthetically valuable to humans, Andrew is to be permitted to per-

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form a new daily routine which is more akin to that of his human masters. Soon, Andrew wins a legal challenge to have himself declared a free robot, and is told that he may "select [his] own jobs" (83) to perform in the Martin household—his performance of menial labour is then substantially subject to his own volition. Yet paradoxically, his overall workload increases, since he makes full use of his ability to stay awake indefinitely to "put in thirty-six or even forty-eight straight hours of" (85) labour into his woodwork at a time.

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Decades later, Andrew uses the amassed riches from these innumerable hours of labour to gain consent for his positronic brain to be transferred into an android body. In this new body, he must now work to relearn actions which he was previously able to perform autonomously by "conscious effort" (137). The uncannily infantile process of relearning to walk, turn, sit, speak and so on despite him being more than a century old is "terribly slow, agonisingly slow" (138), and hence the aftermath of the transfer of his consciousness is at first a chore rather than an emancipation. In order to become more human, Andrew must first become defamiliarised to the taken-for-granted minutiae of everyday life. Given his inhuman age by this point, he must also necessarily come to terms with seeing generations of the Martin family "growing up and getting older and older and eventually dying" (144). Although he outlives them all, he does so at the cost of experiencing the recursive procession of life followed by death which the family displays in aggregate.

Still unsatisfied with the remaining robotic aspects of his corporeal existence, Andrew designs and produces the world's first artificial combustion chambers which mimic the action of the human digestive system, and in the process of doing so, makes the act of excretion briefly novel, and saleable. As Alvin Madescu of US robots aptly observes, in his futile and misguided quest to achieve the ever-elusive moniker 'human', Andrew is "going downhill" (Asimov & Silverberg: 1993: 166)—he succeeds only in making his supreme technological body increasingly unreliable and mundane. In parallel, just as "Andrew, redesigning himself physically, must continually adjust his self-image, so man, transforming his body with machines, must accept a new vision of humanity" (Warrick, 1981: 239) in the contemporary world. In his obsession over obtaining "utterly trivial" (Asimov & Silverberg: 1993: 169) signifiers of humanity such as fingernails, and his decisive resolution to become mortal and die, Andrew proves both the fallibility and the unattainability of the moniker 'human'.

The Caves of Steel: Forays into the Habitual

Numerous different technologies inhabit a similarly mundane positionality within the sixth millennium setting of the first novel of Asimov's robot tetralogy, *The Caves of Steel* (1954)—which is set almost exclusively within the eponymous underground cities evoked

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poetically by its title. Richard L. McKinney argues that there is an intractable otherness to the novel's subterranean New York, given that the "greatly increased population density of the city has led to major changes in how people live, the manner in which they interact, even in the ways they move about" (2011: 69). This observation falls far from the mark, however, even when aided by McKinney's subsequent qualification that despite these purportedly immense changes, "[n]ew norms and customs have developed" (69) around these alterations to the lifeworlds of the City's citizens. Specifically, McKinney entirely neglects to emphasise the habitual nature of these new norms and customs to the residents of the novel's New York. Furthermore, these purportedly "major changes" are in no instance so major that the reader is unable to draw from them cognitively engaging parallels to their own quotidian life. The vicarious-imaginative "place of alterity" (68) which McKinney claims the novel communicates to its reader via its depiction of a New York City of the far future must therefore be seen to be a fundamental oversimplification of Asimov's objective in his rendering of its thoroughly habitual *mise-en-scène*.

On the novel's Earth, robots have become banal enough articles of technology—although they remain largely outlawed in public—to be referred to merely as "R's" (Asimov, 2018b: 10). As a Plainclothesman, Lije Baley is grateful to be able to work in "the nonclerical levels" (44) of the New York police force, after having been exposed to the routine mundanity of menial labour as a clerk for years. Baley's motivation to solve the murder case he is presented with in *The Caves of Steel* therefore results from his fear of being declassified, replaced by a robot, and forced to return to "the labor pool" (10). Likewise, as his New York is fiercely stratified by social class, he is acutely aware that gaining a promotion would entail him getting a "seat on the expressway in the rush hour, not just from ten to four" and moving higher "up on the list-of-choice at the Section kitchens" (10). His society, it is apparent, maintains social order by interpellating its citizens to aspire to achieve fractional improvements to their quotidian lives.

