Technology and Politics

PHIL 4310 - Philosophy of Technology

technology, choices, and values

- What problems to solve, what questions to ask.
- How to gather data to support solutions and answers.
- What solutions to propose, and how to design them.

ethics, politics, and design

- Moral and political properties of artifacts and designs
- The responsibilities of the designer
- What technology tells us about ethics

how can artifacts or designs be moral or political?

Langdon Winner

“What matters [in politics] is not technology itself, but the social or economic system in which it is embedded.” (251)

Sociological Reductionism

Evidence of Technology's Political Properties

- "Large-scale momentum of sociotechnical systems"
- Response of society to "technological imperatives"
- Transformation of human ends by technical means. (p. 252)

(1) using technology to settle a political issue

EXIT 33
109 WEST
Farmingdale

“Many of his monumental structures of concrete and steel embody a systematic social inequality, a way of engineering relationships among people that, after a time, became just another part of the landscape.” (253)

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NARROWS AV
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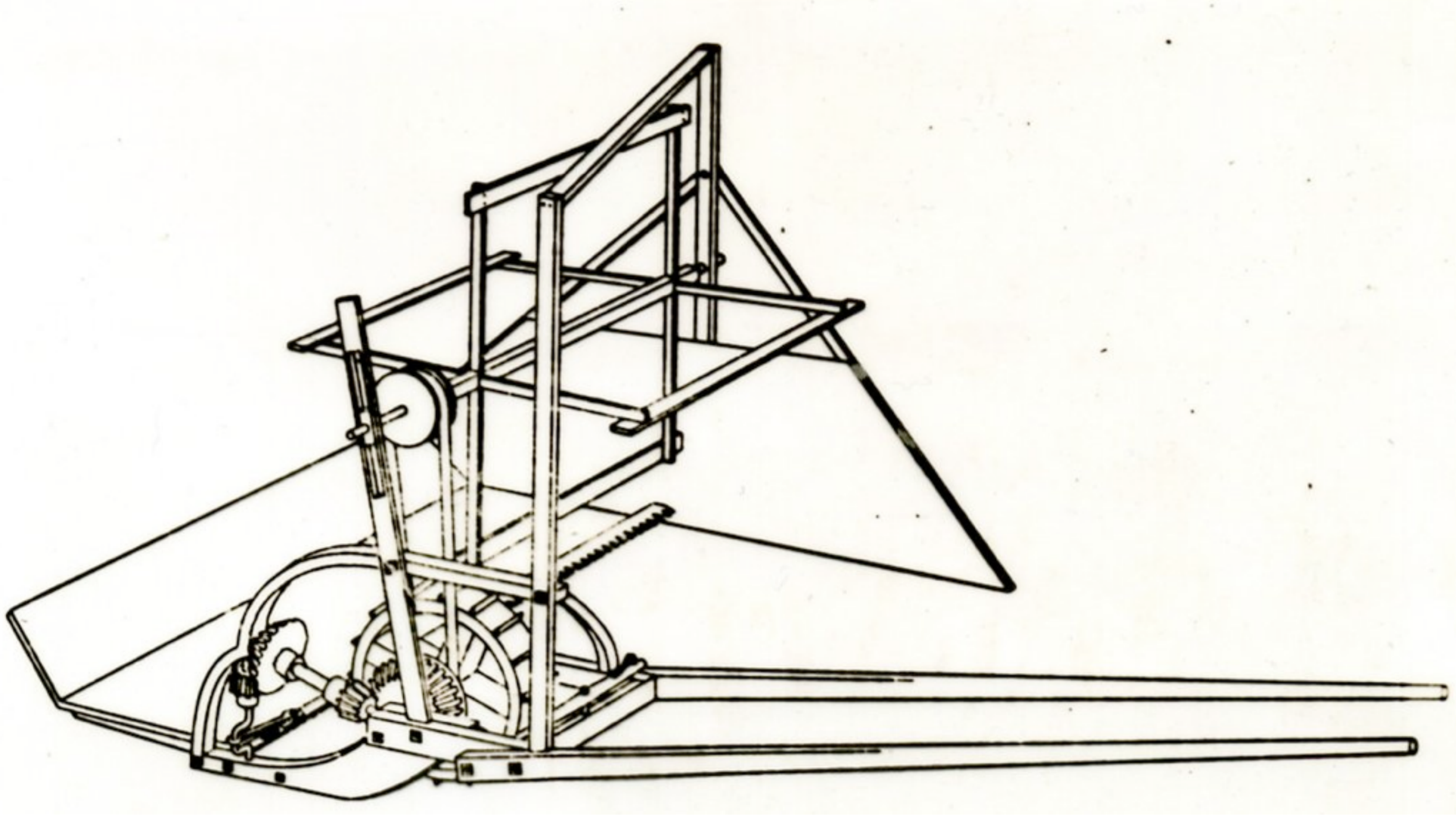
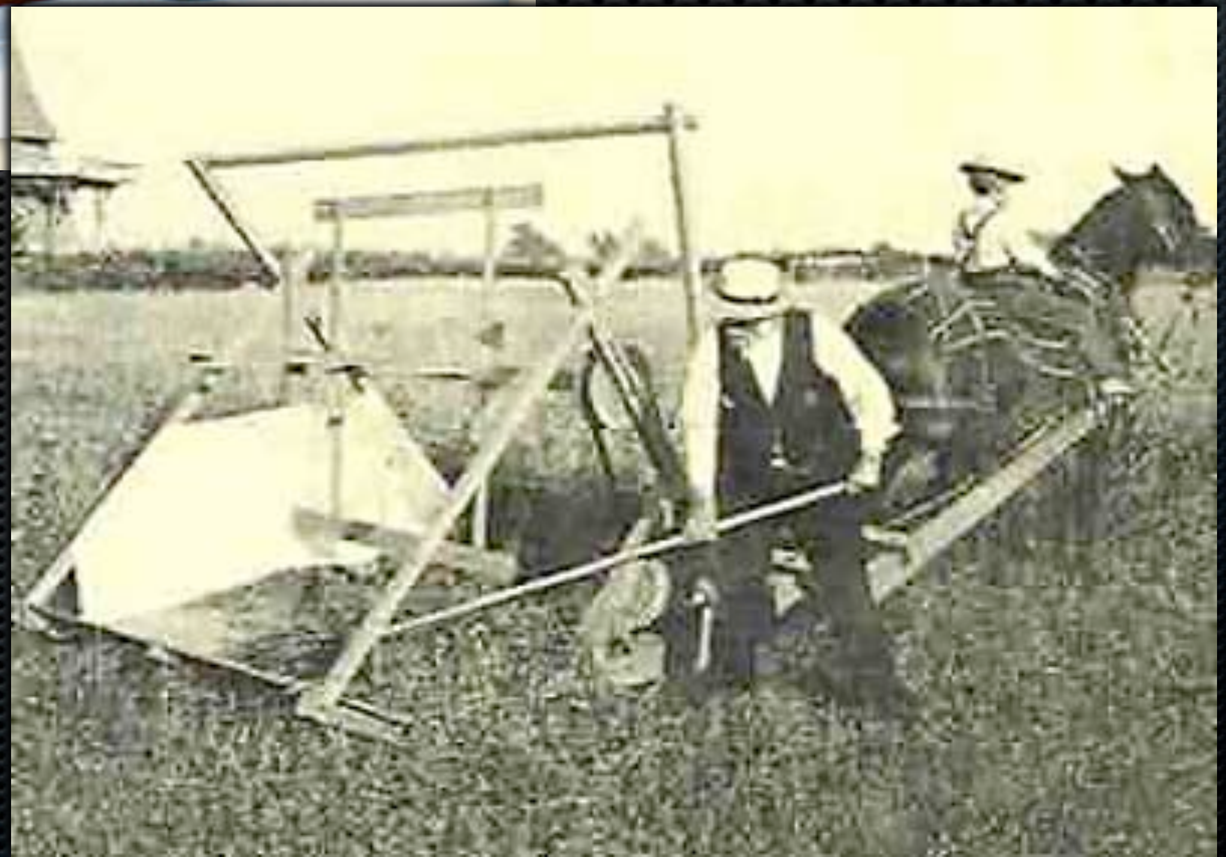
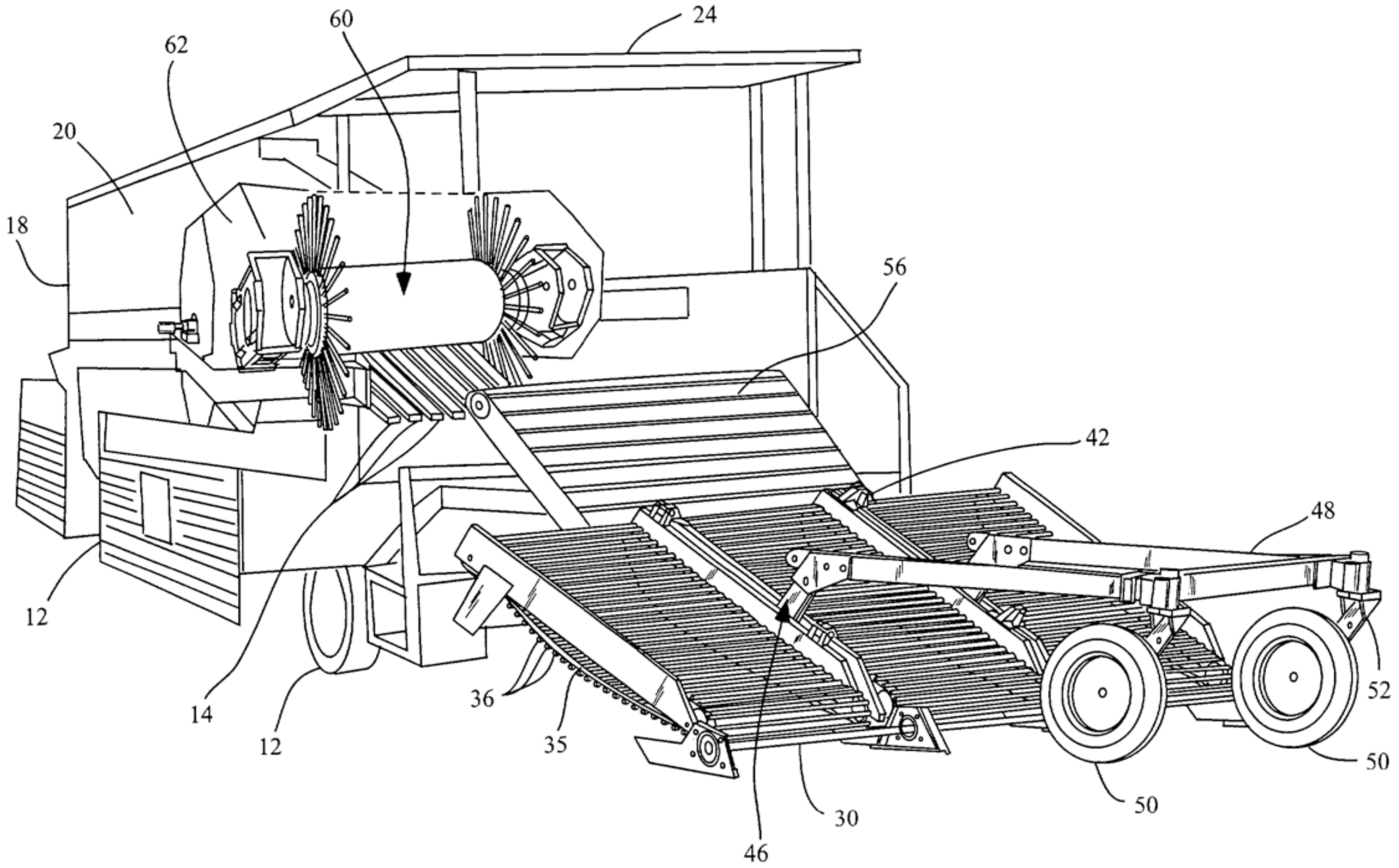
TOURCOACH
SETRA



