



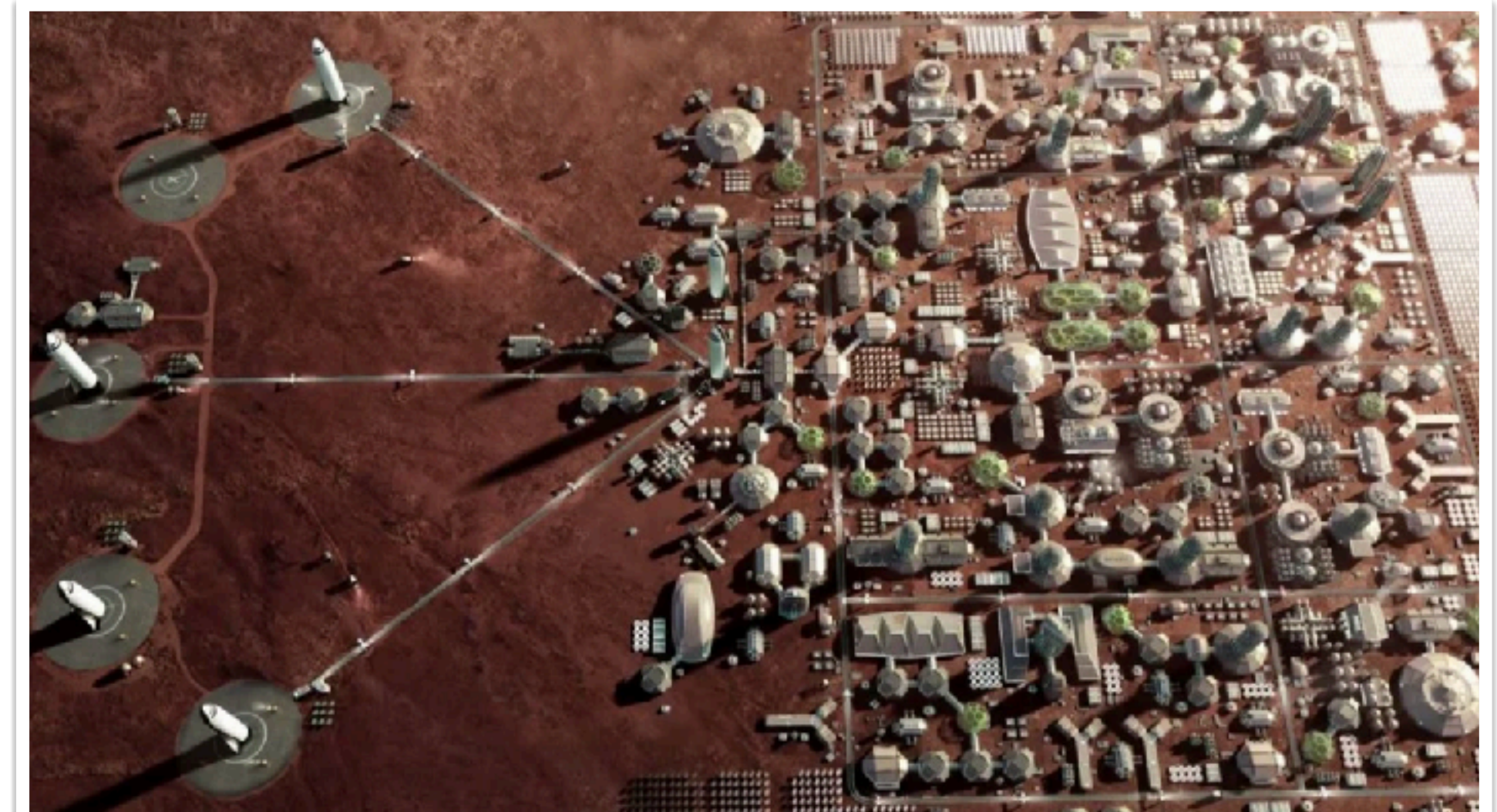
# What I'm going to talk about today...

- ▶ Fictional Technofutures
- ▶ Tracing Neuroenchantment: Examples of Neurotech in Science-Fiction
- ▶ Fictional Technofutures as merging narratives



# Technofutures are...

- ▶ ... **mediated statements** about our world being changed by new sciences or **technologies**, at a time when these technologies **have not yet materialised**.
- ▶ They come in the form of **presentations**, foresight reports, advertising, corporate visions, **images**, etc.
- ▶ They are fictional by nature, but they are "a fiction that masks its fictionality" (Iser 1993, 13)

