

A Glitch in the System: Alienation and Glitches in *Psycho-Pass*

By

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Abstract

This project looks at societal and cultural lessons that help prepare society for the future by analyzing the first season of the Japanese animation *Psycho-Pass* (titled *Psycho-Pass I* in this project). While the framework focuses mostly on Western theorists, historical and cultural contexts between Japan and America are noted to show how intertwined media artifacts between these two nations are. Pulling in cultural Marxism and glitch theory to explore how alienated glitches – people ousted by society – challenge societal expectations formed the main framework used for analyzing *Psycho-Pass I* as a case study. This overarching claim argues that being a glitch in society means to challenge the status quo, but this can also lead to alienation. This framework pulls from Karl Marx’s concepts of alienation; specifically framed by Melvin Seeman, Isidor Walliman, and Frank Weyher. By also incorporating Rosa Menkman’s *Manifesto of Glitch Theory* and Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), the framework shows the interconnectivity of alienation, glitches, and actors, and how all of these, combined, show cracks in a system designed to be infallible. By pulling in Latour’s ANT with Menkman, this framing argues that glitches were designed from the start - that they are a necessary part of any working system, which plays into the “equal-importance” factor of ANT. Even though these glitches are important, the overarching system in power attempts to alienate those glitches because they represent imperfection in a seemingly perfect system. This analysis further expands to implications in the real world that argues and warns over humanity’s potential over-reliance on technology – specifically the type of technology that makes emotional decisions based on logical and mathematical equations.

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Introduction

“A world where humans’ state of mind and the tendency of their personalities can be quantified. While all sorts of inclinations are recorded and policed, these measured numbers used to judge people’s souls are commonly called ‘Psycho-Pass’.” - *Psycho-Pass*

This excerpt seen after the ending credits of every episode of *Psycho-Pass* season one (*Psycho-Pass I*) describes the state of Tokyo, Japan in the year 2112. *Psycho-Pass*, a Japanese animation (anime) that first aired in 2012, depicts a futuristic society run by an overarching computer system called the Sibyl System. The events in *Psycho-Pass I* forewarn a future in which society has become overrun and controlled by technology, to the point that free-will is a myth. In this thesis, I examine the effects a society dominated by technology has on people, fostering critical thinking about the ever-expanding technological world we currently live in. Specifically, I have created a framework integrating cultural Marxism, Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and glitch theory to explore how alienated glitches – people who are estranged from society and work against the system in place – challenge societal expectations, using the world of *Psycho-Pass I* as a case study. I argue that being a glitch in society means challenging the status quo; however, glitches can also suffer from symptoms of alienation from society. In *Psycho-Pass I*, glitches show the cracks of a seemingly perfect system, an idea that can be applied to everyday life. This case study has implications for critically analyzing new and popular forms of media that Americans already consume – in this case, anime – to explore current societal trends and to challenge the status quo. This analysis also considers the cross-cultural contexts of anime between the States and Japan.

The theories of alienation, glitch, and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) combine to create the framework in which I analyze *Psycho-Pass I*. This framework pulls from Karl Marx’s concepts of alienation, specifically framed by Melvin Seeman, Isidor Wallimann, and L. Frank Weyher. By also

incorporating Rosa Menkman's *Glitch Studies Manifesto* and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), my work shows the interconnectivity of alienation, glitches, and actors, and how all of these, combined, show cracks in a system designed to be infallible. ANT relates to Menkman's claim that glitches are features, not bugs; therefore, glitches are a necessary part of any working system, which plays into ANT's recognition that actors have equal importance. Even though these glitches are important, the overarching system in power attempts to eliminate those glitches because they represent imperfection in a seemingly perfect system. Although this is not a harmonious framework, putting these discordant analytical perspectives together expands the horizons for analyzing media regularly consumed for entertainment in America. This intersection of alienation, glitch, and ANT describes the setting in *Psycho-Pass I*.

I first discuss the key scholars and the main theories I pull from, including all supplementary scholarship. Following the critical theory, I discuss the globalization of Japanese animation (anime) in America and explain why *Psycho-Pass I* is an exemplary text for examining these theories of ANT, alienation, and glitch, followed by a brief summary of *Psycho-Pass I*. Once the theories, scholarship, and historical context have been established, I proceed with my analysis of the Sibyl System, Akane Tsunemori (the protagonist), and Shogo Makishima (the antagonist). This paper then concludes with a discussion of the ways new media analysis reflects real world analysis and reiterates the cross-cultural importance of anime in America, as well as asking the overarching question: what can we learn about our society by applying critical theories to the media we already consume?

Literature Review

Although there are varying methods of understanding and exploring the concept of alienation, the key strands being used in this study combine Marxist philosophical alienation, estranged labor, and feelings of alienation from dominant society. Marx's concepts of alienation and estranged labor

in “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: Estranged Labour” stem from this disconnect from society and the violation of an individual capacity to freely and authentically interact in the world, regardless of whether they are a worker or non-worker. People feel a bit of a disconnect from their authentic being, as well as their interactions with the world, labor, and others (Marx 81). Weyher’s “Re-Reading Sociology via the Emotions: Karl Marx's Theory of Human Nature and Estrangement” also notes that “Marx saw alienation (or estrangement) as stemming from a state where our ‘existence’ (again, in many varied forms) contradicts our ‘essence’” (347). In other words, to be estranged means that our social nature, which both makes possible and is realized through our “free conscious activity,” facilitated by our emotional registration, orientation, and activation of such activity, is somehow either not realized or hindered in practice (Weyher 347). Weyher suggests that reason and rational thought work in tandem with emotional action, and thus comments on how we should not see emotion and reason as antithetical, but rather as pieces that make up the human spirit and help with human actions (343-44). Weyher, then, states that a human cannot truly be un-alienated and fully self-realized until they acknowledge that they are both logical and emotional (345).