As Baley muses, "What a trifling addition to the convenience of the apartment an activated washbasin was when for thirty years previously the trip to Personal had been an automatic and unregarded one" (109). Nevertheless, if he were to be demoted, he strongly suspects he could not give up the washbasin without experiencing severe psychological trauma. As this implies, due to the tightly-woven social fabric of City life, behaviour is strictly policed, the everyday character of life is protracted, and the gravity borne by the habitual aspects of life is greatly magnified. Accordingly, adverse changes to the smooth operation of an individual's lifeworld become categorically pernicious, and there is next to no chance that individuals will risk ostracisation by disobeying social conventions.

For this reason, Baley is categorically certain that an Earthman could not have committed the murder he is investigating by walking "cross country" (Asimov, 2018b: 62) from New York to reach Spacetown. When his robotic partner R. Daneel Olivaw suggests that the murder was committed in this manner, Baley exclaims, "Impossible! There isn't a man in the City who would do it" (63). The notion of walking cross country is so far outside of the boundaries of the cognitive parameters he uses to negotiate everyday life that he cannot conceive the prospect of a fellow citizen having thought of it. His quotidian life conditions his thought processes, and this he assumes, would have been the case for the murderer too. He is proven correct—despite the fact that the exits to the city "are unguarded" (65) and entirely unmonitored, it transpires that the murderer was much more

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prepared to fire a gun at a humanoid than he was to walk cross country.

The ideology of the political sect known as Medievalists—and by extension, the impetus for the murder which precipitates the novel's plot—centres around the assumption that "It was simpler once. Everything was simpler" (18). Hence, the murder central to Asimov's novel has been engendered by a political faction whose prime motive is nothing less than making their everyday lives more straightforward. Given the unsavoury depiction of Section kitchens in the novel, the Medievalists' fervour is certainly comprehensible. Baley reflects that in the kitchens, you "have your own seat which you occupy all the time. You're with your family, your friends. Especially when you're young, mealtimes are the bright spot of the day" (134). Aside from those of sufficiently high social status to have gained "private eating privileges" (51)—in which case, they can eat the same limited menu in the comfort of their own apartment up to 'three times a week' (49)—all citizens are expected to eat prescribed foodstuffs in the section kitchens at predetermined times, and must therefore undergo the rigidity of the mealtime routine in order to eat.

Furthermore, as the archetype of the Section kitchens functions to entirely omit gustatory considerations, the diners' surroundings seem to have more substance than the food itself. Accordingly, the activity of nourishment becomes reducible to the phenomena of "that particular odor [...] the waiting triple line [...] the rumble of humanity [...] the sharper clatter of plastic [...] the gleam of simulated wood [...] highlights on glass, long tables, the touch of steam in the air" (131). As the pervasive impression of synaesthesia apparent in Baley's narration demonstrates, all his senses but his gustatory sense are stimulated by mealtimes, and the act of eating is therefore comparatively dissatisfying. Whereas Andrew Martin became obsessed with obtaining biological signifiers of the human, the societies of *The Caves of Steel* actively obscure the performance of human biological functions under a menagerie of sensory phenomena. The routinised banality of the section kitchens is one, but by no means the only, pertinent example of the novel's saturation with mundane components.

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In order to travel around New York, Baley uses strips "with the ease of a lifetime's practice" (Asimov, 2018b: 14)—he is so habitualised towards this SFnal means of transport that he does not "time his steps consciously. If he had, he would probably have missed" (21) the junction. He is able to ride the strips automatically, since a spatio-sensory understanding has been conditioned into his "cerebral plasticity" (Hayles, 2010: 129) through the rote repetition of his usual routes. N. Katherine Hayles uses the term cerebral plasticity to refer to technological/cognitive learning processes in order to emphasise that the human brain is—in this sense—analogous to a computer whose memory can literally be programmed and reprogrammed. Likewise, for Patrouch Jr., "it is difficult to believe that we need those extra three thousand years to get to the caves of steel. They're

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here already" (1978: 161). As this confirms, the cityscape setting of this diegetic New York barely appeared defamiliarising to Western readers, even at the point in time when the novel was published.