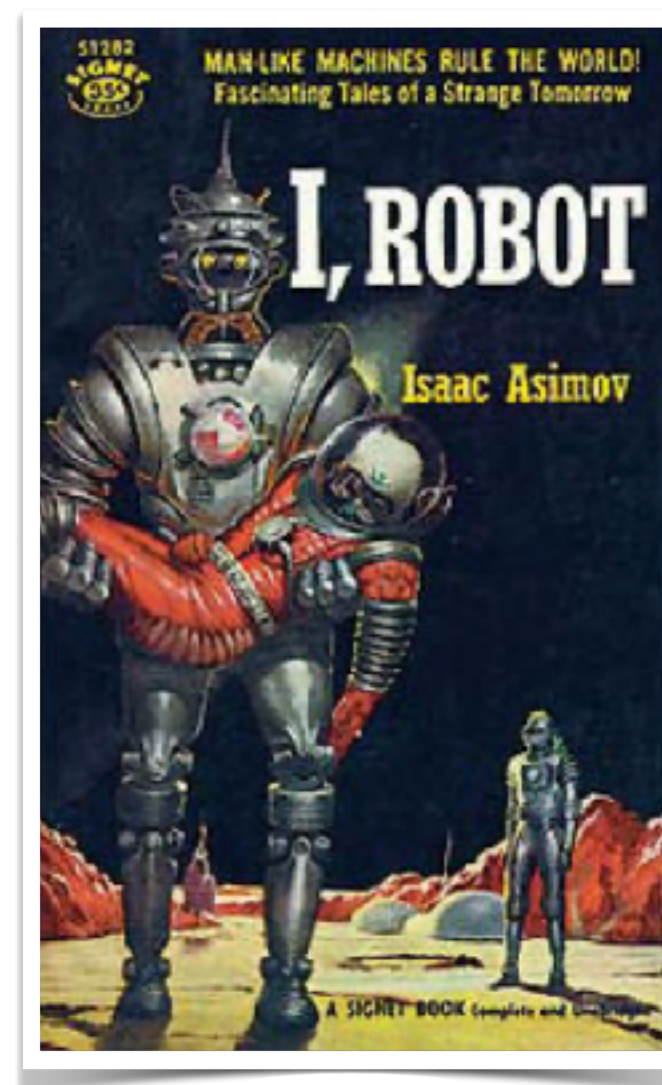




# Fictional Technofutures are...

... statements about the future, that **impact our thinking about the future** and are **clearly labeled as fictional**.

- ▶ Prominent examples:
  - ▶ R.U.R. – Rossum's Universal Robots (Capek, 1920)
  - ▶ The three laws of Robotic by Isaac Asimov



*"We have: One, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm."*

*"Right!"*

*"Two," continued Powell, "a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law."*

*"Right!"*

*"And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws."*

*"Right!"*



# Neuroenchantment & Neuromyths in popular culture

- ▶ How are Neurotechnologies framed in fictional technofutures?
  - ▶ Where do these ideas come from (**prefiguration**)?
  - ▶ How are they forged into a cohesive narrative (**configuration**)?
  - ▶ How do they impact the way we think about the technology (**refiguration**)?
- ▶ Neurotechnologies inspired the arts (in particular Science-Fiction) for the past decade, shaped different tropes and warnings
- ▶ Analysis is based on the Futures Circle: A Framework for Hermeneutic Technology Assessment (Mehnert, 2024)



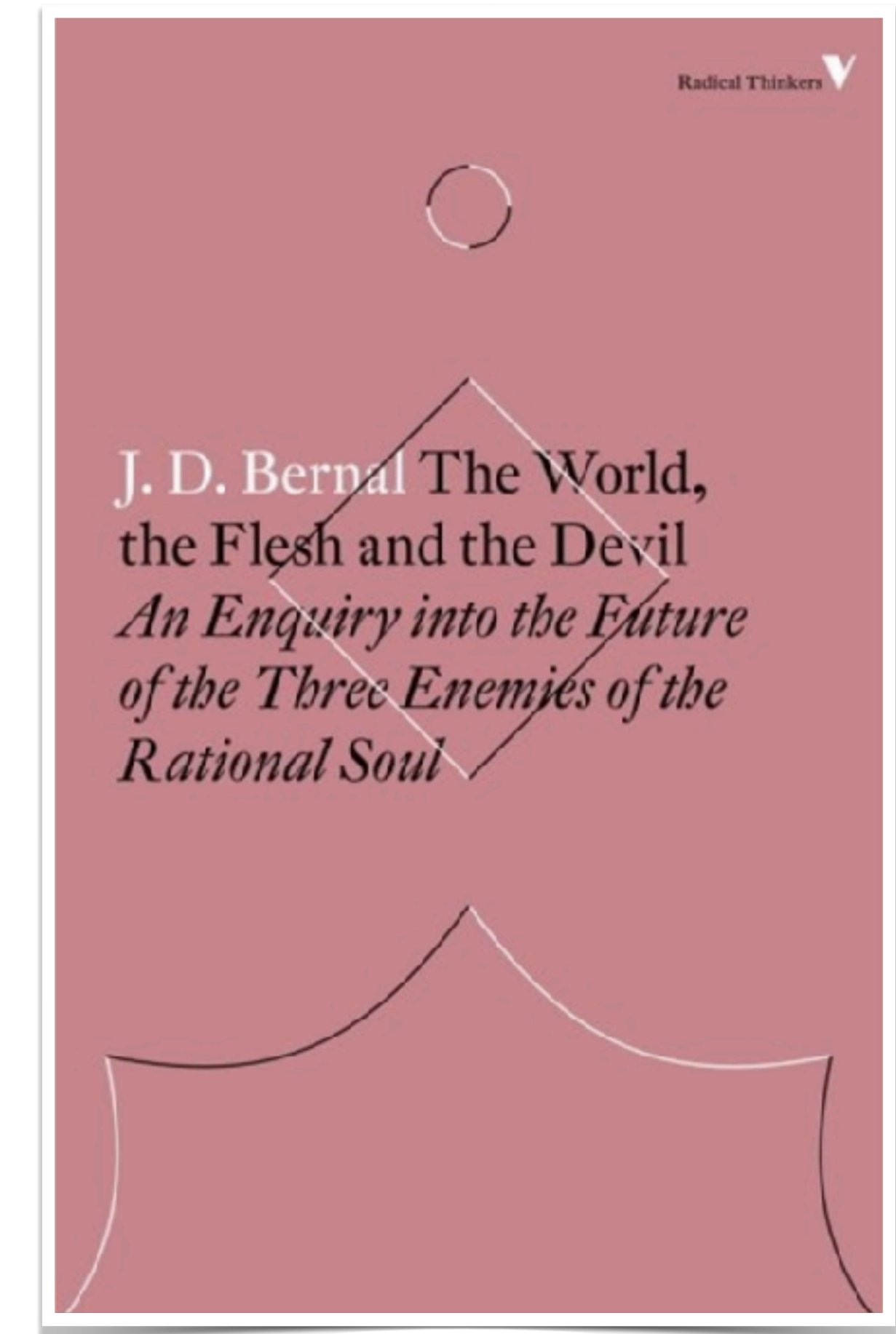
Mehnert, W. (2024). The  
Futures Circle—A  
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Technology Assessment.  
Technology and Language,  
14(1), 129–151. [https://  
doi.org/10.48417/  
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# Donovan's Brain in a Jar