Melvin Seeman also describes varying aspects of alienation in his article, “On The Meaning of Alienation.” The first attribute of alienation includes powerlessness, which is a lack of power that takes away essentials for the worker’s being, determining labor based on mechanical decisions (Seeman 784; Marx 74). The system in power automatically creates estranged labor: labor that “is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to [their] essential being”, relating “to the notion of ‘internal versus external control of reinforcements’ [and] the individual’s sense of influence” over society (Marx 74; Seeman 785). Wallimann continues the conversation by commenting that:

In very general terms, his and the estrangement of all other individuals allows for a world which they do not fully control, which they do not fully subject to their own will. It allows for a world in which [...] man is dominated and subject to an involuntary division of labor affecting all. However, not all are equally affected.

(159)

Wallimann's discussion of powerlessness, then, ties into how being estranged from one's labor can cause feelings of alienation and isolation from society, but individuals feel this estrangement on different levels.

Another attribute of alienation is isolation, which refers to intellectual detachment, or rather "the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards - one who [...] has become estranged from his society and the culture it carries" (Seeman 788). Next, alienation as self-estrangement, outlined by Seeman, includes lack of self-realization in one's current society by not being their idealized version of themselves because of the limitations placed on individuals (789). Self-estrangement is also "the loss of intrinsic meaning or pride in work" because laborers are no longer participating in "intrinsically meaningful activity" (Seeman 790). Other attributes of alienation include meaninglessness (encompasses the human journey to search for the meaning of existence) and normlessness (a sense of loss of common social standards and how that may affect individualism) (Seeman 784-790). According to these scholars of alienation, a living entity is a culmination of emotional, philosophical, and material aspects of being, thus being viable to have agency – rather, to be an actor in an entangled network.

This brings into conversation ANT. ANT "presupposes that all entities achieve significance in relation to others," characterizing ANT as a "theoretical and empirical writing which treats social

relations, including power and organization, as network effects," in which sociology characterizes "the ways in which materials join together to generate themselves and reproduce institutional and organizational patterns in the networks of the social" (Ritzer; Law 379). An interpretation of ANT states that actors and actants in a system are vital to its function, whether or not those causing the alienation recognize these vital essences. George Ritzer and John Law's characterization of ANT, then, ties into the fundamentals Bruno Latour explains in his article "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications." For example, Latour describes ANT as "a network-tracing activity" and "not about traced networks," meaning that the actor is not outside the network, but inside ("On Actor-Network" 378). This actor, then, defines their world by their experiences and notes what they observe, forming the network. Both Ritzer and Latour analyze the importance of the actor in ANT, including how actors and actants are any entity – anything that can act on and/or react – meaning not just humans are actors. As Latour states, "No net exists independently of the very act of tracing it, and no tracing is done by an actor exterior to the net" ("On Actor-Network" 378). In other words, all networks – and therefore, actors – work in tandem with one another. Latour further expands the definition of ANT by describing it as "an ontological claim on the 'networky' character of actants themselves" ("On Actor-Network" 373). Therefore, all consequences and causes are intertwined. All entities are intertwined. Because of this interconnectivity, actors are also networks, thus creating actor-networks, which are composed of smaller energies/matter. Everything is entangled as "actants enter into networked associations, which in turn define them, name them, and provide them with substance, action, intention, and subjectivity" (Latour, "An Attempt" 483; Ritzer). Therefore, ANT helps reveal how powerful structures come to be by taking apart the networked entities that piece it together, showing that "power is persuasion" and "is generated in a relational and distributed manner as a consequence of ordering struggles" (Ritzer). As Law also notes, "there are real differences between

the powerful and the wretched, differences in the methods and materials that they deploy to generate themselves” (390). The last point offered here helps to ground some of the theoretical work that ANT does – namely, it’s important to look at systems, but recognizing the power dynamics and hierarchies within those systems is, perhaps, more important because these dynamics are very real.

The power dynamics and tensions of actor-networks tie into glitches as being a resistance already in the network. As Steven Hammer notes in his article “Zaum as Linguistic Glitch, Glitch as Critical Theory”:

[G]litch theory posits that actants exist insofar as they interact, or ally, with other actants in networks. When network configurations are repeated in order to achieve a consistent process or product, and therefore establish what we might call a function or flow, they become inevitably prone to malfunction, interruption, or glitch. (“Zaum”)

Glitches, then, are an integral part of any actor-network system, making glitches in the system by design. Wallimann also discusses “consequences of estrangement” which correlate to power structures and hierarchies; one of these consequences creates glitches in a system – glitches that, as noted by Menkman, were originally already part of the Actor-Network and therefore are not bugs, but features (Wallimann 151; Menkman). In Menkman’s *Glitch Studies Manifesto*, she calls for others to “speak the totalitarian language of disintegration” (10). By this, the disintegration is the interruption – a noise – that challenges the status quo. Menkman makes frequent use of the concept of noise as a counterpart of “static, linear notion[s] of transmitting information... [forcing] the reader to move away from traditional discourse” while the noise also stands “for a disturbance, break or addition within the signal of useful data” (4). In other words,

these noises are glitches to show the flaws in a system, namely the dominant system. Thomas Michaud's discussion of cyberpunk protagonists coincides with Menkman's glitches by stating these protagonists are "marginal figure[s] who fight against a system they judge alienating and dehumanizing" (Michaud 74). Glitches, then, are both fictional and real figures – any actor that challenges the status quo can become a glitch in a system. This type of figure can also be considered an iconic subject of both posthumanist Marxism and ANT, which "describe a relational subject who emerges through activity, who is the hybrid product and producer of socionature, and who is entangled with vast socionatural actors and networks" (Drake 111). A glitch, then, is a figure in a system that is some type of interruption in a system – whether that is their actions or the glitch themselves that is the interruption depends on the figure.

