Automating Academia

It's a shivery Autumn morning with an overcast sky. Vera Green wakes to the chill from the inch-cracked window beside the bed. She stretches, rises, goes through her morning routine feeling like she should be happier: today's a teaching day, and she likes teaching days. It's the empty house that bothers her. With her spouse and daughter traveling, she eats breakfast alone and notices the VIRENS status indicator pulsing yellow on her phone's widget. She checks the notification: Tuesday, the weekly backup drive rotation. She finishes her breakfast, gives the cats each a loving chin-chuck, puts the backup drive in her bag to swap it with the one at her office, and heads out the door.

Dr. Green steps up the steep sidewalk heading toward the university. The walk to her office typically takes her 25 minutes, during which her phone automatically shifts from "home" to "moving" focus mode, muting all but essential notifications and queuing up her "Energetic" music playlist. She puts her headphones in and says, "Hey Siri, VIRENS morning brief." Siri begins: "Good morning, Dr. Green. Observatory reports your h-index increased to 12 yesterday, with three new citations to your 2022 article on technical taxonomies. The Pickering article citing you looks relevant to your book project. Overnight, Hazel processed four PDFs from yesterday's library downloads; two need manual metadata review. Your co-author left three comments on chapter four draft six in DEVONthink. Readwise has five ebook highlights from last night's reading ready for processing." Siri continues with her schedule: "You have English 101 at 10 AM and English 512 at 2 PM. Two student emails are flagged for response in Things. Your last reading session had these notes marked for follow-up: 1. Question: What are the implications of Andrew Feenberg's penultimate chapter for Thursday's graduate seminar? 2. Question: How do those implications connect to Feenberg's earlier book?" Siri finishes

and switches to her "Energetic" playlist, and Dr. Green decides to take a detour through the campus library humming to the chorus of P.O.S., "They Can't Come."

She locates the distinctive blue spine of Feenberg's earlier book in the library's sub-basement stacks and pulls out her phone to Scanner Pro, photographing the title page with the ISBN. The Shortcuts automation extracts the ISBN, queries WorldCat for full metadata, creates a complete Bookends entry for *Transforming Technology*, generates the citekey @feenberg2002-transforming, triggers Hazel to watch for a future PDF download, and creates a placeholder note in her Obsidian vault. As she walks the last five minutes from the library to her office, she says, "Hey Siri, Tot, to-do: Feenberg, Transforming Technology, review where Feenberg addresses Althusser and especially overdetermination, deadline Thursday 9 AM for planning Thursday afternoon's 512 seminar; note: see if I've got old materials for this from Lev's Göteborg 2004 ACH talk." VIRENS captures the Tot note along with the Just Press Record transcript, inserting a copy into today's Obsidian daily note and creating a Things task with the Thursday morning deadline.

Dr. Green arrives at her office and sets down her bag. She opens her work laptop and VIRENS detects she's at her office, shifting her focus mode from "moving" to "work" and triggering her "workday start" configuration. Moom instantly arranges her windows: the left third of her screen shows her Obsidian daily note, the middle third displays her DEVONthink inbox with those four PDFs awaiting metadata review, and the right third has Bookends minimized and ready. Bunch opens her essential apps in the background: Mail, Things, Alfred with clipboard history loaded, and Hookmark ready in the menubar. She swaps the backup drive with the one mounted to the laptop on her desk. Plugging in the fresh drive triggers the VIRENS script for Carbon Copy Cloner to verify last week's backup integrity and begin this week's incremental backup.

Keyboard Maestro's "morning processing" macro for VIRENS starts, showing a notification that two PDFs are waiting in Downloads, then opening her Obsidian daily note to the "morning pages" writing habit

section. The macro sets a timer for thirty minutes and maximizes the Obsidian window, and for the next half-hour, Dr. Green freewrites with abandon. At minute 30 (634 words today), the macro prompts her to wrap up and get to the end of her thought and answer the question: `What comes next for any part of what you just wrote?` She marks the writing as completed, and the macro takes her to the next section of the daily note with today's template already filled in: teaching prep checklists for both classes, an "inbox sweep" section showing her three unprocessed Drafts captures from yesterday's walk, and research time blocks automatically calculated from the gaps in her calendar. The macro runs the VIRENS `scholar-status` script in the background and displays her key metrics in the menu bar: `H:12 | Cites:+3 | Tasks:7 | Inbox:3`. Before she dives into the morning's quick review routine, VIRENS automatically commits yesterday's Obsidian vault changes to her private Git repository with the message "2025-10-06 evening changes - 14 notes modified, 2 created." Time for coffee, Dr. Green decides, and sets her office's small pot brewing.

The coffee percolates while she spends five minutes on her quick review routine: processing those three Drafts items (one goes to her "Questions for Tenure Committee" note, two become reading notes for yesterday's sources), responding to the two flagged student emails with Alfred's email workflow, and noting with interest that DEVONthink's "See Also" AI has surfaced an unexpected connection between yesterday's reading and the manuscript she's working on that has an upcoming milestone next month. She saves that connection for her afternoon deep work session.