Patricia Kerslake, meanwhile, asserts that in *The Caves of Steel* Asimov "posits a mundane Earth, with the average and the commonplace taking a greater role than the rare and the unusual" (2007: 123). Regarding its characters, Kerslake asserts that the "predictable ordinariness of their lives is interwoven with staggeringly extraordinary details, such as the pedestrianised 'strips' that everyone takes as a matter of course" (123). Yet, since the technology which facilitates the strips is utterly commonplace from Baley's phenomenological perspective, its novelty is barely explicated to the reader. Importantly, as David Samuelson states, "we are mainly limited to the consciousness of [Baley]" (1975: 155) by means of "the thoughts with which [he] combats his boredom" (131), aside from small interruptions and clarifications by a third-person narrator. Thus, the novel exhibits "a definite focus on the action, not a diffuse panorama of an unfamiliar world" (155), and the reader typically only gains comprehension of its SFnal environ through the proxy of Baley's habitualised perspective.

It is thus precisely Baley's habitualisation to his lifeworld which distils the novelty of the novel, and as it were, the novelty of the novel's nova. Its representation of the phenomenological lifeworld is patently a fundamental aspect of the text's rhetorical strategy—the means by which *The Caves of Steel* generates cognisance of its SFnal aspects, and thus gestures towards its SFnal aspects. Furthermore, perhaps no facet of Baley's lifeworld is delineated in greater detail within the novel than the City's Personals, or communal bathrooms, are. Baley takes great care to instruct Daneel that he must not speak "a word, not a glance" (46) whilst in the Personals, in accordance with a "strong custom" (45) which is naturalised in his own mind by the enormous cognitive weight of everyday reiteration. Asimov here evokes what David Andrew Griffiths refers to as the urinal choreographies of the contemporary Western lifeworld. As Griffiths implies, "the anxieties that exist in the strangely private-public space of the public toilet" (2020: 150) are symptomatic of far broader anxieties around the speciousness of the periphery between the public and the private aspects of life in paternalistic societies.

In the Personals, Baley once more benefits from his C-5 rating, since he is granted "a small projector" (47) upon which he can catch up on the news whilst showering, shitting, and banally, activating another machine which does his laundry for him. Whereas the regular Personals are "Spartan" (47)—and offer no diversion from the biological functions performed within them—highly-rated citizens are amply rewarded for their adherence to social strictures in the form of private stalls which enact an exotic amplification of their mundane lifeworlds. As most City-dwellers presumably are, Baley is a *de facto* connoisseur of Personals. Humorously, he is far more interested in toilets than he is in the SFnal nova which surround him. When he is exposed to the procedures for entering Spacetown, for instance, he is more engaged in observing that their Personal "was small, but it was well appointed and antiseptic in its cleanliness" (84) than he is stimulated by the prospect of entering a Spacer society for the first time.

Likewise, it is via a thoroughly mundane object that the novel's SFnal plot is both precipitated and solved by Baley. Although Asimov makes mention of Julius Enderby's spectacles on at least a dozen occasions throughout the novel, they seem nothing more than a device of characterisation to the reader until Baley reveals them to be the de-

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finitive clue which proves that the Commissioner perpetrated the murder in Spacetown. Patrouch Jr. opines that since the "major clue in the story is a mid-twentieth-century clue, not a clue of the future" (165), *The Caves of Steel* has become dated. Nevertheless, the unremarkable nature of Enderby's spectacles is manifestly a calculated aspect of the novel. It is precisely because Baley is so habitualised to seeing them upon Enderby's face that he dismisses Daneel's far earlier interest in that "queer" (150) aspect of the commissioner's apparel. He therefore misses a crucial opportunity to solve the mystery early, since he cannot comprehend that Enderby's spectacles have anything other than an aesthetic function.