Hammer further expands Menkman's glitch theory by arguing that in an increasing technological world, glitches are inevitable ("Writing"). His definition of glitches in "Writing (Dirty) New Media/Glitch Composition" strengthens Menkman's claim by stating glitches are breaks in a system "to reveal the fallibility of technologies," or in other words, showing the cracks in an otherwise perfect system (Hammer, "Writing"). Dann Kolkman and Jakko Kemper also argue that glitches are a necessity, and "focusing and insisting on the glitches that come up when a model is in function offers a potentially critical perspective, intervening into what otherwise might go unquestioned." These glitches are the "phenomena in which systems [...] experience some kind of malfunction or irregularity" (Hammer, "Writing"). Therefore, glitch studies involve studying "disrupting and interrupting signals patterns, and structures of various media and data to produce work that highlights the ways that technologies (mal)function," as well as capturing the moment in which a glitch happens (Hammer, "Writing"). Glitches, according to Hammer, are in a state of quantum fluctuation: "the glitch [is] a momentary break

or interruption [...] that moment between function and failure” (“Writing”). The act of capturing the glitching moment provides proof that it happens, creating a capture of the state of the glitch – whether that is the function or failure depends on the moment of capture. These glitches, then, no matter what state they are captured in, show the unpredictability and chaos of a system.

Other scholars help supplement the overarching analytical framework. While ANT is useful as a tool to analyze the world and connections, ANT is not to be thought of as a tool to fight against social injustices, whereas “Marxian terminologies and insights” can lead to pointing out and fighting against inequities (Drake 112). Phillip Drake also notes how Marxism can be “inharmonious” with ANT, as well as other conflicting theories; however, it is within these conflicts that “lines of inquiry” can be established (107). Megan Garcia’s “Racist in the Machine,” and Kolkman and Kemper’s “Glitch Studies and the Ambiguous Objectivity of Algorithms” both discuss the dangers and humanistic attributes of algorithms and technology. As seen in Garcia’s article and Kolkman and Kemper’s writings, robots and AI learn behavior based on their programming, coding, and observations, making algorithms “culturally situated.” By observing and reprogramming specified algorithms, this type of technology would gain some semblance of sentience. Kolkman and Kemper also state, “Regardless of their perceived potential, algorithms are hardly infallible.” Finally, Michaud provides excellent support in analyzing science fiction and looking at the genre as political philosophy, which ties into how *Psycho-Pass I* functions as a cultural artifact. With the overarching theories and scholarship, the Sibyl System as an actor-network that creates alienation, oppression, and isolation will be examined, showing the fallibility of this otherwise perfect system via glitches.

Historical Context of Anime

While anime has a clear cultural and media relevance in the States, anime is often overlooked in academia. Both Jaqueline Berndt and Andrew C. McKevitt discuss the cultural impacts of anime, including both in academia and in popular culture. In Berndt's article, "Anime in Academia: Representative Object, Media Form, and Japanese Studies," she first focuses on how Anime Studies is somewhat of a transcendental subject, one that is seen in both Japanese Studies and Media Studies, and is still a fairly recent field in academia. Berndt makes an important distinction between the fields, including the delineation of anime vs. Japanese studies and the complexities of area studies. Anime studies, then, appears to be polarized in academia, especially in conjunction to the type of field it belongs to. As noted by Berndt:

Anime's new relevance in the age of digitalization and media ecologies (or anime as method) provides the point of departure here. In line with the modal conceptualization of anime, Japanese-studies expertise is employed as a tool to consider historically specific local situations that conjoin transnational aesthetic and economic configurations. (10)

In other words, analyzing anime can be a cultural and media study, but it can also be a study of inter-cultural exchanges of commodities. McKevitt expands on the conversation of cultural exchanges brought forth by Berndt in his article "'You Are Not Alone!': Anime and the Globalizing of America." He further argues that anime was one of the products which helped strengthen the relationship between the States and Japan. He refers to anime as a source of cultural globalization: an inter-cultural exchange which includes the "flow of symbolic systems of meaningful ideas, images, and goods" (McKevitt 895). Just as well, the communal aspect of

fan gatherings to watch/interpret anime helped the media grow in the States (McKevitt 910). The trade of cultural goods is, itself, a network - one that has entangled America and Japan together.