After opening her office door and switching her focus mode from "work" to "available" for any students who might drop by with questions before class, she turns to email triage. Using Alfred (`em student`), she quickly reviews her student messages. Marcus hasn't responded to her check-in from Friday after missing Thursday's class when she'd assigned peer review drafts, and today those drafts are due. She types `;;lw` (her Keyboard Maestro trigger for "late work check-in"), which opens a form with fields to fill:

```
Student Name: [Marcus]
Missed Class: [Thursday]
Assignment Type: [peer review draft]
Due Date: [today]
Personal Note: [optional]
```

After she quickly completes the fields and adds a personal note, Keyboard Maestro expands the template:

```
Hi %StudentName%, just checking in since you missed %MissedClass%.
Your %AssignmentType% is due %DueDate%. Do you have it ready, or
do you need to arrange an alternative? %PersonalNote% Let me know
if you need support with %DueDate%'s %AssignmentType%.
%StudentEmailClose%
```

The macro fills in her values and inserts her personal note about the Feenberg connection: "I was reviewing your planning notes from Thursday's in-class writing about technology anxiety, and they connect nicely to the idea of 'democratic rationalization' the students are talking about in my graduate seminar. Smart work. Would you like to discuss exploring that connection?" She captures the pedagogical connection in Drafts with tags #pedagogy-theory-bridge #feenberg #101-512-connection and sends the completed message, and Hookmark creates bidirectional links between Marcus's student record, the Feenberg reading note, and her 512 lesson plan.

With thirty minutes before class, she triggers her VIRENS Keyboard Maestro "pre-class prep" macro. Her screen shifts to teaching mode: the class roster appears on the left with her private notes about each student's strengths and struggles, while the right side shows today's lesson plan with timer segments. All notifications except emergency are muted. The macro sets Things to "teaching" context hiding all non-urgent tasks and projects a subtle timer overlay showing the class segments for the 75 minutes:

```
1. Overview: 5 min. | 2. Opening writing: 5 min. | 3. Pair-share:
5 min. | 4. Initial discussion: 10 min. | 5. Peer review: 25 min.
| 6. Review discussion: 10 min. | 7. Revision planning: 5 min. |
8. Closing: 5 min. | [Flexible time: 5 min.]
```

With everything set, she uses her remaining minutes before class to pull up the DEVONthink record for *Transforming Technology*, scrolling its index to add three page number references to her Thursday graduate seminar notes where Feenberg's older work on democratic participation in technical systems might illuminate the readings her students struggled with last week.

At 9:55, Dr. Green's phone vibrates with the reminder to head for her English 101 classroom. She takes her coffee and walks down the hall, her teaching timer running. As she enters the classroom, VIRENS has scraped the twenty-three student draft submissions from Canvas and formatted them for today's peer review, stripping identifying information and assigning randomized ID numbers. The word of the day appears on her phone screen, "revision," auto-generated by VIRENS after scanning today's lesson keywords, comparing against the course framework, and confirming it hasn't been used for attendance before. "Good morning, everyone! Let's start with our word of the day for attendance. Open Canvas, go to today's quiz, and type the word 'revision'—*arr ee vee eye ess eye oh en*—to mark yourself present." While students pull out their laptops, Dr. Green's screen shows the VIRENS dashboard confirming submissions in real-time: nineteen present so far, with Marcus just walking in. Good, she sees, his draft is in the Canvas folder, so he got it done despite missing Thursday.

"Today we're doing criterion-based peer review of your technology narratives. You'll see the lesson plan in Canvas with all the details, including *optional* supplemental readings I've pulled together for those who want further guidance. There are some powerful revision and invention heuristics in the first one, a summary of more abstract thoughts about technology from a philosopher named Andrew Feenberg, and the third is the source of my advice last assignment about moving

concluding paragraphs to the front." Behind the scenes, VIRENS has created shareable DEVONthink links to three articles from her methods database, automatically selected based on keyword matches with this week's lesson topics and course framework and last week's student `#muddy` exit ticket responses.

She opens the Canvas peer review dashboard on the projector and gives a two-minute refresher on the word "revision," and then tells the class, "I've set up your review groups. You're in randomized groups of three, and you'll each read two peers' drafts. Remember, your goal is to give criterion-based feedback. Helps your peers get their writing where it needs to go. 'Good' and 'bad' are the two least interesting things you can say about a piece of writing. Respond like a reader. Describe what the writing is doing, point to the parts that do interesting things, ask questions using the criteria." While Canvas handles the peer review logistics, VIRENS monitors the gradebook, ready to flag any students who seem to be struggling with their reviews. She'd originally wanted to use Eli Review for the task, but couldn't get the writing program to approve the cost of the subscription for students, so her feedback system imitates some of Eli Review's moves. The class settles into focused reading and commenting. Dr. Green circulates, occasionally glancing at her phone where VIRENS displays a real-time participation tracker to identify students who might need encouragement or support. She stops by Marcus's desk. "Your technology anxiety angle is really sophisticated," she says quietly. "Check the supplemental reading on Feenberg when you get a chance. It connects directly to your argument's examples."

Thirty minutes later, as students finish their reviews, Dr. Green asks them to include three hashtags and a one-sentence summary of their biggest revision challenge. "Submit those to the Canvas discussion board, and we'll look at patterns together."