McCORMICK

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FMC

“As far as I know, no one argued that the development of the tomato harvester was the result of a plot... What we see here instead is an ongoing social process in which scientific knowledge, technological invention, and corporate profit reinforce each other in deeply entrenched patterns, patterns that bear the unmistakable stamp of political and economic power. Over many decades agricultural research and development in U.S. land-grant colleges has tended to favor the interests of large agribusiness concerns.”(255)

"The things we call 'technologies' are ways of building order in our world. Many technical devices and systems important in every day life contain possibilities for many different ways of ordering human activity. Consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or inadvertently, societies choose structures for technologies that influence how people are going to work, communicate, travel, consume, and so forth over a very long time." (256)

(2) inherently political technologies

Friedrich Engels

DAF
DAF

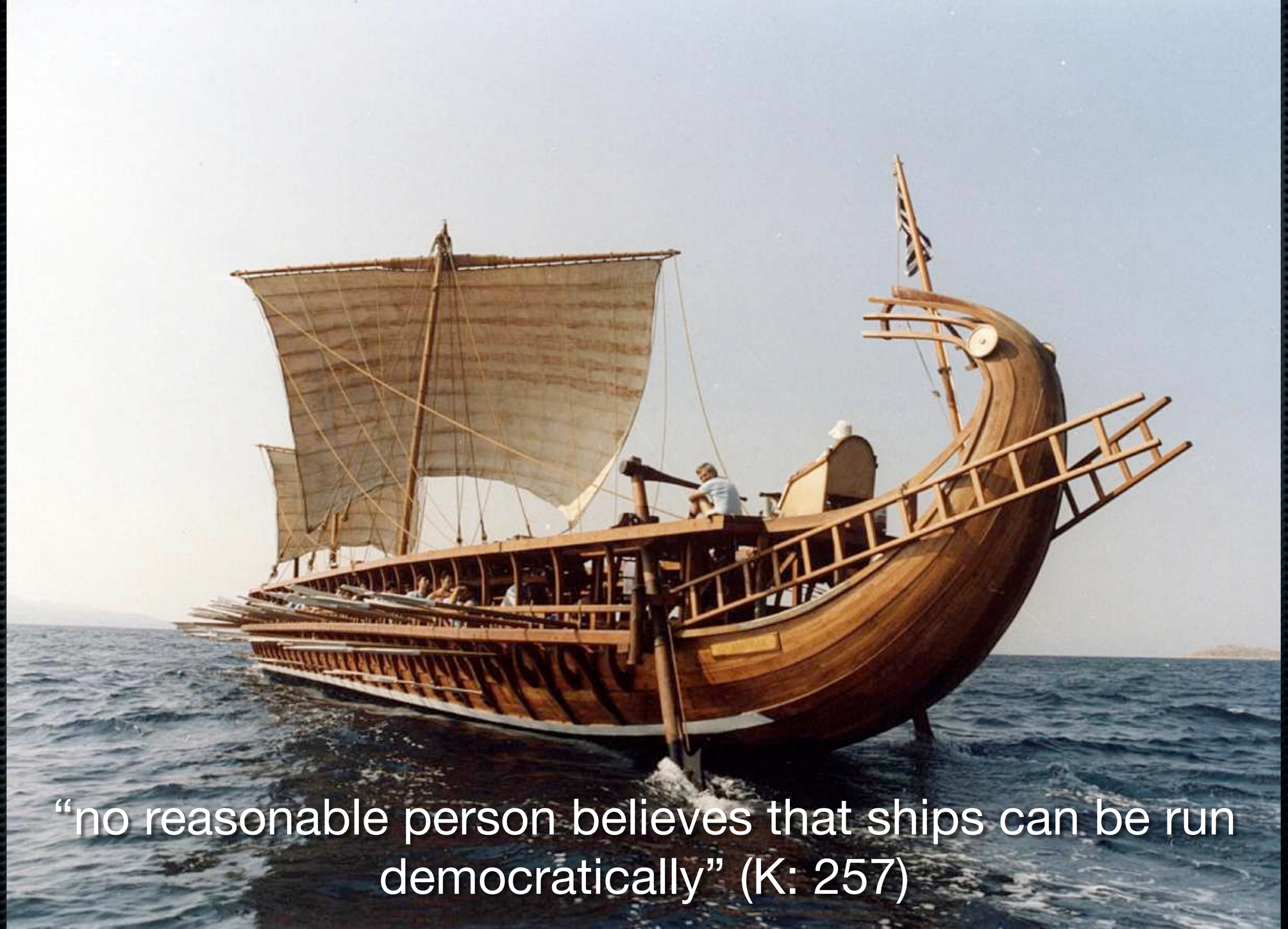
EXIT

“The automatic machinery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers have ever been.”

- Engels (quoted by Winner, K:257)

“If man, by dint of his knowledge and inventive genius, has subdued the forces of nature, the latter avenge themselves upon him by subjecting him, insofar as he employs them, to a veritable despotism independent of all social organization.”