The cultural exchange of anime between America and Japan is a fairly recent phenomenon. Japan and the States have a co-operative exchange with animation. Osamu Tezuka, creator of a groundbreaking anime for Japanese TV, “credited his trademark style” to Walt Disney cartoons – the cultural transfer became reciprocal between the States and Japan (McKevitt 897). Anime, then, was a “mingling of Japanese and Western aesthetics, genres, and racial and gender categories, that permitted anime to be a truly hybrid global product” (McKevitt 901). America’s reception to the cultural exchange started briefly in the 1960s but didn’t become a significant cultural phenomenon in the States until the 1980s (McKevitt). In the 1960s, anime would be localized; however, in the localization efforts, editors would “Americanize” or remove any “Japaneseness” aspects from the source material, not fully realizing the Japanese culture that originated in anime (McKevitt 898). Fast forward to the late 1970s, where the first anime fan club in the States formed, which started a wave of anime fan gatherings, including more “fan clubs, conventions (or ‘cons’), and [...] underground, self-published, English-language literature on anime” (McKevitt 905). In 1983, at a Baltimore Science Fiction Convention, a Japanese Anime film was scheduled to play for fans. While fans expected to watch *Space Battleship Yamato: The Final Chapter*, a mix-up occurred where a different chapter of the same series was played in the original Japanese language with no English subtitles. Despite this, the “audience’s participation in the imaginative communal act of watching something different, something Japanese – something global [...] served as the frontline of cultural globalization by showcasing Japanese animation” (McKevitt 893). Due to this explosion of global cultural connections, sci-fi and narrative fans were able to experience a different set of entertainment and media: anime,

which “looked unlike the children’s cartoons of U.S. television, and it told stories that challenged viewers’ emotions and worldviews” more than the popular Hollywood films of the 1980s, thus inspiring anime fan clubs and conventions (McKevitt 894).

In 1988, Streamline Pictures was launched in the U.S. to meet the demands of anime consumers’ wanting “authentic anime.” This “was the first U.S. company created to import, translate, and subtitle or overdub anime for distribution in the U.S. theater and home-video markets,” including the hit 1988 movie *Akira* (McKevitt 903). Before Streamline Pictures began importing anime goods, anime “fan communities existed solely because of grass-roots, ‘do-it-yourself’ initiatives” (McKevitt 896). Not only did the consumption of anime bring about local relations on the individual scale, it also helped strengthen the U.S. – Japan relationship (McKevitt 897). Anime in the 90s also served as a catalyst for people seeking to learn Japanese, a cultural phenomenon that inspired a large amount of youth (Millennials) to learn a second language (McKevitt 909). Then, in the year 2000, *Pokémon* became a cultural phenomenon in the States (McKevitt 898). Through Streamline Productions and fan demand, anime began being imported in its original glory “by the turn of the twenty-first century,” including the cultural markers – or rather, “Japaneseness” – that capture cultural and societal aspects of Japan” (McKevitt 899). This is important to note because anime gives international viewers (international in this case being outside of Japan) a look into Japanese society; furthermore, viewers might see reflections of their own society within Japanese anime.

Psycho-Pass I, then, is a 2012 Sci-Fi Cyberpunk anime set in a dystopic futuristic Tokyo. In this futuristic society, an overarching AI called the Sibyl System judges and determines essentially every facet of humanity’s lives, including career choices after an aptitude exam as part of their schooling’s graduation. The list of recommendations of careers provided by the

Sibyl System offers the illusion of choice. Another major aspect of this futuristic Tokyo is the concept of psycho-pass to determine a crime coefficient. The psycho-pass system uses a psychological scan of the brain that then measures one's crime coefficient into a quantifiable number; the psycho-pass is a color-coded hue that determines whether one's psychological state is balanced or not, and the crime coefficient determines one's aptitude for crime. With the use of an advanced gun called the dominators - controlled by the Sibyl System - the Ministry of Welfare's Public Safety Bureau (MWPSB) can determine someone's crime coefficient just by pointing the dominator at the suspect. The MWPSB is run by both inspectors and enforcers carrying out the Sibyl System's orders. Inspectors have full authority of the enforcers; enforcers, also often referred to as "hunting dogs," are latent criminals that were recruited by the MWPSB to help with taking down other criminals. Although *Psycho-Pass* is a wide franchise, with movies, multiple seasons, and a video game, this case-study only focuses on the first season (*Psycho-Pass I*), specifically in regards to the character Shogo Makishima, whose role is critical in the first season. *Psycho-Pass I* excellently encapsulates a dystopic society that controls free will under the guise of making life easy, as well as articulately examines how glitches can co-exist in the same system while simultaneously having major differences in personality and ideals. The first season also establishes the fear and mystery surrounding the Sibyl System, including the revealing moments of what the system actually is.

Sibyl System Behind the Curtain

The world of *Psycho-Pass I* is one where society is over-reliant on technology. The focus of this analysis is on the technological think-tank running futuristic Tokyo, The Sibyl System, and two glitches in the anime, Akane Tsunemori and Shogo Makishima. Other characters are mentioned as they interact with The Sibyl System, Akane, and

Shogo. By looking at the public's interactions with technology and The Sibyl System, one can see how this system creates an alienated society in which glitches come forth; Akane and Shogo, being the protagonist and antagonist respectively, challenge the system.