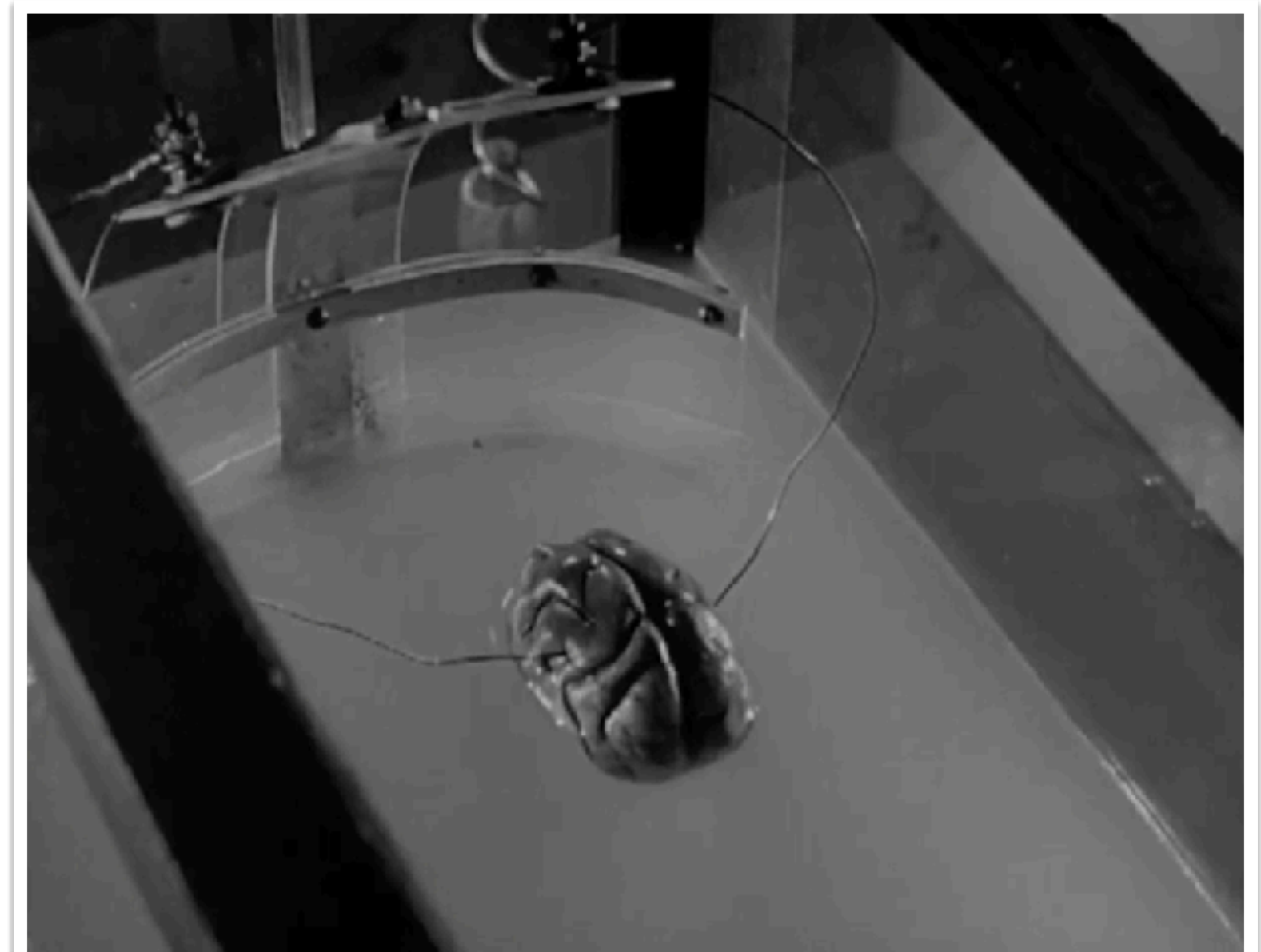
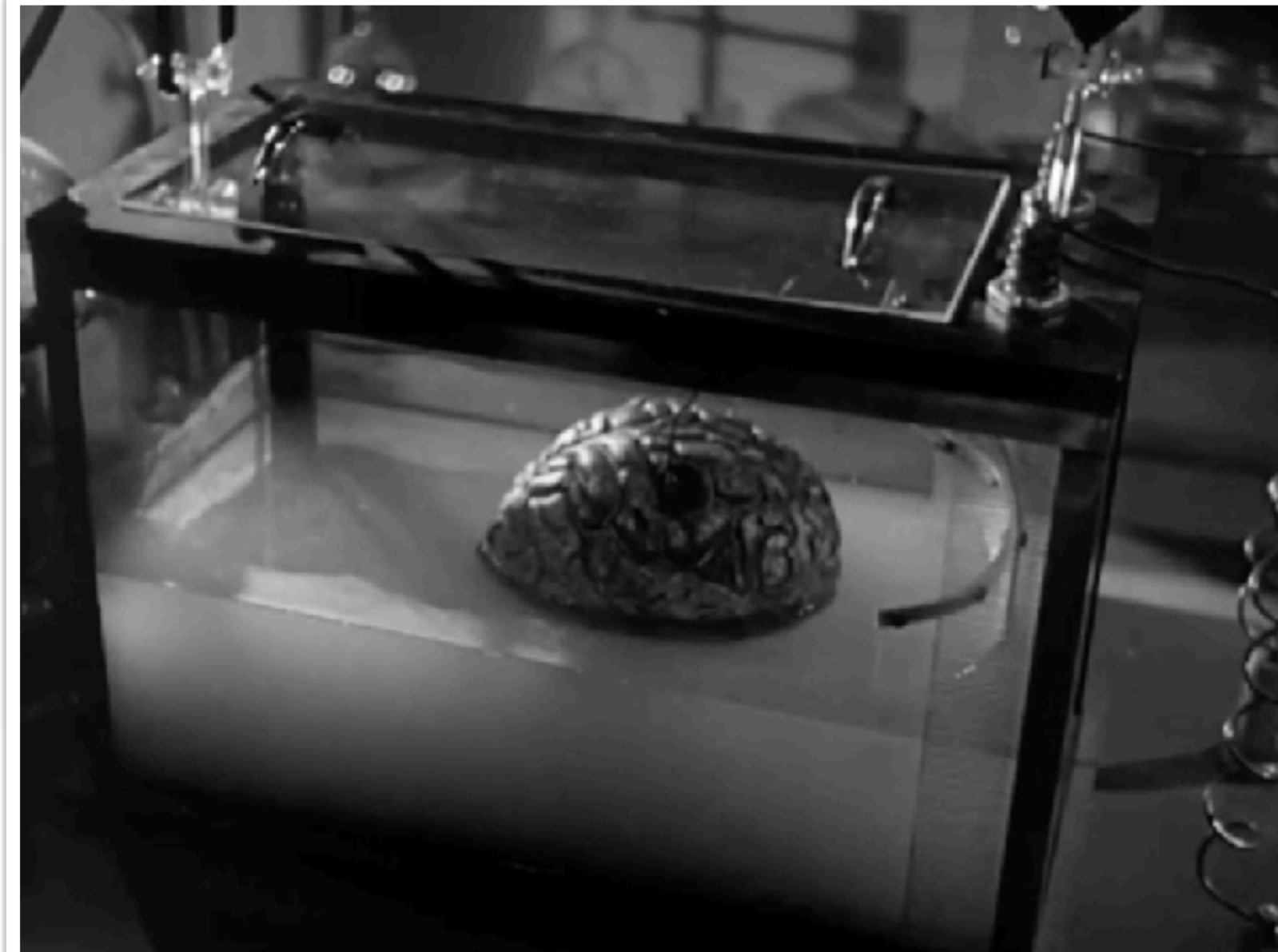
# The World, the Flesh and the Devil (Bernal, 1929)