- Engels (K:257)



“no reasonable person believes that ships can be run democratically” (K: 257)

“In this conception some kinds of technology require their social environments to be structured in a particular way in much the same sense that an automobile requires wheels in order to move. The thing could not exist as an effective operating entity unless certain social as well as material conditions were met.” (258)

strict requirement vs. strong compatibility

internal vs. external politics

“The issue here does not concern how many jobs will be created, how much income generated, how many pollutants added, or how many cancers produced. Rather, the issue has to do with the ways in which choices about technology have important consequences for the form and quality of human associations.”

(K: 259)

How artifacts can have political properties

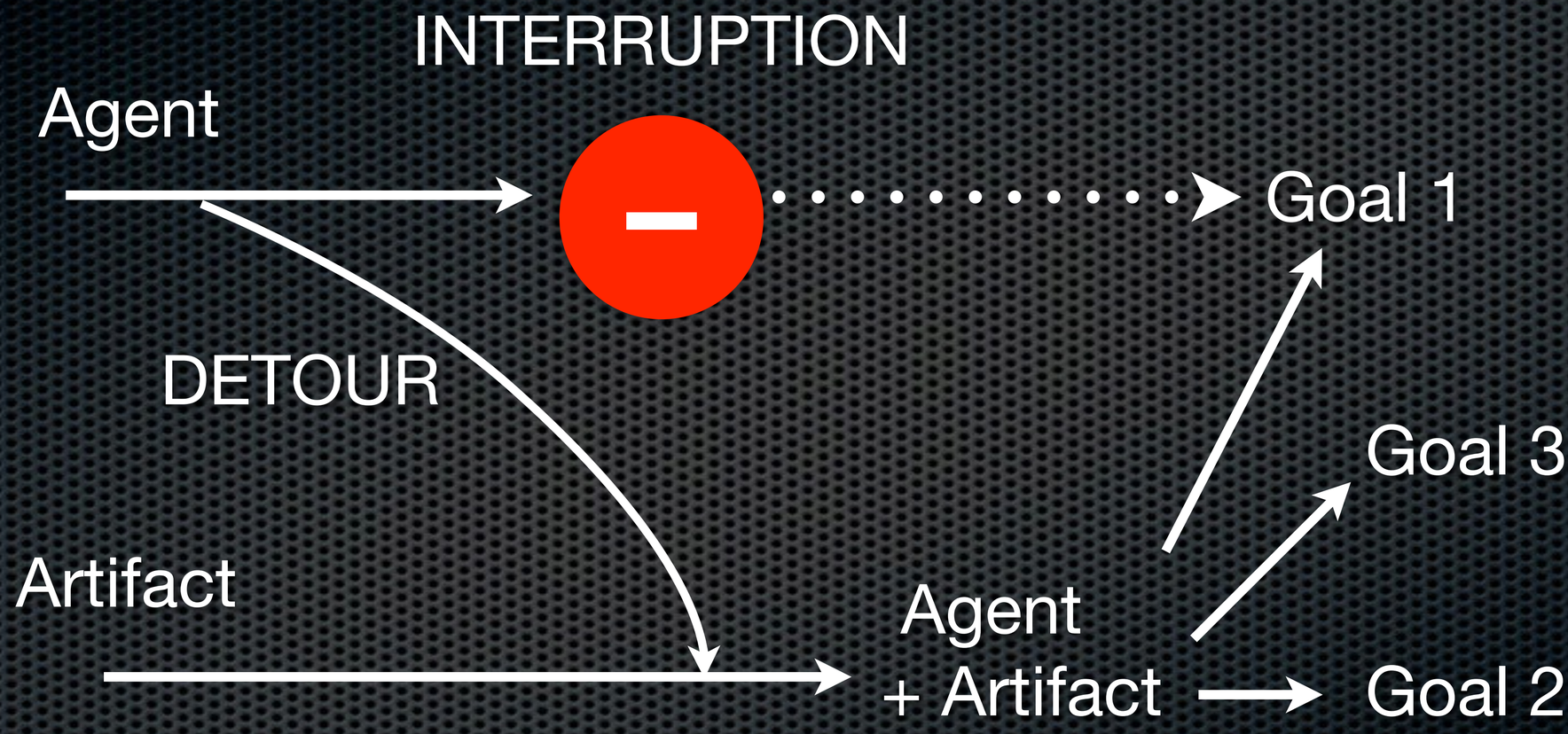
1. Designed to settle a political issue.
2. Inherently political technologies