The Sibyl System in *Psycho-Pass I* is the overseer of futuristic Tokyo, dictating the direction of life in this society. This system is the center of translation, communication, law, and labor force in Tokyo while generating “complex configurations of network durability, spatial mobility, systems of representation, and calculability – configurations which have the effect of generating the center/periphery asymmetries and hierarchies characteristic of most formal organizations” (Law 389). For example, in episode two, Akane and her friends discuss the aptitude scoring of the Sibyl System; Akane, having had three different options, specifically chose the MWPSB, despite her doubts after her first day. While Akane expresses her doubts, her friends continue to compliment the system, complaining about their own aptitudes, including “I could only get C Rankings,” but even then, this friend is supposedly good at blue-collar jobs, thus the reliance on the hierarchical system of the Sibyl aptitude scoring (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 2, 06:18 – 06:21). Although played off as a joke, one of Akane's friends also notes that “what needs to be done is done by those capable of doing it. Such is the grace bestowed to mankind by Sibyl” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 2 06:56 -07:02). This, alongside how mundane the aptitude conversation is, shows how the Sibyl System has engrained itself in everyday life.

The Sibyl System is the network center that uses power to persuade society that it is perfect by limiting burdens of choice, convincing society that it is the best possible solution to ensure the most ideal happiness level is reached for the majority of people. Yet, this system doesn't allow for will or desire. The Sibyl System, then, acts as a spokesperson “to simplify networks of others (who may or may not consent) by representing their interests, attributing

identity, establishing roles, and advancing a course of action,” creating an uneven hierarchy of other actor-networks (Ritzer). Because of this higher entity making choices for individuals, citizens don’t have to worry about the power to choose their path in life. This technology, then, coats a society in an illusory and false utopic state, including “the elucidation of implicit value systems” in which the Sibyl System provides a gateway/offering to a system with limited choice, therefore taking away the burden of freedom (Kolkman and Kemper). Due to the objective belief of happiness and value systems, the Sibyl System gives false pretenses of a utopic world through propaganda. Inside rehabilitation centers for latent criminals, The Sibyl System advertises the world as something utopic and beneficial, specifically within The Occupation Aptitude Test (OAT): “The Occupation Aptitude Test guarantees you a stable life in which your talents are used to their fullest. Humans will live a more civilized life. The OAT has created a world where anyone can enjoy art, nature and peace” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 12, 04:39-04:50). This quest for the essence, or rather, the quest “for a perfectly objective and accurate model,” describes the world the Sibyl System spouts as “perfect” and stable according to its criteria, making this world appear as a utopia (Kolkman and Kemper). In essence, the technology of the Sibyl System assumes objectivity and objective truth by quantifying human’s psychology, a problematic ideology that runs the world of *Psycho-Pass I*.

Because of this seemingly perfected system to achieve the maximum amount of happiness, the Sibyl System appears to be infallible. As an algorithmic AI, the Sibyl System “reinforce[s] its stature as [an] objective and unbiased vessel” which “imposes impartiality and requires that all interpretations be unprivileged,” equating “*human* activity with the *rational* thought and action of *individuals* with a concomitant disregard

or exclusion of emotion,” rationalizing the human brain as a logical equation for the maximum amount of happiness (Kolkman and Kemper; Ritzer; Weyher 343). Therefore, The Sibyl System is an algorithm which “shape[s] a reality in accordance with their own inner logic, thereby reinforcing their gloss of objectivity and becoming something of a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Kolkman and Kemper). An example of this objective logic occurs in episode twenty, when The Sibyl System explains the decision to murder Shusei Kagari – an enforcer who once worked with Akane – as though it were as objective as a math problem: “We compared and considered the contribution Shusei Kagari would make to society throughout his life against the risk of him revealing the secret of the Sibyl System and decided that the latter issue was more important” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 20, 04:51-04:58). AI and algorithms are imbued with the promise of bringing “reliability and objectivity to otherwise uncertain procedures,” meaning that the reliability in algorithms – in this case, the Sibyl System – is based on the assumption that technology *is* objective (Mazzotti qtd. in Kolkman and Kemper). Therefore, this decision to kill Shusei made objective sense according to the Sibyl System – a rather dangerous idea to be considered objective.

While the true origins of the Sibyl System are unknown for those in Tokyo, the chief of the MWSPB, Joshu Kasei, notes that the system Sibyl is based on “a system that expands and speeds up its ability to think by incorporating human brain activity” put in place “more than fifty years ago,” making the technology existent since 2060 (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 17, 12:58-13:02). Joshu further explains that this technology was kept secret from the rest of the world, causing Japan to be “the only country on Earth to be ruled by law” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 17, 13:10). This foundational beginning of the Sibyl System, hidden in plain sight, became the catalyst that formed the society of the current *Psycho-Pass*: a human creation marketed as an objective

supercomputer. The truth is that Sibyl *is* a piece of technology and an algorithm, which means it carries all the flaws and fallibility that any human-made product has.

Analyzing the fallible nature of the Sibyl System as an algorithm, then, makes the reality of the system less far-fetched than an all-knowing AI. The system is an imperfect collection of disembodied human brains that still contain room for error, as seen by the cases of criminally asymptomatic individuals, a rare case “where the result of the person’s [psychological] scan doesn’t match with their criminal psychology” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 13, 07:02). In other words, the scans do not provide an accurate reading of an individual’s latent criminality and their psycho-pass hue is clear, causing the security system to not protect against people who might be dangerous. These individuals are also described as having psycho-pass hues “as that of a good citizen who couldn’t even hurt an insect” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 14, 05:57). Criminally asymptomatic individuals, then, are cracks in the system which become glitches. Sibyl’s solution into hiding these cracks is to add these individuals into the collective hive-mind that is the system, thus creating a system full of asymptomatic brains to continue to enact the Sibyl System’s ideology for a utopia, even though the system is run by glitches. The Sibyl System is revealed to be asymptomatic brains, forming the foundations of the laws that rule over Tokyo – these brains run as a feature and not a bug, looking for other glitches to turn into features that work in tandem with the system, as opposed to a bug working outside the system.