- ▶ "Normal man is an **evolutionary dead end**; mechanical man, apparently a break in organic evolution, is actually more in the true tradition of a further evolution." (Bernal, 1920, 42)
  - ▶ Proto-Transhumanism (Kehl & Coenen, 2016)
- ▶ "**The brain (...) is connected in the anterior of the case** with its immediate sense organs, the eye and the ear (...). The eyes will look into a kind of optical box (...). The ear would have the corresponding microphone attachments and would still be the chief organ for wireless reception." (Bernal, 1920, 39)
  - ▶ Early visions of a technologically enhanced cyborg
- ▶ "He would still be **better off than a dead man.**" (Bernal, 1920, 42)



# Donovan's Brain (Feist, 1954)

The Brain-In-A-Jar trope









## Configuration

Antagonist  
manipulaor

## Technofuture

**If** we can connect the brain to  
machinesfunction

**Then** this enhancement will  
enable new powers and  
capabilities (telepathy)

## Prefiguration

J.D. Bernal's  
proto-  
transhumanism

## Refiguration

Hubris and  
loss of control

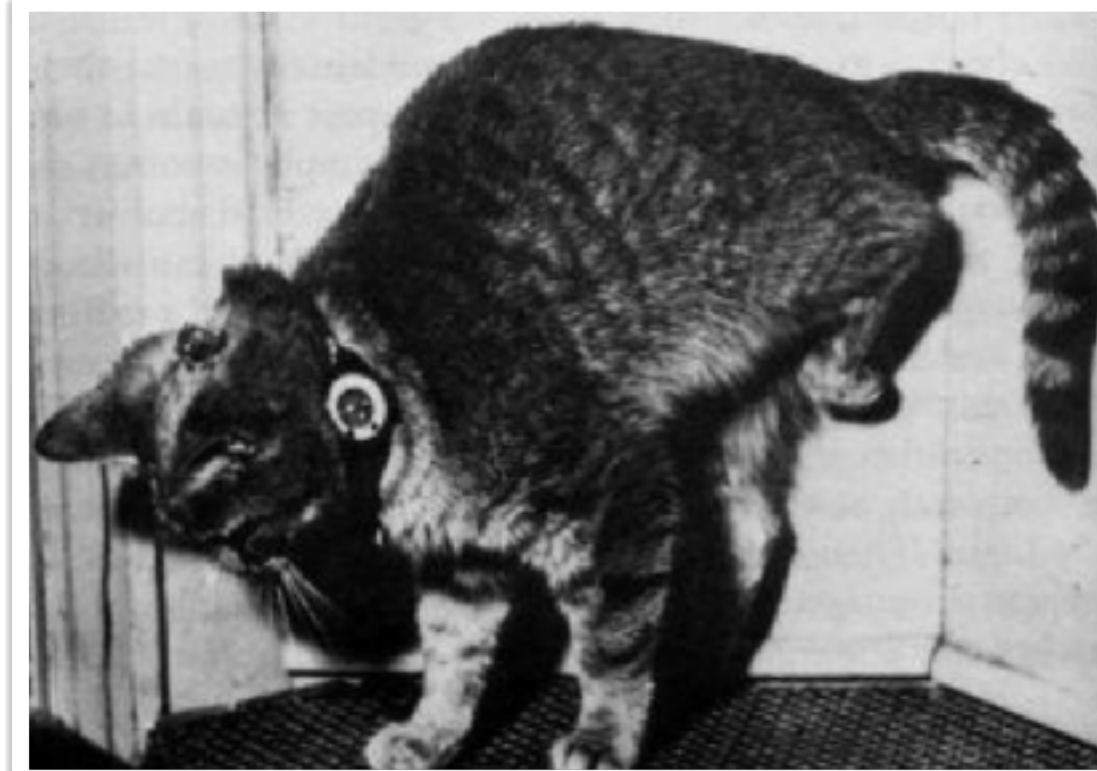
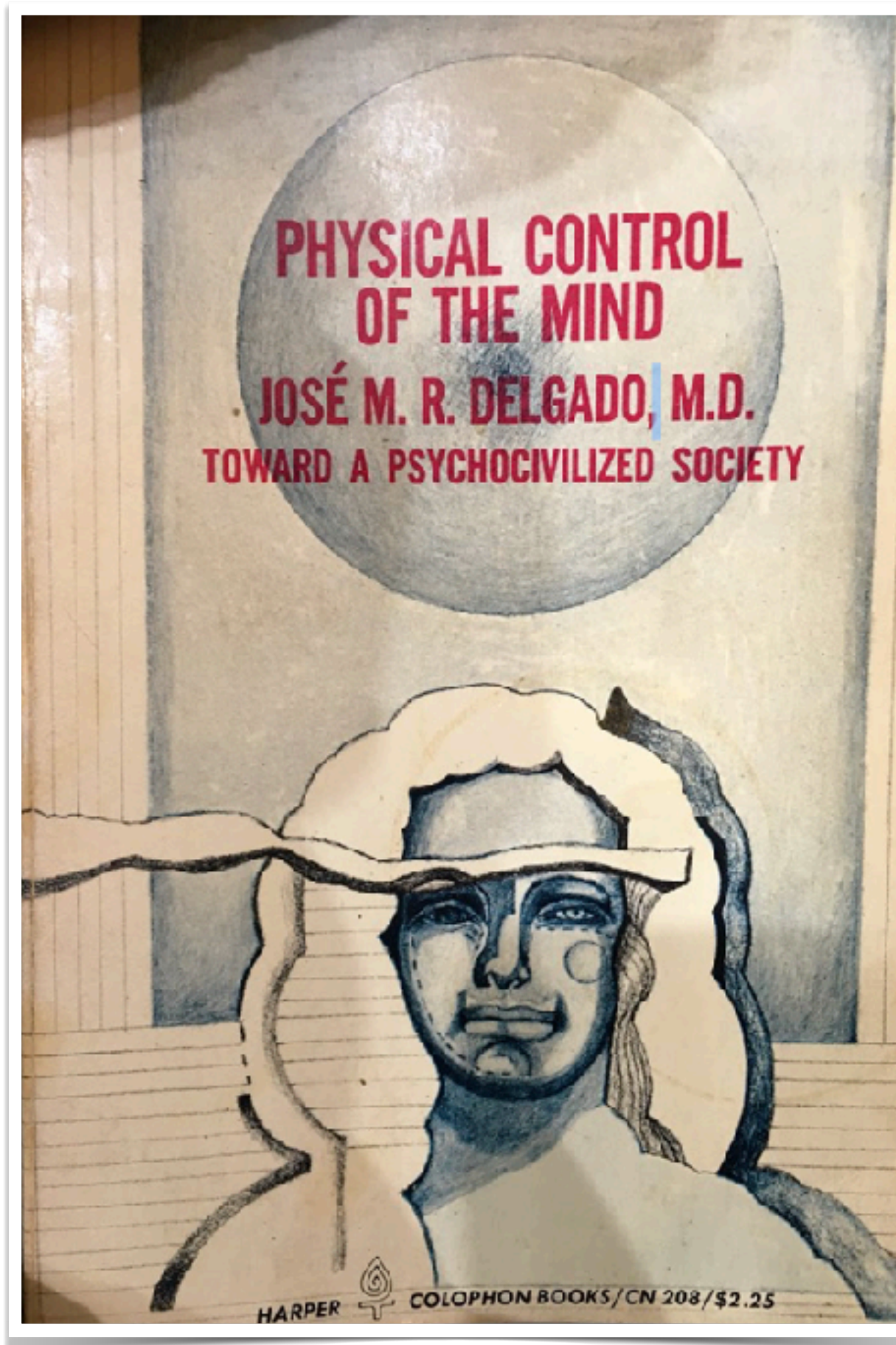


# Delgado's Terminal Man



# Physical Control of the Mind (Delgado, 1970)

Toward a Psychocivilized Society



„She was an attractive 24-year-old woman of average intelligence and education who had a long record of arrests for disorderly conduct. (...) The patient expressed a strong desire as well as an inability to alter her conduct, and because psychiatric treatment had failed, she and her mother urgently requested that some kind of brain surgery be performed in order **to control her disreputable, impulsive behavior**. They asked specifically that **electrodes be implanted to orient possible electrocoagulation of a limited cerebral area**; and if that wasn't possible, they wanted lobotomy.” (Delgado, 1970, p. 108)