Within seconds of the first submission, VIRENS begins aggregating the hashtags. By the time most students have posted, a word cloud shows up on the projector: `#structure` dominates, followed by `#evidence`, `#clarity`, `#conclusion`, and `#voice`. "Look at this pattern," Dr. Green

says, pointing to the cluster of structure-related tags. "About half of you are wrestling with organization. Let's talk strategies." One student raises the anticipated question about whether personal narrative can count as evidence in academic writing and sets up a perfect bridge to Thursday's lesson on evidence strategies. Dr. Green taps her phone quickly, and VIRENS adds "Q: Samantha: personal narrative as evidence?" to her Tot dots for later processing.

Class winds down, and she reviews the next lesson's homework: "Revise based on the feedback you marked most helpful in your revision plans. Next class we'll look at how different types of evidence work in academic versus non-academic arguments. Don't forget the exit ticket. Tell me one thing that was either `#muddy`, `#memorable`, or made you want `#more`; plus what to `#sustain` from today and what to `#improve`."

VIRENS buzzes a reminder on her phone as she's walking back to her office: `Teaching reflection`? She pulls out her phone and records while walking: "Positive energy and no late work today. Marcus turned it around; send him the Feenberg abstract. Big worries about structure, so we'll do a workshop next week. That question from Samantha about personal narrative was helpful and an easy hook for Thursday." Back in her office, she finds VIRENS has created today's teaching reflection note in Obsidian, combining her audio transcript with the exit ticket responses. The Q: dot about personal narrative gets extracted and added to the reflection note and her Thursday lesson planning document. The keyword frequency data gets saved as a CSV for her end-of-semester teaching portfolio. The changes get saved to Git with a timestamp.

She has about thirty minutes before lunchtime, and decides to process those two PDFs waiting for metadata and reviewing her afternoon seminar plan. Her focus mode shifts from "teaching" back to "available" as she settles in at her desk, the backup drive quietly continuing its work in the background. There's a knock on her open door. "Hey Vera, got a minute?" Her colleague Aaron from down the hall stands in the doorway. She gestures him in. "Did you see the Vice Provost's email

about the undergraduate curriculum committee proposals? They moved the deadline up to Friday." Dr. Green's gut drops. She'd completely forgotten about the curriculum proposal.

VIRENS hadn't. While Aaron begins to explain, her Things notification silently appears: "Curriculum proposal draft - Due in 3 days (moved from next Wed)." VIRENS had parsed the Vice Provost's email an hour ago, identified the changed deadline, and updated her task automatically. "I did see that," she says smoothly, pulling up the notification. "I've got time blocked Thursday to finish it." Aaron continues with his concerns about the proposed changes, and Dr. Green activates Just Press Record on her phone and places it on her desk. "Let me take some notes. Helpful for the committee." The recording will be transcribed later, tagged #curriculum-committee, and linked to her draft proposal in Obsidian. After Aaron leaves, VIRENS shows her a reminder that the library book on critical pedagogy she'd checked out two months ago is due today. A Keyboard Maestro palette offers options: "renew online," "return today," "set reminder for walk home." She clicks "renew," and VIRENS opens the library portal, auto-fills her credentials from Keychain, and completes the renewal. The Things task updates to the new due date.

With Aaron gone and her library book renewed, Dr. Green turns to the two PDFs waiting in her DEVONthink inbox. The first is straightforward: a recent journal article downloaded from JSTOR yesterday. Hazel has already done the heavy lifting: extracted the DOI, renamed it `Chiang2025-Algorithmic_Rhetoric.pdf`, and moved it to the Bookends staging folder. She clicks "Process" in DEVONthink, and watches VIRENS do its work.

The Keyboard Maestro macro triggers, sending the DOI to CrossRef, which returns full metadata. Bookends creates the reference entry, generates the citekey @chiang2025-algorithmic, and attaches the PDF. DEVONthink indexes the file from Bookends' attachment folder, runs OCR (unnecessary for Chiang's born-digital PDF but VIRENS checks anyway), and suggests three thematic tags based on content analysis: "digital rhetoric," "algorithm studies," and "computational persuasion." She accepts all three. A skeleton note appears in her Obsidian inbox:

```
---
type: reading
citekey: "@chiang2025-algorithmic"
status: unread
project: chapter-6
devonthink: x-devonthink-item://4AF3B2C1
bookends: bookends://ref/18439
---
# Algorithmic Rhetoric and Computational Persuasion
**Chiang 2025**

## Notes
*Awaiting initial read*
```

Total elapsed time: twelve seconds.

The second PDF prompts an exasperated sigh. It's a scanned chapter from a 1987 edited collection on technology and democracy; crucial for her Feenberg genealogy but wretched for automation. The filename is `scan003.pdf` and Hazel couldn't extract any metadata. OCR ran but the scan quality is poor. She mutters a mild imprecation and opens it in Highlights to check the OCR: some Greek symbols in the philosophical logic sections are garbled. The main text is mostly readable.

She switches to manual processing. In Bookends, she creates a new reference, typing in what she can read from the blurred and scan-artifacted first page: "Democratic Participation in Technical Change" by —she squints—Carl Mitcham? Carl Michael? She opens WorldCat in Alfred (`re wc`), searches "Carl democracy technology 1987," and finds it: Mitcham, not Michael. She copies the proper metadata, pastes it into Bookends, and manually sets the citekey to @mitcham1987-democratic.