Patricia Kerslake, meanwhile, asserts that in The Caves of Steel Asimov "posits a mundane Earth, with the average and the commonplace taking a greater role than the rare and the unusual"

Whereas Patrouch Jr. chastises their pivotal role in the novel's resolution, Enderby's spectacles precisely emblematise the post-humanistic rhetorical strategy of Asimov's SF; the reader is shown a reflection of their own quotidian lifeworld, which allows them to cognitively extrapolate the text's nova from that familiar basis. Furthermore, the centrality of Enderby's spectacles to the schema of the novel can be seen as synecdochic of the blend of organic and prosthetic elements which already comprise the bodily apparatuses of many contemporary humans. Just as Enderby's spectacles have been hidden in plain sight throughout *The Caves of Steel*, the solutions to the central mysteries of the two subsequent robot novels are also hidden in plain sight from both Baley and readers. As with Enderby's spectacles, the unseen mundane components of *The Naked Sun* facilitate the reader's cognitive grounding apropos its intensely novel robots.

The Naked Sun: New Worlds, New Routines

Although Baley desires only to "take up a natural existence again" and "sleep" (Asimov, 2018b: 256) following the extraordinary events of *The Caves of Steel*, his yearning is entirely thwarted. In *The Naked Sun* (1957), he is assigned to work with Daneel "once more" (18) to solve a murder committed on the planet Solaria, of the artist Gladia Delmarre's husband, Rikaine. In order to reach Solaria, he must travel far outside of the solar system, and this transit is achieved via a series of interstellar Jumps. In the first instance, he experiences "a queer momentary sensation of being turned inside out", but this feeling only lasts "an instant" (14). Although Asimov capitalises the word Jump, and thus implies that the interstellar technology remains a novum, its momentary significance here—particularly when contrasted with the momentous narrative emphasis on an earlier form of the same technology in "Escape"—proves it to be a novum which has decayed in imaginative potency in Asimov's robot stories, to the extent that it is practically a datum, and so is elided thereafter. The multiple subsequent Jumps which Baley's ship undertakes are narrated within the remit of a single sentence.

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Similarly, although Baley soon becomes the only living human on Earth to have "ever as much [as] set foot on an Outer World" (Asimov, 2018c: 9), the novelty of his unique position quickly wears off. He is soon acclimatised enough to existence on Solaria to be frustrated that the frequent travel between Solarian time zones which his investigation necessitates is causing him to miss out on "regular meals [and] regular sleep" (168). *The Naked Sun* also extends the robot novels' running motif of Baley's immense knowledge of Personals. Before he leaves for Solaria, he notes with a sense of exotic admiration that the Personal he visits in Washington "was not unduly crowded [...] The stall assigned to him was in decent order with a laundrette that worked well" (4). Although Baley is gleeful following his experience in this Personal, the reader understands that he not only had to provide identification to enter, but once inside, had to carry out his ablutions within the scope of a "water ration" (5).

Once on Solaria however, he undergoes "the unnerving experience of taking a shower in a stall that actually adjoined the bedroom" (42), an incident which gestures towards the newly transformed context of his mundane lifeworld on the Outer World planet more broadly. Although he finds the Solarian Personal to be "the height of luxury in a way" (42), its alien configuration sits so far outside of his sphere of reference in respect of Personals that he is forced to re-evaluate his prior appraisals of toilets in that new context. As when he witnesses a novel method of shaving—in which an unspecified instrument gives out a "fine spray of particles that swept over cheek and chin, biting off the hair neatly and then disintegrating into impalpable dust" (100)—Baley's gradual comprehension of the Solarian alternatives to his own everyday lifestyle practices begins to encourage him to cultivate a pluralistic perspective of human existence. This pluralistic perspective not only transcends the Earth/Spacer dichotomy, but also invokes the realisation that novelty—like mundanity—is both phenomenological and contextual.