# Terminal Man (Hodges, 1974)

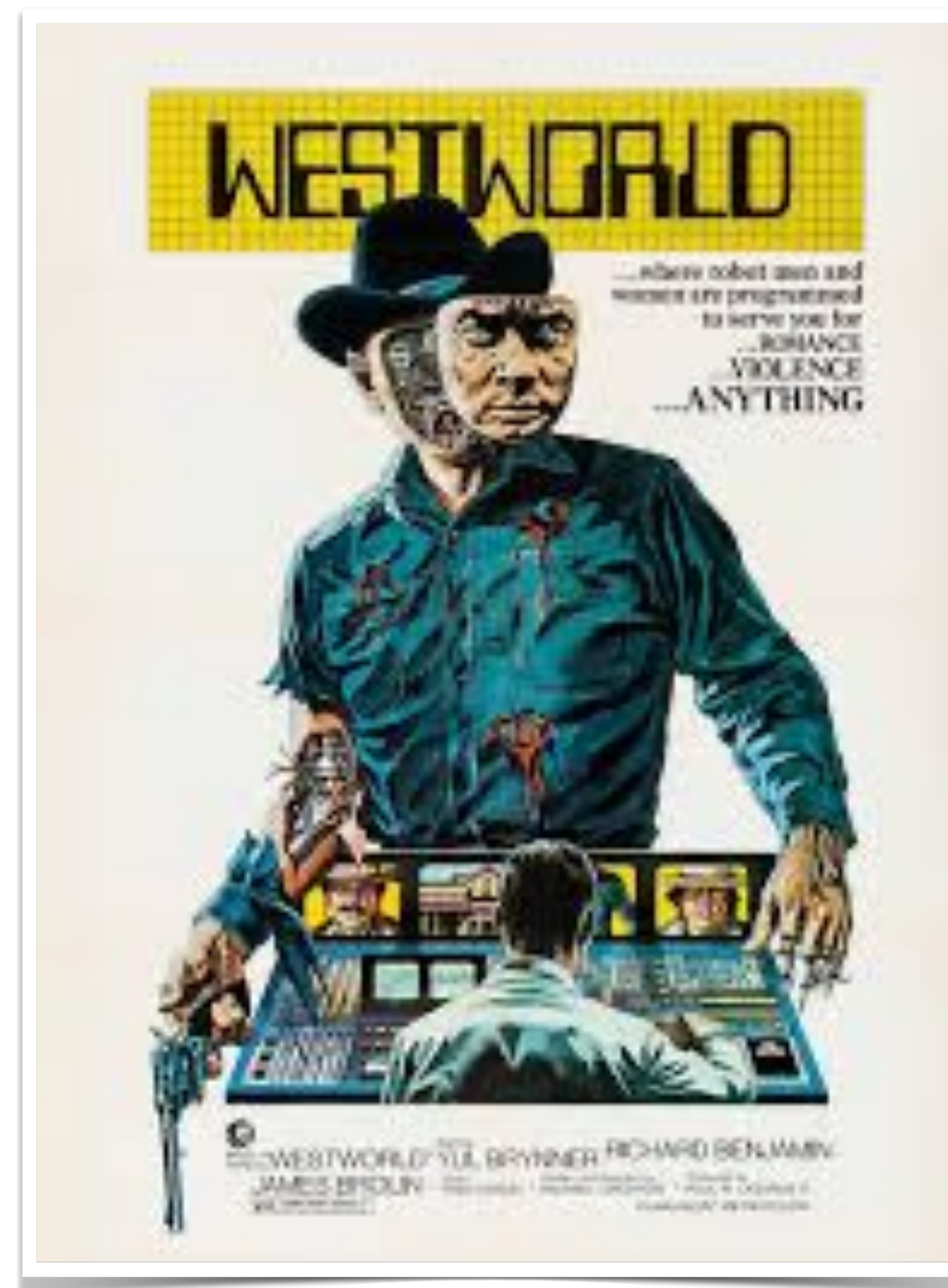
Based on the book by Michael Crichton (1972)





