

Can you code away the messy humans after all?

Blockchain as a techno-social system

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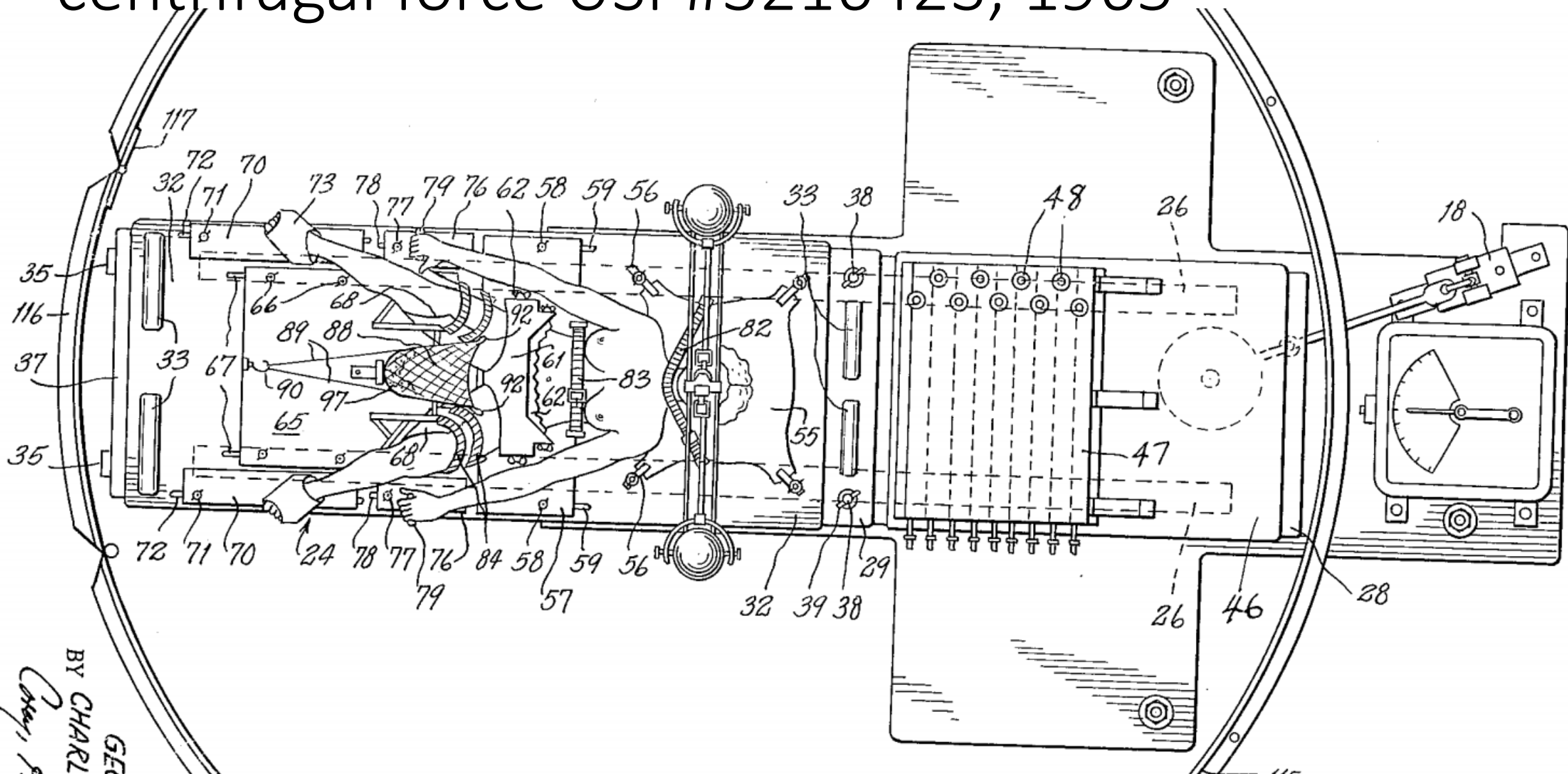
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This is Charlotte and George (Blonski).
She loves children. He is a mining engineer.

Apparatus for facilitating the birth of a child by centrifugal force USP#3216423, 1965



Don't be like Charlotte and George...

is everything that is technically possible,
makes actual sense for the individual user,
and even if it does, **is that use socially desirable?**

Will technology automatically change the world?
And do we want the world to be changed?

It's Déjà vu all over again...

1. Code is Law
2. Progress is inevitable: the future is like the present, but more, and better
3. Open, decentralized, distributed technology will re-shape the current closed, centralized political, economic, social modes of organization
4. The status quo will be disrupted beyond recognition
5. Incumbents will be replaced and disappear

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZEJ4OJTgg8>

It's Déjà vu all over again...

1. Law is more than Code. It is conflict resolution, negotiation, incentive...
2. Technological design choices are shaped by power
3. We tend to reproduce and reinforce existing inequalities on new technologies
4. Status quo is hard to change, progress is rarely teleological
5. Many incumbents are resilient or horrible dictu *useful, and valuable*

Web 1.0, web 2.0, record labels, newspaper publishers, media conglomerates, telcos...

Let's think about incentives...

- Why would consumers want to switch?
- Why would incumbent companies want to switch?
- Why would the hardware want to accommodate the switch?
(remember QWERTY)
- Why would the state want to switch?

Let's think about stakeholders...

- Can you bootstrap the blockchain revolution without the cooperation of those trusted middlemen that blockchain promises to do away with?
- What is the value proposition of current intermediaries and does any blockchain proposal offer a better one?
- Is it disintermediation, or rather, the introduction of a new layer of (technical) middlemen, who compete with / rely on the old ones?

Let's think about law...

Smart contracts are excellent for automating dumb transactions, but cannot replace the sophisticate **exception handling** infrastructure that is law:

- Establishes standards, and thus **creates certainty, trust**
- Maintains order, by **structuring incentives** on how (not) to behave
- Offers **dispute resolution** and mediation via courts
- Protects rights and liberties and thus **moderates structural inequalities, and power imbalances**

Let's think about the Big Picture

And if all goes well, and the blockchain revolution happens:

Do we know the pros and cons of a purely (or mostly) privately ordered world versus one that is for better or worse ordered through democratic institutions?

Is the blockchain based libertarian dream inherently better, more just, than what we produced so far through parliaments, courts, international agreements and technology?

The Blockchain&Society Policy Research Lab

1. Maps how blockchain applications are governed through the combination of technology, and community
2. Maps how stakeholders in social and economic domains think about the pros and cons of a blockchain adoption
3. Maps the adoption process from a social good perspective

<https://blockchain-society.science>
<https://www.ivir.nl/>