The book itself has no DOI, but she adds the ISBN from WorldCat. She drags the PDF onto the Bookends reference to attach it. VIRENS detects the manual attachment and triggers its "cleanup" macro: the PDF gets renamed properly, DEVONthink updates its index, and a reading note

appears in Obsidian. She adds a quick annotation in the note's metadata: "status: needs-cleanup" and "warning: OCR partial, Greek symbols corrupted."

She remembers the chapter was cited in something she'd re-read last month. She types `[[` in Obsidian and starts typing `democra` and autocomplete shows three notes mentioning democracy. She opens them in side panes, finds the citation in her notes on @winner1986-whale, and adds a bidirectional link. Hookmark automatically creates a deep link between the two PDFs in DEVONthink.

Total time for the problematic PDF: four minutes. Not ideal, but VIRENS turned what could have been a fifteen-minute organizational rat's nest into a manageable task. She makes a quick note in Drafts: "Consider adding WorldCat API integration for old books; check if feasible" and tags it #virens-improvement. The note automatically goes to her "VIRENS Development" project in Things.

She glances at the clock and realizes she wants a final adjustment to the seminar plan before lunch. She opens the afternoon's lesson in Obsidian, adds a note about connecting the Mitcham chapter to the Feenberg discussion if time permits, and sets a timer reminder for 1:45 to review the discussion questions one more time. Her stomach growls. Dr. Green, she tells herself, needs to clear some mental space. She sets her focus mode to "Do Not Disturb" and takes the last of the weekend's leftover ratatouille down the hall to the Department microwave.

At 12:40, Dr. Green returns refreshed from lunch. She triggers her "Deep Work" Keyboard Maestro macro with ⌃⌥⌘D. The transformation is immediate and aggressive: her laptop enters a modified Focus mode that blocks all websites except scholarly databases, her office phone forwards to voicemail with a message stating she's unavailable until 1:45, her iPhone switches to a custom "Deep Work" focus that allows only calls from her partner and daughter, and her screen locks to four applications: Obsidian, DEVONthink, Drafts, and Hookmark. Her

calendar, visible to colleagues, shows "DEEP WORK: UNAVAILABLE" in red. A timer appears in her menu bar: 65 minutes. VIRENS protects her time.

She starts by processing the morning's discoveries into atomic notes. Mitcham's PDF in DEVONthink, with some consideration, yields his core argument about technological citizenship requiring "interpretive flexibility" in system design. Dr. Green turns her summary into a Zettel in Obsidian: "Democratic participation in technical systems requires both access and the ability to reinterpret and reshape the system's purposes, and the latter is one form of sovereignty - @mitcham1987-democratic p.47." She tags it #democracy #technical-systems #book-ch4.

The Feenberg connection gets its own note: "Feenberg's 'democratic rationalization' extends Mitcham's interpretive flexibility by insisting that user communities must be able to contest the definitions of efficiency embedded in technical codes - @feenberg2002-transforming p.132." She creates bidirectional links between these notes and her earlier Feenberg entries.

In Obsidian's graph view, she notices a newly dense cluster created by her morning additions around a node she'd forgotten about: `Technical_Democracy_Historical_Genealogy`. The node bristles with connections, fifteen different notes linking to it. She clicks through to DEVONthink and runs "See Also." The search surfaces an unexpected find: the Pickering article that cited her. Curious, she opens Pickering's piece. Her stomach tightens as she reads. Pickering cites her 2022 taxonomy of democratic technical practices in order to systematically challenge it, to put it kindly. Her classification system is "overly rigid," he argues, and her historical link between 1960s "appropriate technology" movements and contemporary open-source advocacy "elides crucial discontinuities." He's particularly harsh about her treatment of counter-cultural influences, citing two sources she knows well: Winner's *Autonomous Technology* and Bijker's *Social Construction of Technology*.

Dr. Green tries to shift her feelings from defensive to energized. She stands up, pushes the Just Press Record button on her phone, and starts pacing and speaking aloud: "Pickering's critique about rigid taxonomies helps me, I think. He's using Winner and Bijker selectively for the critique of technological politics but ignoring Winner's later democratic participation stuff, and that's the thing. I've been working with Chapter 4's argument about classification systems being technical artifacts that encode power relations. His complaint that my taxonomy is 'overly rigid' proves my point: he wants interpretive flexibility in the tool I use to examine interpretive flexibility."