The Sibyl System, then, is the ultimate culmination of human and technological synthesis, run by criminally asymptomatic brains, deciding the fate of individuals. This network is a collection of former humans that appears to be a singular entity, when in fact, it is a whole network associated with this entity. The once objectivity of a cold,

mechanical, think-tank is called into question and problematized because the system is human; although the physical materiality of the former humans is no longer existent, the brains still function as they did in their human flesh. This system isn't all-knowing, but rather a culmination of humanity, and as such, the Sibyl System takes the form of Joshu, who is revealed to be just a human-like robot vessel designed to carry different brains of the Sibyl System, and there are multiple backups of her; meaning, the various disembodied brains that run the system can swap with one another and "control" the body of Joshu, interacting with humans, as well as act as the chief of the MWSPB. The Sibyl System, then, is an example of an "algorithmic bias", which is "objective" programming that takes on prejudices of its creators or data (Garcia 112). By taking on the identity of the various criminally asymptomatic individuals, and adding new ones, the program continually learns and advances its thought process; however, the system is still inherently biased because of the humanity embedded into it. Through this entangled web of criminally asymptomatic brains, the Sibyl System controls and produces the nature of society, including who or what is considered viable enough to be part of the System. Because of this network, the Sibyl System carries inherent biases, which creates problems of relying solely on this algorithm to make objective decisions. Thus, the Sibyl System enacts its own ideals through the guise of objectivity.

Criminality Under the Sibyl System

An overarching question that lingers in *Psycho-Pass I* is what constitutes a criminal. This question becomes salient because one's criminality determines how they may, or may not, fit in society ruled under Sibyl – criminals, then, are exemplary of alienation and estrangement from their peers in this society. How does the Sibyl System determine who is a latent criminal? The system is sold as an all-powerful, perfect AI, but the truth is that The Sibyl System is a fallible

algorithmic AI run by human minds. This system determines the crime coefficient based on one's psychological state at the time of the scan; however, this causes issues for those who have a momentary lapse of trauma or stress. Crime coefficients can be contagious and the overall stress in an area can rise, causing undue stress for people who would otherwise not be a latent criminal. As soon as their crime coefficient rises, individuals are already marked to be estranged from their peers. They are doomed from the system that is set to allegedly protect them, yet in the case of criminally asymptomatic people such as Shogo, other individuals are no longer protected because the true criminals are not stopped. Unfortunately, for people who are held hostage by a suspect, this suspect's crime coefficient can be contagious for the hostage. This type of scenario means that even though the hostage may not be a suspect, their crime coefficient rises due to being around the suspect and the stress on their mental state. Thus, by staying true to the Sibyl System, this hostage would be considered a latent criminal. For the MWPSB, even though they can see with their own eyes the rising crime coefficient numbers and thus could take subjective measures, they are still bound by the Sibyl System to take action.

The Sibyl System makes way for an estranged system that dehumanizes those who are seen as "less than ideal," thus isolating them from the rest of society. The choice of an MWPSB enforcer and inspector then dictates whether or not they are obedient to the Sibyl System. In a sense, both enforcers and inspectors embody this feeling that Marx notes: "If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an alien, a coerced activity, to whom, then, does it belong? To a being other than me?" (77). Notably, both MWPSB enforcers and inspectors' labor belong to the Sibyl System to keep the social order. Despite the similarities in their estranged labor, enforcers and inspectors are treated

differently in society, as enforcers are merely “hunting dogs” used so inspectors’ psycho-pass hues are not muddied. The Sibyl System controls the dominators, which determine whether or not a person has latent criminal tendencies. Thus, the Sibyl System dictates who is valuable to its society, acknowledging willing and obedient members; anyone straying from that path is docked as a criminal.

Unfortunately, within *Psycho-Pass I*, many artists and creatives happen to be marked as “criminals” for pursuing a life that makes them complete due to intense emotions through their creations. Even though artists are doing what they love, the system flags them. Once the Sibyl System dictates the latent criminals and sends the MWPSB to detain them, their only hope is to live in a rehabilitation center or be “lucky” enough to be recruited as an enforcer to then help in perpetuating the cycle. For example, in episode twelve, latent criminals are seen locked up, checking in on their psycho-pass hues, with the Sibyl System announcing for these “criminals” to “work on purifying [their] hue” (*Psycho-Pass* 02:17). This rehabilitation center is not unlike a prison, where day in and day out the latent criminals are treated as objects. If a latent criminal has the aptitude of being an enforcer, they are then offered that “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to continue perpetuating the cycle (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 12, 02:50). Once they make this choice, the “criminals” become a commodity for the Sibyl System, helping stop criminals and allowing the inspectors to not become “corrupted.” Enforcers are often seen as guard dogs, used nothing more than tools so that inspectors don’t have to corrupt their own psycho-pass hues. Yayoi Kunizuka, a latent criminal turned enforcer, initially challenges the recruiters by stating they “take them [enforcers] around like” pet dogs, and that the recruitment of enforcers is just to have “the keen nose of a dog, not a detective” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 12, 08:35-08:40). This transformation turns the criminals into commodities and products via the Sibyl System, all in the form of enforcers.

While the enforcers are now able to be a part of society, they simply do what the Sibyl system and inspectors tell them to, creating a sense of estrangement from themselves, their work, and living to their fullest.