mediation approach

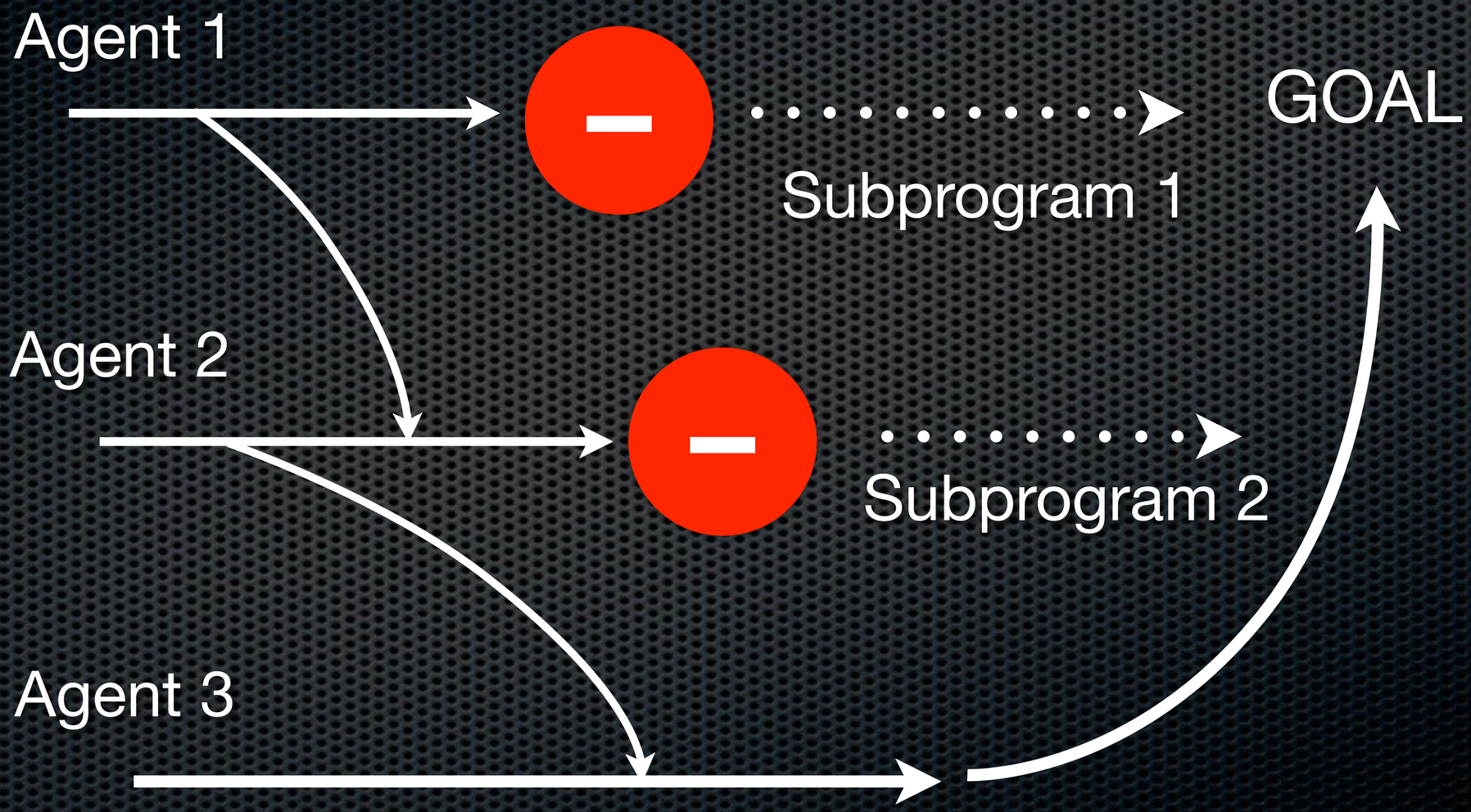
Peter-Paul Verbeek

Agent
Goal

Agent
Artifact
Goal


INTERRUPTION
Agent
Goal 1
DETOUR
Goal 3
Artifact
Agent
+ Artifact
Goal 2

Composition



SLOW
CHILDREN
AT PLAY

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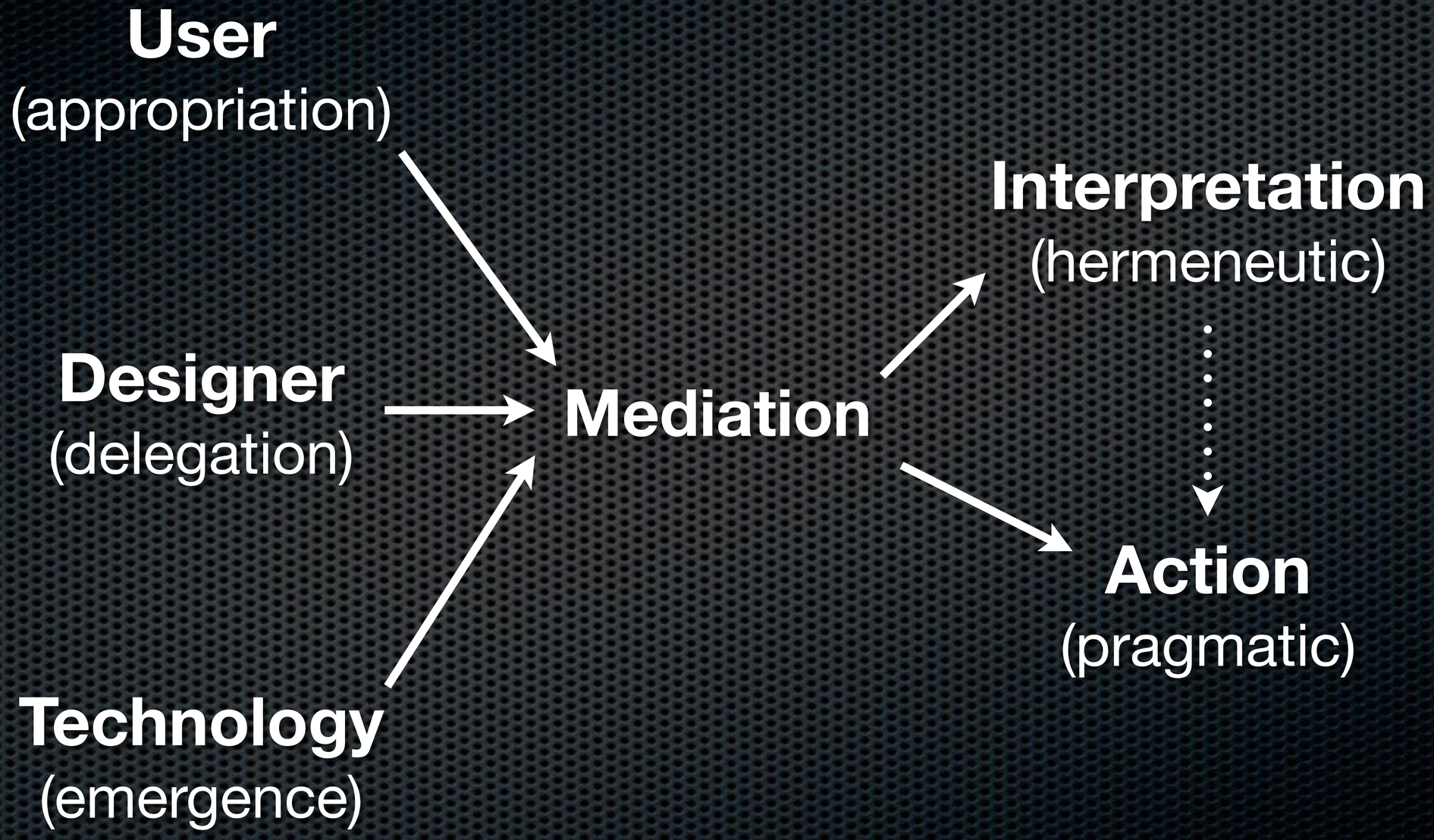
What are the responsibilities of the designer?

Who is responsible?
Designer or User?

H-1962


User
(appropriation)
Designer
(delegation)
Technology
(emergence)
Mediation
Interpretation
(hermeneutic)
Action
(pragmatic)

“moral imagination”

What can technology bring to ethics?