After three minutes of pacing and talking, she stops the recording and sits back down. VIRENS has transcribed her words and loaded them into a Drafts template tagged #book-ch4-draft. She processes this into Obsidian as a new note, "Pickering_critique_response_draft," and shifts to prose composition mode. In Obsidian, she opens her book manuscript outline and navigates to Chapter 4's section on "Classification as Technical Practice." She begins typing:

```
Critics of taxonomic approaches to democratic technology (most
recently @pickering2025-rigid) argue that classification systems
impose artificial boundaries on fluid sociotechnical practices.
This critique misunderstands the reflexive nature of critical
technical taxonomy. As @mitcham1987-democratic demonstrates, the
act of categorizing technical practices becomes a site of
interpretive flexibility.
```

As she types `@mitcham`, Bookends' citation autocomplete suggests the full reference. She accepts it and continues writing. When she references Winner and Bijker, she discovers her DEVONthink database contains her extensive annotations on both authors from her decade-old dissertation work. Hookmark shows the connection chain: those old notes, her 2022 article, Pickering's critique, today's response. The scholarly conversation comes full circle. At 1:35, Obsidian's "orphan notes" plugin catches her attention. Three notes flash as "problematic orphans," notes with no incoming links floating disconnected in her knowledge vault. Early thoughts about "vernacular technical knowledge"

that never found a home. With Mitcham's framework and Pickering's provocation, they might fit. She links them to her emerging argument about classification-as-practice, watching the orphans transform into connected nodes in her knowledge graph.

Her timer chimes at 1:45. Deep Work complete. She's got 400 words of new prose, processed two major sources into atomic notes, found a way to respond to criticism, and rescued three orphan ideas. VIRENS releases its grip: notifications return, websites unblock, and her phone rings with a student question. The 65 minutes of protected focus have moved her book forward.

She saves everything, and VIRENS commits to Git: "Deep Work 12:40-1:45: Ch.4 democratic taxonomy argument, Pickering response integrated." Time to review those discussion questions for seminar. Dr. Green shifts her focus mode back to "teaching" and opens her seminar prep. VIRENS pulls up her discussion questions in split-screen: today's questions on the left, her "Seminar Patterns" note on the right showing which question types have generated the richest discussions over the past six weeks. Question 3 about technological determinism feels stale and too similar to last week's opener about autonomous technology. She clicks into DEVONthink, where "See Also" suggests a passage from today's Feenberg reading that directly contradicts last week's consensus about user agency. Perfect. She revises the question: "Last week we provisionally agreed users shape technology through appropriative practices. But Feenberg writes 'the technical code is not neutral.' How do we reconcile user agency with embedded politics?" VIRENS also shows her that three students have posted reading responses in the shared seminar vault mentioning "*telos*": her word-of-the-day will land.

At 1:55, her phone buzzes with the teaching reminder. She shoulders her materials and heads to the seminar room across the quad. Halfway there, she encounters Lee, the interim Department Chair from Philosophy. "Vera! The productive person I need to see." His tone makes her wary. "The Dean mentioned at today's Heads and Chairs meeting that you've had three articles accepted this semester, with a full load. She

thinks you'd be perfect for the new Arts and Humanities Strategic Planning Committee. Apparently someone this efficient must have extra bandwidth." Dr. Green wonders silently whether Lee could have been the one who nominated her.

She keeps her expression neutral. "How kind of her. When does she need an answer?" The problem with visible productivity, she thinks, is that people assume efficiency means capacity for more work.

Lee shrugs. "She said nominees would be notified by COB tomorrow. Just wanted to give you a heads-up. Between you and me, it's a time sink. Monthly three-hour meetings plus subcommittee work, and a lot of the faculty names proposed for the committee are the big shot 'I-know-everything' folks." The nomination probably didn't come from Lee, she decides.

They part ways, and Dr. Green makes a quick voice note: "Strategic planning committee trap; need polite deflection strategy. Check service obligations for tenure file." VIRENS files it to both her "Political Navigation" note and creates a Things task for crafting a response.

She enters the seminar room at 2:02, where eight graduate students are seated around the table, laptops open. The shared Obsidian vault for ENGL512 is projected on the screen, showing today's collaborative document: "Week 7: Technological Teleology and Democratic Rationalization." Jamie, today's discussion leader, has already added their prepared notes with linked references.

"Good afternoon, everyone. Our word of the day is *'telos'*, for the Greek concept of purpose or end-goal. Let's start there. When we talk about technological progress, what *teloi* are we assuming? Take five minutes to write a response." As students write, she checks the shared vault on her phone: their individual response notes are appearing in real-time, each tagged with initials and timestamp. During the individual writing, Eloy raises his hand and whispers when she comes over that he never received her feedback on his proposal draft. Dr. Green frowns. She discreetly checks her phone, where VIRENS shows the Hookmark-linked

chain: the student's email from last week, the draft in DEVONthink, her feedback notes in Obsidian, the composed but unsent reply in her Drafts archive. "I'm so sorry! I wrote it but never hit send. Check your email in thirty seconds." She triggers the Drafts action to send the archived message. Crisis averted.

After five minutes, she says, "Turn to your partner and share what you've written. Look for points of agreement and tension." There's quiet talk in pairs. Dr. Green opens a teaching widget on her phone: a grid of shortcuts specific to seminar mode, including "Capture Brilliant Comment," "Flag for Follow-up," and "Add to Research." Ten minutes later, they reconvene. "What patterns did you notice?" The discussion is hesitant at first, then accelerates. Three pairs raise the problem of multiple, competing *teloi* in the same technology. Maya argues that Silicon Valley's "disruption" discourse assumes a *telos* of perpetual change. Sam counters that users impose their own *teloi* through appropriative practices. "Excellent. Jamie, you're leading us through Feenberg's response to precisely these tensions. Take it away."