Referencing the Sibyl System as an actor-network enforcing their ideals under the guise of utopia, the connections between people are only there because the system requires them to work – any other connections not approved by the Sibyl System leads to the potentiality of criminalization. One of the issues as far as criminality is the emotional ties artists and creatives have to their work, thus becoming what is often considered “unauthorized” careers. There are some musicians and artists that are seemingly approved by Sibyl; however, that means the creative aspect of their art must be in line with Sibyl, making the system an agent of censorship to its own biases. Nobuchika Ginoza, an inspector of the MWPSB, speculates on the reasoning of artistic censorship within the Sibyl System:

I hear that there are many cases of people's Hues getting clouded when they become deeply involved in their art. It probably means that a strong affection like art, that moves people, can be a medicine but also a poison as well. That's exactly why it [art] started requiring prior approval. (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 12, 07:33 – 07:47)

Because of the intense emotions associated with art, people are living to their fullest potential, but this also creates strong emotions that cannot be maintained and controlled, causing their psycho-pass hues to become impure.

Shogo's critique of Sibyl recognizes that people who spend their lives pursuing their life's goal end up having a higher crime coefficient, as seen with Yayoi. Before becoming an enforcer, Yayoi began a relationship with a singer of an “unauthorized”

band, and while this relationship was not nefarious by any means, the mere connection of the two made Yayoi's psycho-pass hue clouded, causing her to become a latent criminal needing to be taken to a rehabilitation center. Yayoi's authorized band member even commented on how "Music by an unauthorized band is worthless!" to which the unauthorized singer simply argues that "making music that carries favor with Sibyl is what's worthless" (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 12, 09:59 – 10:05). The tension between the "authorized" and "unauthorized" band members shows the division Sibyl System creates between those "accepted" or "not accepted" by that system. As Weyher also notes, what makes a human, human, is the culmination of emotion and reason; or rather, to be whole (350-51). Thus, estrangement stems from people not being fully realized; that is, taking a piece out of their whole being, which, in a society as controlling as the Sibyl System, a piece of their emotional self is usually hindered in some way, including creating art. Yet, if they give up their passion, they also become self-estranged. The lack of will and freedom creates a sense of alienation from oneself, and therefore, the system itself lends itself to being a dystopic nightmare masked as a desirable utopia for maximum human happiness. Because The Sibyl System exists, humans cannot fully realize their potential. As Weyher comments, "emotion is [...] central to Marx's conception of human nature—it is our 'essential power' energizing and directing the 'free conscious activity,' which, for Marx, forms our 'species-character'" (344). Estrangement stems from people not being fully realized - that is, taking a piece out of their whole being, in which the Sibyl System hinders a piece of their emotional self.

The highly advanced Sibyl System represents what alienation and dehumanization looks like when applying cold mechanical logic to human emotions. While the motions of living appear easier under the Sibyl System, the will and purpose of living is gone, creating a sense of alienation. The setup of the Sibyl System creates a utopia for itself and those content and

complacent with obedience while forming a dystopic world for artists, creatives, and others feeling incomplete. Although there are no social or economic classes that benefit directly from The Sibyl System's rule, its perceived objectivity to create the perfect society benefits from the continuation of the system. Just as well, "the concepts of exploitation and alienation are particularly useful for understanding not only the array of factors that influence how individuals live and relate to others in the world but also the various formulations of power that influence these relations" (Drake 120). This interweaving of exploitative forces, as described by Drake, is prevalent within the Sibyl System in how it dictates the usefulness of individuals through the career selection, and those who stray from the "career decisions" are marked as criminals. Because of this society, estrangement and alienation are prevalent since an overarching system that takes away human empathy and emotion becomes a system that dehumanizes and estranges humans (Michaud 75). The Sibyl System is flawed, yet as noted in episode twenty, there is no better solution. The hive mind of the system even says that "the ideal you [Akane] imagine isn't clear and firm enough to deny the social order achieved at this point [...]. Hence, no matter how much you hate and deny the Sibyl System, [...] you cannot reject it" (*Psycho-Pass* 08:56-09:02; 09:13 -09:17). The system, then, achieves the maximum amount of happiness through the logic of its system, despite the flaws in dictating criminals.

Glitching in a Flawed System

An obviously flawed system will have cracks, or glitches, that stand out, while a system that appears flawless will have these cracks hidden and more subtle. In a fluctuating state, Akane is "stuck in the membranes of knowledge, governed by social

conventions and acceptances,” attributes of glitches in society (Menkman 3). Because “Glitch theory is concerned with the location of irregularities, interruptions, and malfunctions as essential features of networks,” the glitches in *Psycho-Pass I* can be identified how they operate within and challenge the Sibyl System (Hammer, “Zaum”). As individual actants in the Sibyl System, the glitches form a resistance to the oppressive system. After all, “It is through these noises – these glitches – in which people can move to interrupt linear systems. In many ways, glitch is a method of deconstruction” (Hammer, “Zaum”). The glitches themselves challenge and start to break apart the system, starting with Akane and Shogo.