# Tech-Gone-Wrong as a narrative device

Crichton's critique on hubris





# Tech-Gone-Wrong as predictive device

Crichton's critique on hubris

## Configuration

Technology  
becomes  
Antagonist

## Technofuture

If BCI can help to control  
psychological diseases

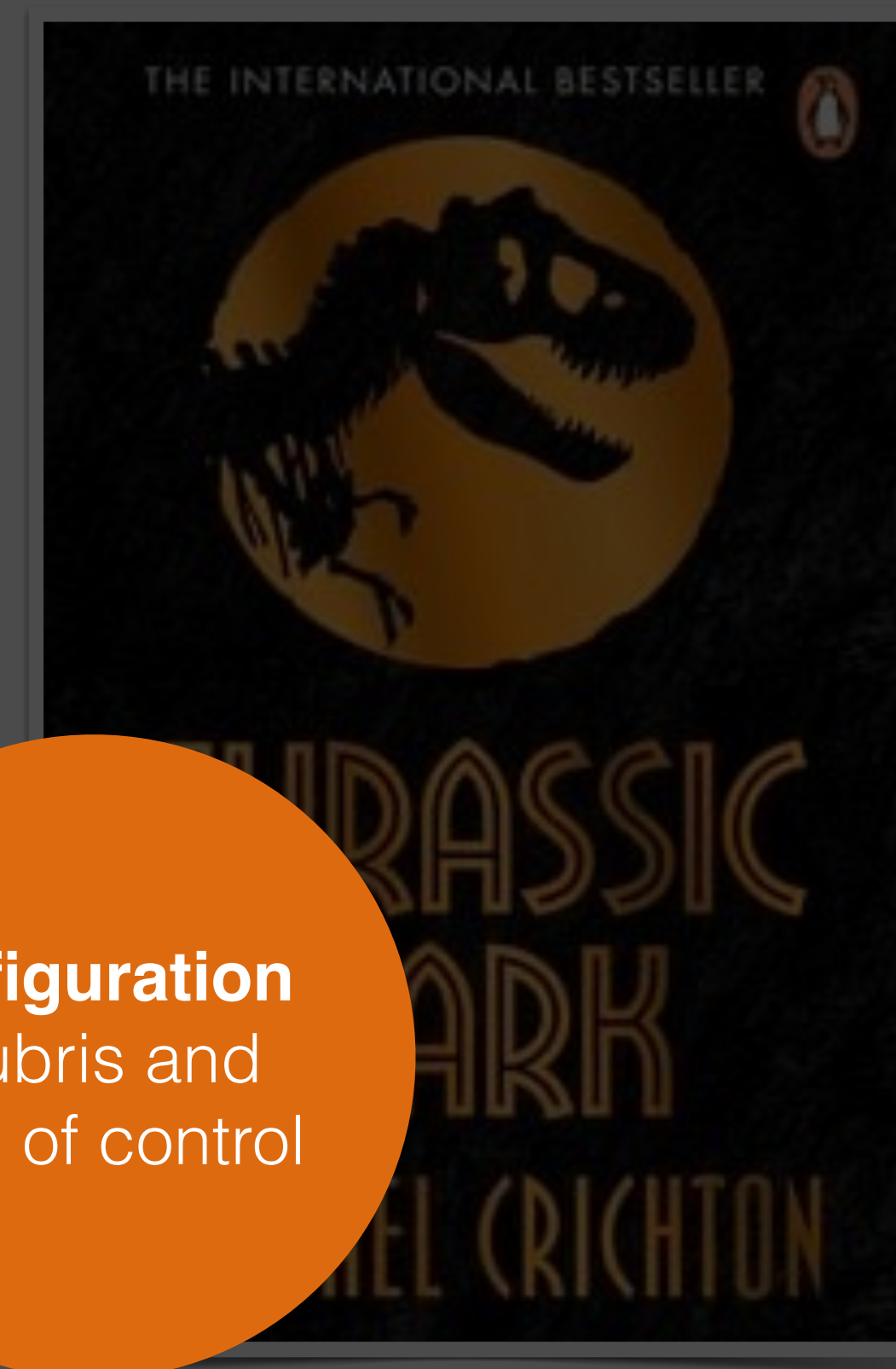
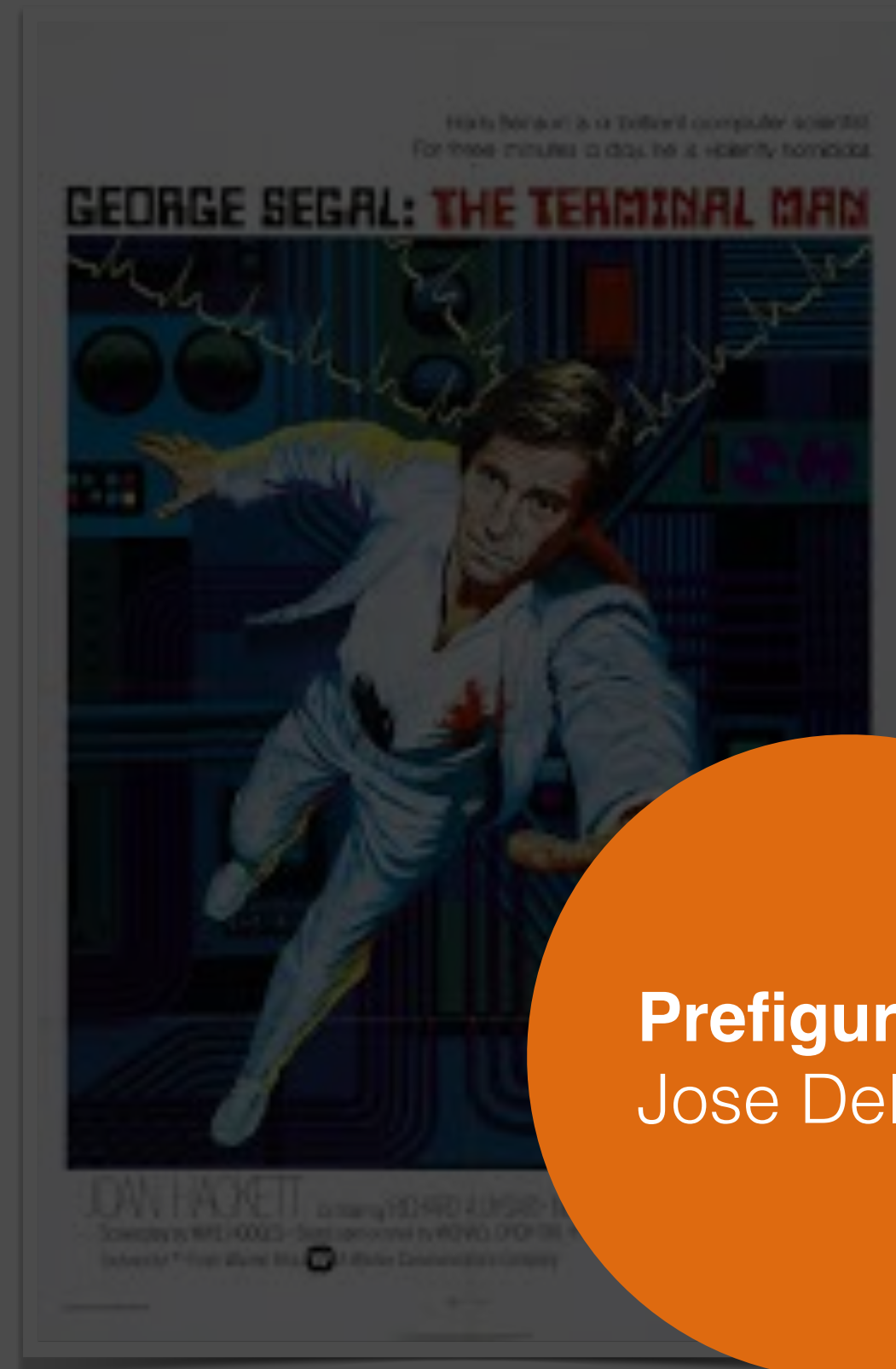
Then this will cause the  
opposite of what is wished for  
and we will lose control