Jamie stands and switches the projector to a prepared Hookmark connection map. "I've mapped how today's reading connects to our previous weeks." The visualization shows Feenberg as a central node with links radiating to Winner, Haraway, and Latour. Sam wants to know why Heidegger isn't on there. "Let's start with this passage on page 184," Jamie says, and uses the Alfred workflow to quick-search the PDF, instantly projecting the highlighted section. As Jamie facilitates, Jordan serves as *rapporteur* in the shared vault, capturing key points with timestamps. VIRENS auto-formats their entries, creating linked references to previous weeks' notes. Dr. Green watches the collaborative document grow, knowing Git tracks every contribution for both assessment and the collaborative literature review they're building.

Twenty minutes into Jamie's facilitation, Robin interrupts: "Wait, isn't this like machine learning optimization functions?" The room turns. Robin's usually the quietest. She gains confidence. "Feenberg talks about technical codes embedding values, right? That's literally what

happens when we define a loss function in ML. The optimization target is the *telos*. It determines everything the system learns to value. We're encoding Aristotelian final causes into algorithms." The room is quiet for a long moment. Excited cross-talk erupts. Dr. Green nods in approval, happy to hang back.

Her thumb finds the "Capture Brilliant Comment" shortcut on the phone widget. VIRENS marks the audio timestamp, creates a note titled "BRILLIANT-Robin-ML-teleology-2025-10-07" in both the seminar vault and her research vault with tag #student-insight, and generates a Things task: "Follow up with Robin; develop for DHSI conference?"

The seminar builds on Robin's insight for another thirty minutes. Jamie weaves it back to Feenberg's argument about democratizing technical codes. Eloy joins Sam in failing to interject Heidegger. Jordan's *rapporteur* notes in the shared vault are merging into a complex shared record, with other students adding marginalia and links and occasional /*-commented snark in real-time. The Git commit history will reflect how Robin's comment transformed the trajectory of the discussion.

At 3:10, Dr. Green intervenes: "Smart work, everybody. Before we finish, complete your exit tickets: what connected most powerfully today, what was confusing or difficult, and what question will you carry forward to next week? Add them to your personal folders in the vault." As students type their exit tickets, VIRENS is processing: the audio recording tagged at Robin's breakthrough, the collaborative notes versioned in Git, the new connections between machine learning and democratic theory linked in her research vault. Her phone shows a notification from Things: "Grade participation by Friday." There's also a new citation alert from Observatory. Someone else has cited her work recently. She'll check it after class. "Remember," she says as students pack up, "your contributions to our collaborative literature review are tracked in Git. You're building knowledge and a publication. For those of you who submitted a proposal, don't forget the conference acceptance notices come out tomorrow. See you Thursday." The students depart, Robin hesitating in the classroom doorway a moment before following the others.

Ten minutes later, back in her office, Dr. Green closes the door and records the opening thoughts for her teaching reflection: "Robin's ML connection shifted the paradigm. Let's nurture that. Jamie's facilitation was top-notch. Group dynamics improving. Follow up: Robin for conference proposal, develop ML-telos connection in Chapter 4." VIRENS transcribes, tags it #teaching-reflection, and creates the corresponding Things tasks.

She reluctantly switches her focus mode to "admin." Hooray for Dr. Green doing administrative work, she narrates, the trick of getting humans to do machine tasks. VIRENS and Moom rearrange her screen to place email on the left, Things admin tasks on the right, Drafts centered for composition. She resigns herself to the hour's drudgery.

First, the committee trap. She opens Drafts and types `;stratno`, her Typinator snippet for "strategic no." A form appears:

```
Request name: [Arts & Humanities Strategic Planning Committee]
Time commitment: [3hr/month + subcommittees]
Tenure-required?: [No - already met service requirements]
Advances research?: [No - unrelated to digital humanities]
Teaching connection?: [None]
Current commitments conflicting: [book deadline, two conferences,
curriculum revision]
```

VIRENS uses her inputs to generate a response via template:

```
Dear Dean Cooper,

I'm honored you thought of me for the Strategic Planning
Committee. After careful consideration of my current commitments,
I must respectfully decline. As my annual report will show, I'm
currently balancing a book manuscript under contract (deadline
March 2026), curriculum committee work already underway, and two
conferences where I'm presenting.

Per Faculty Handbook 3.7.2, pre-tenure assistant professors should
```

```
maintain focused service portfolios aligned with their research
trajectory. My current service on the Digital Humanities Advisory
Board and the Graduate Curriculum Committee fulfills this
requirement while directly supporting my scholarly agenda.

I'd be happy to suggest colleagues whose research in institutional
planning might benefit from this opportunity: [names].

Best regards, Vera
```

She reviews it, adjusts two phrases, and saves it to send after one more read-through tomorrow. One burden lifted.

Email is next. At the top of the list is Robin's, auto-tagged as #student-grad-current high priority. It's also from 1:51 PM: she missed seeing it before class. The message begins, "Dear Dr. Green, I'm applying to PhD programs and wonder if you might write me a letter of recommendation?" Crap, she thinks, and wishes she'd seen it earlier. "I'm looking at programs in Philosophy of Technology at MIT, STS at Cornell, and I'm also kinda considering staying here for the PhD in Digital Rhetoric. I know it's unusual to continue at the same institution, but I'm thinking there might be some research space in this program for me. The deadline is December 15th."