On Solaria, there are "two hundred million working positronic robots, [...] ten thousand robots per human" (Asimov, 2018c: 26), and it is precisely this proliferation of robots which has engendered the radical transformation of Solarian humans' everyday lifeworlds. Almost unconditional proportions of robot labour allow Solarians to remain "widely scattered" (38) across the planet, and each individual subsequently lives on an enormous estate all of their own. Having lived his life until this point exclusively inside the caves of steel, it is profoundly perplexing to Baley that Solarians not only have dwellings which are easily large enough for them to be able to "devote a single room to a single purpose" (34), but live lives in which they never physically come into contact with one other. Instead, Solarians only ever contact "one another freely" (47) via trimensional imaging technologies, a social mandate which they refer to in casual parlance as "viewing" (56). Whilst seeing is outlawed by social custom at all times—other than for procreation—viewing is so commonplace an occurrence that it is totally unremarkable from Gladia's perspective for her to view Baley whilst she is wearing no "articles of clothing" (55) whatsoever.

Asimov palpably remodels humanist models—such as the Cartesian *cogito*—which position the human as a social subject in *The Naked Sun*, where humans have instead become antisocial subjects. This move not only deconstructs the category 'human', but also illustrates the extent to which new human sociocultural norms constantly develop throughout Asimov's robot stories, in an invariable process of recombination and metamorphosis. As a result of these social developments, the Solarian lifeworld is profoundly

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different from the crowded streets of Earth which Baley is acclimatised to. Although Solarian robots are ubiquitous and unobtrusive enough to be merely a background noise amidst the clamour of human activity on the planet, their unremitting governance of the lives of their masters behind the scenes is absolutely imperative to the shape of the human everyday lifeworld. Gradually, Baley gains a pluralistic understanding via his altered lifeworld on Solaria that is characteristically post-human, and begins to become cognisant of the extent to which the everyday routines and lifeworlds of other humans are distinct from his own.

Baley therefore correctly infers that he cannot carry out the murder investigation on Solaria which he has been asked to carry out in the same manner that he would on Earth, namely by asking an array of people "a million different routine questions" (Asimov, 2018c: 58). Instead, he elects to view six "piece[s] of fiction dealing with everyday life on contemporary Solaria" (97) as an equally mundane means of investigation. As this decision suggests, Baley understands that the basis upon which he will be able to solve the murder is inextricably grounded within the Solarian everyday sphere. In his own words, he "must understand how Solarians feel about ordinary matters" (117) in order to be able to comprehend that extraordinary rupture of the impregnability of the everyday sphere which facilitated the murder he is investigating. After immersing himself in Solarian culture, he soon finds that he has become acclimatised enough to their planet and ways of life to find "himself not minding a plane flight through open space" (184), despite him having been intensely agoraphobic at the outset of the novel.

Soon after—by virtue of his cathartic realisation that the "[d]arkness and crowds" (Asimov, 2018c: 210) of his home planet are just as much an arbitrary means of social conditioning as the Solarian antipathy towards seeing is—he makes the pivotal deduction in the murder investigation, the solution "bursting like an inner shout" (211) into the newly expanded cognitive territory of his mind. By virtue of his newly acquired pluralistic perspective, he is able to solve the same murder case which Solarian and Terrestrial perspectives alone had proven incapable of fathoming. Yet although the conclusion of the investigation is approaching, he finds that the "comfort and familiarity and dearness of home" has been perverted, and that there is "an estrangement between himself and the Cities" (213) which keeps him from being eager to return to his wife and son.[2] Having gained a pluralistic perspective of human life, Baley no longer feels any one planet to be his home, and subsequently becomes preoccupied with transforming the societies of Earth in order to emancipate them from their imprisonment within the stultifyingly subterranean cognitive horizons that are conditioned by life within the steel caves.

On Solaria, there are "two hundred million working positronic robots, [...] ten thousand robots per human" [...]

At the conclusion of *The Naked Sun*, Baley explicitly comes out in support of "open[ing] the gates of salvation" (Asimov, 2018c: 238)

[2] Baley's sense of alienation from his wife and son likely also results from his increasing infatuation with Gladia; he is sleeping in her house during this scene. Symbolically, the beginning of their affair literalises a shift in Baley's cognitive horizons beyond those delimited by his former life on Earth.

