

# NEW 103 Digital Technology and Society

## Technology Journal Assignment (35%)

**Due Dates: Oct. 27, Nov. 24(see below)**

Throughout the first semester of this class, you will keep a “technology journal.” This journal will be composed of two parts, and will eventually form the basis for the “Video Diary” assignment you turn in at the last class of the semester.

### 1. Daily writing.

As often as you like, but a *minimum* of 4 times per week, write down brief observations about your interactions with technology. Here are some examples:

**Sept. 21.** Running to class, I noticed the traffic light was blinking yellow. What kind of computer crash is responsible for that? Are roads information systems?

**Dec. 2.** Cold today, when I swipe my phone nothing happens. What do they do in the Arctic? Just not use phones?

### 2. Weekly paragraphs.

Each week between Sept. 18 and Nov. 24 – so at least 10 times – you will write a minimum of one substantial paragraph of reflection, based on one or more of your observations from that week. It is really essential that you do this every single week, rather than wait for the deadlines. Here's an example of such a paragraph.

**Paragraph, Sept. 24** Re: blinking lights, Sept. 21, let's think about the traffic system. When I'm riding my bike to work, I have noticed that, at rush hour, if I'm going in the right direction I can easily make one green light after another, but if I go in the opposite directions I will get stopped at almost every light. So the light cycles seem to have been optimized for rush hour traffic. This system must quickly become pretty complex (what happens when two big streets cross each other? What happens when you get past the centre of town?) This is probably a difficult mathematical problem with no perfect solution – so no matter how well it's planned, some people are always going to be frustrated. And if something goes wrong – like a traffic accident, or a light that has stopped working – then all the efficiencies would be for naught. The traffic system aims to move people around as quickly as possible; but it doesn't take into consideration what else might be going on around them. In this sense it is an *impoverishing* information system rather than an *enriching one*. I wonder what it would take to make traffic an information-rich experience? I wonder what Adam Greenfield would say about this?

Notice that this paragraph has some neat ideas in it, but they are not tied together as logically or seamlessly as you might expect in a paper. Also, no research has been done – these are simple reflections that extrapolate from an experience in thoughtful but not necessarily systematic way. This particular paragraph also refers back to one of the course readings, but that is not required.

## **Notes on Composition**

Since this is an odd format that mixes very quickly-jotted notes with short pieces of contemplative writing, you may want to be able to access your diary quickly at any time. Two technologies are well-suited to this:

1. a small paper diary that you can easily carry in your backpack or perhaps pocket
2. an application like Google Docs, which allows you to access and edit your documents from any device, including your phone. I'm inclined to this option, because I always lose my notebooks, but you may prefer (1). If you do choose Google Docs, and you have a somewhat recent Android phone, you may be interested in making a home screen shortcut directly to your diary. See these instructions: <http://goo.gl/0yNzX6> Iphone users: you're on your own!

## **NOTE ON DUE DATES**

You will hand in your diary in two parts over the course of the semester, but I will mark them as a single assignment at the end of the semester. The two due dates ensure that you work consistently and effectively.