Dr. Green's fingers fly. She opens a new draft, deliberately not using her Typinator shortcuts:

```
Robin,

Absolutely yes. I'd be thrilled to write for you. Your insight
today about ML optimization as technological teleology was fierce,
top-notch graduate-level thinking. You stunned the room! That's
the third time this semester you've made big leaps that advance
our understanding.

I won't insult you with my standard recommendation template. Let
me share some data: you've contributed 23 substantive entries to
our collaborative vault (most of any student), your Git commits
```

show 6 major conceptual additions, and your seminar participation
scoring (yes, I track it, so I can write better letters for
brilliant students like you) puts you in the 98th percentile of
five years of graduate students.

But here's what the data can't capture: you think originally. Your
connection between Aristotelian causes and loss functions is the
kind of insight that can open new directions of study. If you
stayed for our PhD, we could co-author that conference paper, and
I could connect you with the AI Ethics group at the Institute.

That said, I'll write you a stellar letter wherever you choose to
go. MIT and Cornell would be lucky to have you. Send me your
materials when ready.

--Vera

She sends it immediately, then creates a Things project: "Robin Recommendation Letter" with subtasks for each school's specific requirements. VIRENS pulls Robin's past work from DEVONthink into a reference folder.

Finally, the annual report. This version is for Department approval before sending up the chain to the Dean and Provost; their versions aren't due until December. Still, the institutional requirement fills her with mild dread. She doesn't like pages of bureaucratic boxes demanding quantification of intellectual labor. But she triggers Observatory's annual report function, curious to see what her year looks like in aggregate. The screen fills with visualizations drawn from this morning's updated data. Her breath catches. The numbers tell a story she hadn't fully grasped:

Research Output: 3 peer-reviewed articles accepted (acceptance
rate: 60% vs. journal average 22%). 1,247 citations total, up from
894 last year. H-index climbed from 11 to 12. The controversial
2022 technical taxonomies piece has generated 89 citations this
year.

```
**Writing Production**: Obsidian's Git history shows 147,000+
words drafted, 43,000+ revised to polish. 892 literature notes
created. 234 permanent notes in the Obsidian Zettelkasten. Book
manuscript: 67% complete with four chapters drafted.

**Teaching Innovation**: 112 students taught across four courses.
Teaching evaluations: 4.4/5.0. Pedagogical experiments: 15 new
active learning techniques tested, 8 in permanent practice. Peer-
rated assessments of draft quality (tracked privately) increased
by 23% on average between first and final drafts.

**Code & Infrastructure**: 2,847 lines of Python and .zsh and
.config files and templates for Observatory. 156 Git commits. 34
Keyboard Maestro macros. 18 Hazel rules. The entire academic
workflow automated and documented.

**Service Without Suffering**: 47 committee hours logged, but
Things shows committee work was batch-processed in focused blocks,
never bleeding into research time. Said no to 12 requests. Said
yes to 3 that aligned with research.
```

Dr. Green stares at the screen, startled at herself, thinking for a moment she must have made some decimal-place error in the annual report VIRENS templates she'd adapted. Observatory generates the university's required narrative from the same data and a template:

```
This year represents significant acceleration in research
trajectory while maintaining teaching excellence. The integration
of democratic theory with technological criticism has opened new
avenues, evidenced by the sharp increase in citations and
invitations to contribute to edited collections. The book
manuscript 'Technologies of Persuasion and Domination' progresses
ahead of schedule. Teaching innovations, particularly in graduate
seminars, have produced exceptional student work, with three
students presenting at national conferences.
```

It continues. Flourishing, not drudgery. The productivity that makes the Dean want to pile on more committees is the result of strategically saying no, automating the automatable, and ferociously protecting deep work. VIRENS has helped her become more productive and make that productivity visible and defensible. She exports the report to PDF, saves it to DEVONthink with tags #annual-review #evidence #protection, and creates a Things task to polish it next week. Her phone shows 5:17 PM, and she can hear the student marching band and drum line practicing outside. Time to head home.

She stands and feels lighter than she has since the semester's second week. The committee rejection is drafted, Robin's letter will be a pleasure to write, and her annual report is a celebration doing a heel turn as compliance. She puts in her headphones, switches her focus mode to "moving," and closes the office door behind her. As Dr. Green moves down the empty hallway, Siri reads aloud her evening summary: "Two Deep Work sessions scheduled for tomorrow. Book manuscript 67% complete. No committee or Department meetings scheduled tomorrow." Her playlist for the walk home kicks in with Algiers, "The Underside of Power."

Dinner is a simple pasta she makes herself and eats alone, missing her partner's more ambitious cooking. After, Dr. Green stands at the kitchen sink washing her single plate and glass. She'd ordinarily be helping her daughter with homework while her partner cleaned up. But they're with her partner's family, a trip she'd bowed out of citing mid-semester obligations. She'd decided to pass on the unflagging pointed questions about "what exactly tenure will get if you still have to work so hard."