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for Earth via a characteristically pluralistic project which will allow the planet's population to achieve everyday relations in excess of the unremitting "noise and crowds and more noise and people and people and people" (242) to which they have known no alternative. Nevertheless, Gunn's conclusion that "finally [...] *The Naked Sun* is about Elijah Baley and his battle against agoraphobia" (1996: 111) is problematically anthropocentric. Although the novel indubitably comprises a rumination on cultural difference, that specific aspect of its ontological scope is constructed through and set against the othered figure of the robot by Asimov's concurrent emphasis within the novel upon the colossal extent to which robots supplement and transform the mundane lifeworld of humans. It is thus far more accurate to state that Asimov's rendering of adaptability in the novel is mediated by the acknowledgement that humans are engaged in a co-evolutionary spiral with robots, and *vice versa*.

Baley becomes a direct witness to three attempts at murder throughout the novel, all of which—in addition to the murder that he is initially tasked with investigating—are facilitated by robots at the behest of humans. When Gruer is almost fatally poisoned by a "glass of liquid" (78) handed to him by a household robot, he is almost killed by the subtle manipulation of two separate background aspects of the scene—the water and the robot. Indeed, in the original murder and the two subsequent attempts, the human perpetrators utilise the assumption that robots are nothing more than background noise to occlude the impending danger from the perception of humans, and so succeed in weaponising the mundane. Finally, when Solaria's eminent roboticist Dr Leebig confirms that "Delmarre's robot had detachable limbs" (229), the murder of Rikaine is revealed to have been made possible as a direct result of his utter habitualisation towards the novelty of that robot. The background noise of robots proves to have been a vital component of the melody of the novel all along.

The Robots of Dawn: Robots Hidden in Plain Sight

At the outset of *The Robots of Dawn*—published in 1983, 26 years after *The Naked Sun*— Baley is once more tasked with a murder investigation—into the deactivation of Gladia's robotic so-called 'husband' R. Jander Panell—and this time, must travel to her home planet, Aurora, to pursue the case. Donald Palumbo observes that each of Asimov's robot novels follows a remarkably similar murder mystery plot, within which its principal protagonists "must race against time to solve an apparently insoluble mystery [...] are victims of frame-ups or assassination attempts while pursuing the case [and finally] always snatch victory from the jaws of defeat at the last possible moment" (2002: 95).

Palumbo, however, neglects to note that this recursive schema also coheres into a thoroughgoing satire on the humanist notion of individual agency. By casting Baley, or his proxies, into situations where they must repeat the analogous sequences of events which comprise the schema of each novel, Asimov ensures that even at the moment of logical triumph on behalf of Baley, he merely repeats that same stale victory which he has won before. This trope contributes significantly to the post-humanistic schema of the robot novels. Whereas humanist traditions have privileged rationality as "the primordial corresponding order of the human and the world" (Apostolopoulou, 2016: 121), at the very apex of each robot novel, the notion of human rationality is subtly undermined by the recursivity of events. Therefore, the overarching schema of Asimov's robot novels radically problematises the notion that Baley possesses

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any semblance of agency, or rationality. Like a robot, he is bound to laws—the laws of the rigid narrative schema of the robot novels.[3]

When Baley once again boards a spaceship at the beginning of *The Robots of Dawn*, he knows "exactly what to expect" (Asimov, 2018d: 26). The novelty of the interstellar Jump has been replaced by familiarity for him phenomenologically, and he laments the listlessness caused by "the useless time crossing space" (29). He is able to "ignor[e]" the interstellar Jump itself, "as though it had been a tiny hiccup inside himself" (48), since he has become acclimatised to it. The Jump has acutely decayed as a novum, not only from Baley's perspective, but also from the cognitive perspective of the presumed reader, and its SFnal fundament is therefore enough of a datum to be implied rather than directly evoked in the text's narrative.