## Prefiguration

Jose Delgado

## Refiguration

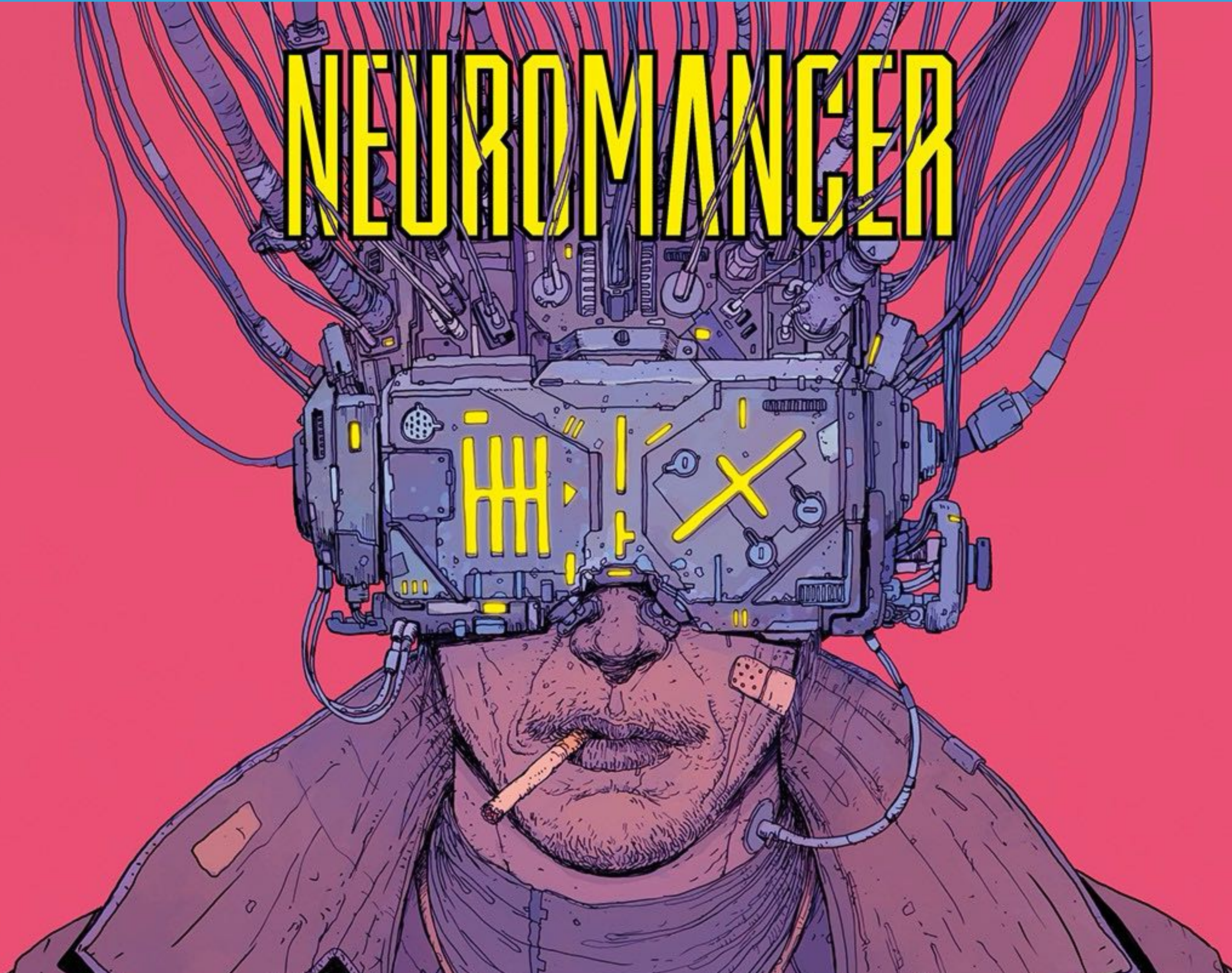
Hubris and  
loss of control



# Molly Millions and the Cut-Out Chip



# NEUROMANCER





# Gibson's Reality

Prefiguring „Structure of Feeling“ (Williams 1978, 133)

- ▶ **Technology enters Everyday Life**
  - ▶ Consumer electronics became ubiquitous (Casio watches, Sony Walkman, Nintendo Gameboy, Personal Computers, etc.)
- ▶ **Neoliberalism and Globalization**
  - ▶ Deregulation of markets empower multinational corporations
- ▶ „Structure of Feeling“
  - ▶ **Overwhelming by rapid pace** of technological and social change.
- ▶ Neuromancer reflects this disorientation
  - ▶ **disaffected loners** trapped in systems they can't control
  - ▶ They need to **hack the technology to regain autonomy**





# NEUROMANCER



"So the bastard who ran the place, he had some custom software cooked up. Berlin, that's the place for snuff, you know? Big market for mean kicks, Berlin. I never knew who wrote the program they switched me to, but it was based on all the classics. ... And they didn't tell me. They switched the software and started renting [my body] to specialty markets." (Gibson 1984, p. 162)



# NEUROMANCER

## Configuration

Antiheroes suffering from technology

## Technikzukunft Technofuture

If BCIs can connect to our brain and mind

## Prefiguration

„Structure of feeling“ of the 1980s

**Then** the mind (and the body) becomes a commodity and can be controlled or sold by others – without consent

## Refiguration

Loss of control and capitalist critique



# Conclusion

In (some, not all) Fictional Technofutures...

- ▶ Neurotechnologies are framed as **loss of control** and human agency
  - ▶ Technology allows manipulation by others
  - ▶ Often expressing a general feeling of overwhelmingness when faced with technological progress
- ▶ Neurotechnologies are framed as **hubris**
  - ▶ Fictional Technofutures articulate warnings
  - ▶ Either regarding experimenting with the human body or regarding societal changes
- ▶ Neurotechnologies become a **projections for societal worries** and imaginaries
  - ▶ It's not about the feasibility of the technologies but about the values attached to it
  - ▶ Those values get lost when imaginaries got *elite captured* by the industry (Gerola & Robaey, 2024, p. 57)

Thank you

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