She opens her laptop on the kitchen counter and triggers her "sunset" Keyboard Maestro macro. The screen fills with satisfying activity. Hazel gears up: seventeen files swept from ~/Desktop into `/Archives/2025-10-07-Tuesday/`, the Downloads folder cleared except for three PDFs still awaiting metadata, today's forty-three Drafts entries archived to the daily log. Tomorrow's folder structure manifests: `2025-10-08-Wednesday/` with subfolders for English 101, English 512, and Deep Work.

The "Processing" folders empty themselves while "In-Progress" items remain untouched. Finally, Git commits the day's Obsidian changes: `EOD 2025-10-07: 47 notes modified, 12 created, 3 orphans connected.`

She watches the progress bars, thinking about Scotch. Her annual review deserves a Scotch, she tells herself. She pours herself a glass of Pinot Noir. She picks up the iPad and settles on the couch, joined soon by Tully, the smaller of their two rescued tomcats, who slumps across her lap. He purrs with the warm iPad propped on his rump. Maybe it doesn't need to be *that* much of a celebration, she thinks. Gaius takes position at the far end of the couch, close enough for company but beyond the range of a jealous swat from Tully. She'd opposed naming cats after figures from antiquity on principle, given the ways that many met their ends, but the partner had insisted.

She opens Atanasoski and Vora's *Surrogate Humanity* on her iPad, bumping it up the queue ahead of Christian Fuchs's thick prose on digital labor. Tonight, she wants something lighter. As she reads, she highlights freely, knowing the passages will flow to Readwise tagged #pleasure-reading, not tomorrow's urgent queue but next week's "Interesting Ideas" review. She sits up to make the first highlight from Chapter 1, disturbing Tully: "If the human condition (in the Arendtian sense) is defined in terms of how one acts in and upon the world, including through work and labor, then dreams of mechanization are never just about efficiency, but also inevitably about the kinds of work and labor that are unfit for a human to perform." Productivity and ML optimization, she thinks, and leaves it for later to pursue.

Chapter 2 yields another small gem: "In spite of claims that we are entering a new social and economic moment that, enabled by technology, can finally fully free the human from drudgery of service work and repetitive tasks that can now be done by machines, the reliance on surrogates who perform devalued tasks to enable the freedom and autonomy of the liberal subject is one that dates back to imperial modernity and the very premises of capitalist

developmentalism." Her book manuscript could use this in Chapter 5, but she simply highlights and moves on. For now, the value is in the pleasure of the ideas.

A few minutes before 10, she closes the e-reader app and checks DEVONthink's scheduled tasks, curious about what will happen while she sleeps. The overnight queue scrolls up:

```
2:00 AM - AI Training: Process today's 14 new documents including
Pickering critique and response notes. Update concordance with
1,247 new terms. Strengthen conceptual links between 'democratic
technology,' 'technical citizenship,' and 'optimization
functions.'

3:00 AM - See Also Refinement: Analyze co-occurrence patterns in
today's documents against 10,847 existing items. Weight
connections based on semantic similarity. Surface non-obvious
links between Pickering's critique and previous critical responses
to Dr. Green's work.

4:00 AM - Deep Index Update: Process full text of Mitcham 1987 and
Feenberg 1991 additions. Extract named entities. Map conceptual
network. Generate suggested tags based on content clustering.

5:00 AM - Weekly synthesis: Compile connection patterns from past
seven days. Flag emerging themes. Generate visualization of
knowledge graph growth.
```

The technical poetry of it appeals. Memory palace database sestina Mad-Libs red-string murder wall indices while she dreams. By morning, DEVONthink's processing will have found connections she hasn't consciously made, patterns in her thinking she hasn't recognized. She moves to put away the iPad, but notices that Observatory notification from earlier today still pulsing gently. She taps it.

```
New citation: _Zeitschrift für Medientheorie_, October 2025.
Citing Green 2022 'Technologies of Argument.'
```

The author's name is familiar: Noemi Zimmermann, from the Universiteit van Amsterdam. She recalls Zimmermann's MLA presentation in New York the previous winter, a bizarre multimedia performance-lecture on Achille Mbembe and Jenny Holzer that cleared two-thirds of the initially packed-to-capacity audience and left the remaining third bewildered and transfixed. She'd been in the remaining third. The preview shows a tantalizing fragment:

```
Greens Taxonomie der technischen Argumentation bietet einen
Rahmen, der einen zyklischen Prozess in eine halbverdrehte
Schleife umwandelt--
```

--and the sentence cuts off. She could run it through DeepL right now, find out how Zimmermann is using her taxonomy. She ⌥⌘NNs a natural-language Things task: "Tomorrow 10am read Zimmermann citation - brew the good coffee for reading." VIRENS schedules it for tomorrow's first Deep Work block.

The iPad goes on its charging stand. The cats follow her down the hall, Gaius first with his three-legged thumpity-tripleting gait, Tully langorously downward-dogging before padding after. As she brushes her teeth and meanders through her evening gratitudes, she thinks about tomorrow: Zimmermann's citation awaiting translation, Robin's ML connection to develop, Chapter 5 enriched by tonight's reading. The house's empty presses less, she rhymes. Quiet something with esses in rest.

Her phone shows a final VIRENS notification before she puts it away: "All systems ready for Wednesday. First Deep Work block: 8:30 AM."

Tomorrow's possibilities await. Today, she's done enough.