Other ostensible nova within *The Robots of Dawn* are adequately banal to begin with. Whilst en-route to Aurora, Baley uses a "pseudo-gravity" (Asimov, 2018d: 44) bed, a rarified technology which recreates Terrestrian gravity in order to preserve its user's comfort whilst they sleep. His host, Dr. Fastolfe, owns something he calls a "car" which is driven by a built in robot, and which, he happens to casually mention, "is an airfoil, actually" (69). Also on Aurora, Baley is woken one morning by "a faint and unrecognizable odour in the air", which transpires to be a compound named antisomnin which "activates the arousal system" of humans (177). Daneel has elected to wake him up early since he feels that Baley "might want an early start" (181), and had decided that the drug was the most efficient way to wake his master. Upon entering the Auroran Administration Building, Baley rides with Daneel and the other main robotic character in the novel, Giskard, on an "up-helix" (291). Although this moving staircase can save its passenger time, "one must wait for the unwinding" (292) procedure to complete if they approach it at an inopportune moment, and it may prove quicker for them to take the stairs in such an instance. Fastolfe also showcases a "spicer" (75) to Baley, which must be manipulated in a complex and ornate sequence of motions in order to produce "a fine sprinkling of salt" (81).

It is thus far more accurate to state that Asimov's rendering of adaptability in the novel is mediated by the acknowledgement that humans are engaged in a co-evolutionary spiral with robots, and *vice versa*.

In each instance, these nova produce so little impact on the narrative of the text as to be nothing more than SFnal window dressing. Each comprises a pedestrian application of a magnificent technology, and therefore functions only to underscore the decadence of Auroran life. Accordingly, the patrician character of the Auroran everyday lifeworld is characteristically alien to Baley at first. Sex in particular has become a particularly humdrum affair, and as Baley characterises the situation with only a hint of hyperbole, "offering sex is about on a par with commenting upon the weather" (160). Social sex, as it has become known, is regularly offered by one Auroran to another, and offers are typically

[3] In addition, as Asimov himself states, "I make no secret of the fact that in my mysteries I use Agatha Christie as my model" (1994: 375).

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accepted. As a result, many Aurorans find the act utterly banal and predictable. Dr Vasilia, Falstolfe's estranged daughter, for instance, prefers not to subject herself "to some uninteresting event that will merely waste [her] time" (216), and chooses to abstain, she claims, out of boredom.

Another prominent Auroran, Gremionis meanwhile, has "always dreamed" (Asimov, 2018d: 263) of entering into a monogamous relationship—a supreme novelty in his society. Contrastingly, the use of robots as sex toys is entirely normalised, as Aurorans hold that "it's just masturbation" (272) by means of an expensive sex toy. Nevertheless, after Gladia has had vanilla sex with Baley she hears him unconsciously mutter the key article of evidence in his sleep, with which he can solve the latest murder investigation. Specifically, this information is revealed as Gladia watches Baley "snore" (374) in a distinctly unerotic manner, grounding the scene's overtones of erotic transgression within a substratum of bourgeois domesticity. Therefore, whilst the decadent character of social sex is emphasised in *The Robots of Dawn*, it is pointedly the comparably simple act of sharing a bed together after sex which reveals the solution to its SFnal intrigue.

Whilst this article has amply demonstrated that Asimov's rhetorical emphasis on the consequence of Personals was also explicit in the two preceding robot novels, Hassler is right to observe that it "is remarkable how much the characters go in and out of toilets in" *The Robots of Dawn* (1991: 107). Even before Baley reaches Aurora, he has made certain to reconnoitre the Personal onboard the spaceship—which, he notes, does not contain the "huge banks of urinals, excretory seats, washbasins, and showers" (46) that the communal Personals back on Earth do. Baley has an almost scatological fixation with detailing and making comparisons between the features of the Personals he visits, and yet, this preoccupation is demonstrably symptomatic of his pluralistic objective.

By coming to understand how that most banal, public, and yet nevertheless furtive aspect of any given human culture is coded sociologically, he can learn important facts about those that do the shitting. Fastolfe's private Personal is particularly revealing of its client's mentality. Specially designed to project a naturalistic and personalised simulation which entirely hides the room itself from view, it gestures towards Fastolfe's misemployed opulence, his individualistic tendencies, and his hubris. Baley finds it "foolish" (101), and is almost unable to urinate in his state of confusion at its bizarre and highly novel setup. Vasilia meanwhile, reveals her obstinacy and guarded nature by refusing to let Baley use her personal, and directing him to instead use the "Community Personals" (234). When Fastolfe's rival, Amadiro, disingenuously offers Baley the use of his Personal, it becomes apparent to Baley, Daneel and Giskard that his pleasant demeanour is a ploy to either distract them, or to covertly gain information from them. It is this act which confirms that Amadiro's actions are villainous in Baley's mind, and leads him to firmly (though wrongly) suspect that Amadiro was Jander's murderer.

If Personals and sex are banal phenomena on Aurora, the same is true to an even greater extent of robots. In this latter instance, however, Asimov makes it apparent that the treatment of robots as picayune objects is unreasonable. Although Daneel makes it apparent that he "can go through the motions of eating" (Asimov, 2018d: 38) if it pleases his master, he does not in any physiological sense need to do so. Although Daneel is capable of completing quotidian human actions in a performative manner, in the act of doing so he implicitly proves the inferiority of his masters, who are intractably necessitated to perform such routines that he can entirely do

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without—such vital signifiers of human identity are utterly surplus to robots. Likewise, although Baley notices that Gladia pays "no particular attention" to her seventy-seven household robots, it is only because they are so efficient at performing the mundane activities around her establishment, and even moving out of her line of sight as she approaches, that she does not have to give them a second thought, and usually only ever sees them "out of the corner of the eye" (126). The intense love she had for Jander, it transpires, was out of all proportion to her usual habitualised attitude to her robotic retinue.

[...] this article has amply demonstrated that Asimov's rhetorical emphasis on the consequence of Personals was also explicit in the two preceding robot novels.

Baley himself soon notices that he is becoming just as habitualised to the presence of an obsequious robotic retinue who "flutter about him unseen" with the result that "chores appear to do themselves" (131). Although at one point he does not know exactly where Daneel and Giskard are, he feels contented in the knowledge that, "presumably, they were guarding the house" (161). At a later point, when Gremionis lunges to attack Baley, the plainclothesman is instantaneously protected by three robots, despite him having forgotten that "they were in the room" (273) altogether. Although they may seem ornamental—even articles of furniture—when stored in wall niches, the immensely complex positronic brain of any robot is capable of many superhuman feats, including the vastly expedited thought processes which save Baley from injury.

It is therefore profoundly cathartic that the novel's resolution is brought about by the profound defamiliarization of one particular robot. Both robots and viewing have by this point in the robot novels been rendered decidedly banal to readers via overexposure, and appear to have become little more than arbitrary plot devices as a result. Yet, as it transpires, Giskard can read and influence minds, and has been ensuring that Baley's interactions on Aurora have all been beneficial to his master. Whilst Giskard has been micro-managing the text's plot, the reader has remained as unaware as Baley of the true worth of his robotic companion. Once again, Asimov demonstrates that the solution to an intractable problem was hidden in plain sight—but in this instance—the novel's *dénouement* also stages a pointed criticism of the habitual treatment of robots by the humans of the novel.

Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, the characteristic focus within Asimov scholarship exclusively upon the technological aspects of his robot stories and novels has meant that the importance of their mundane components have been systematically overlooked. By shifting critical focus to the mundane aspects of these works, it becomes newly apparent that Asimov uses a mundane foundation to problematise humanistic constructs of the human. These mundane components comprise an essential cognitive foundation of known phenomena, via which the comprehension of Asimov's profoundly novel robots becomes plausible contextually. By readily

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anticipating and demonstrating the phenomenological impact of the everyday positionality of technology in the contemporary world, Asimov's robot stories and novels recode the outdated signifier of the 'human' in a post-humanistic paradigm.

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