Akane Tsunemori, the bright-eyed, naïve, and newest member of the MWPSB, acts as an inspector and feels the tension between her form of justice and what the Sibyl System dictates, embodying a sense of powerlessness. For example, on Akane’s first day as an MWPSB inspector, she immediately calls to attention some of the flaws with the psycho-pass colors and crime coefficients, starting a ripple effect that slowly comes to surface the truth of the Sibyl System. The suspect she encounters on her first day also has a hostage - being in close proximity to the suspect, the hostage’s crime coefficient rapidly increases and rises well above the criminal threshold. Shinya Kogami, an enforcer who later becomes a key component to both Akane and Shogo, is ready to kill the hostage because that is his job. However, Akane paralyzes Shinya instead, saving the hostage who had been flagged as a threat to society. Although Akane disobeyed the Sibyl System’s will, the hostage was able to be treated through therapy, and after a few days, her crime coefficient returned to below 100, allowing the hostage to return back to society. Akane’s actions here represented a humanistic approach to the dehumanized system that was put in place; her show of empathy put a wrench into the entire machine. Because of Akane’s actions, the ripple effect causes “perceptible glitches in the functionality of” the Sibyl System,

inviting “a critical attitude as both organizational and individual stakes are riding on the operations of” the perfect system (Kolkman and Kemper). Part of the ripple effect of Akane was Shinya’s acknowledgment of her making the correct decision, which, in turn, reminded him why he originally became an inspector, but ended up as an enforcer. However, Ginoza does not agree with Akane’s actions, claiming that their job as inspectors has no room for empathy, especially for latent criminals. In Ginoza’s eyes, it was due to these emotions that his former partner, Shinya, became an enforcer. Ginoza warns Akane to “draw a line between [her] and Enforcers,” and to “simply fulfill [her] duties as an Inspector” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 5, 20:45-20:48).

When Akane finally encounters Shogo as he reveals himself to be the mastermind behind a series of heinous crimes, she witnesses him commit murder right in front of her eyes; unfortunately, the dominator she uses registers his crime coefficient as low, making her unable to detain this obvious criminal. This is the second time Akane witnesses an inherent flaw in the Sibyl System - even though Shogo killed someone and has been linked to a number of crimes, his crime coefficient didn’t change significantly. Shogo even gave her a traditional firearm to use on him; however, Akane misses her shot, all while questioning if killing him would have been the right choice for justice. Questioning the dominator’s judgment, Akane continues to undergo a sense of powerlessness. Akane, unwillingly, actively perpetuates the state of alienation and estrangement within herself, even though her own ideals present a humanistic approach. Although she was able to identify another glitch – Shogo – she was unable to stop him from committing additional crimes. Another interesting aspect about Akane is her psycho-pass hue and crime coefficient rarely becomes clouded. Even during a situation such as a memory scoop – a

process that image maps one's memories that can sometimes be traumatic – Akane's hue stays un-tainted. Because of this, she was willing to bet her well-being to capture the image of Shogo from her mind once she saw his brutal murder of her friend.

Akane's sense of justice and human empathy sets her apart from The Sibyl System, as she truly embodies all aspects of her humanity, whereas the Sibyl System completely cuts out human emotion, making it a reason-based system that cannot fully comprehend the entirety of human reason (Weyher 343). Even though Akane acts as an enforcer of alienation, she still feels the noted effects. Akane's decision to internalize and keep the secret to herself continues the cycle for a while longer; however, she directly disobeys the Sibyl System's orders to bring Shogo to them alive, as Akane knew Shinya would kill Shogo. Despite Akane disobeying and internalizing personal spite towards the Sibyl System, she continues to work as an MWPSB inspector, perpetuating the very system she wants to challenge. By perpetuating the cycle of the Sibyl System, knowing fully well how it works, Akane embodies powerlessness. Despite her being a glitch in the system, Akane's choice to continue the cycle can be interpreted as her being a complacent glitch – one that works *with* the system because she acknowledges that “the current society cannot hold without Sibyl” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 22, 15:55). As an Actor-Network, then, Akane is the embodiment of a perfect actant that is, in a sense, multiplying “the mediating points between any two elements,” in which she knows the truth, and that alone sets her apart and estranges her, but it also allows her to act as a liaison of the Sibyl System (Latour, “On Actor-Network” 378). However, she still exhibits her glitchiness in that she is “there to maintain the network of actors,” while also revealing “the already present imperfections, or glitch potentiality, within systems typically associated with seamless functionality,” even if her glitch characteristics are mostly internalized (Hammer, “Writing”). Akane, then, appears to be an almost perfect

subordinate actor-network glitch because she “does not jump outside a network to add an explanation,” but rather “simply *extends* the network further” (Latour, “On Actor-Network” 376). However, Akane also holds within her a promise to one day dismantle the Sibyl System, and as she notes in episode 22, “Someone will come to this room [the Sibyl brain room] someday to turn off the power. We will find a new path for sure” (*Psycho-Pass* 16:36-16:39). Although she didn’t actively take down the system like Shogo, she is perpetuating a humanistic cycle just by how Akane frames words, such as her rhetorical decisions in addressing enforcers, showing that she is not as complacent as she may appear. Akane’s rhetorical choices surrounding enforcers directly conflict with what Ginoza told her on her first day: “Don’t think that the guys you’re about to meet are humans like us. Their Psycho-Pass Crime Coefficients exceeded a specified value. They are people of bankrupt character. They’re hunting dogs. They’re beasts used to hunt beasts” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep.1, 05:46-06:07). In contrast to Ginoza’s description of the enforcers at the beginning of the series, in the final episode, Akane explains the enforcers’ role to the new agent as such: “The guys you’re about to meet are humans just like us, but they’ll deal with crimes using criteria for judgment different from yours. Their actions sometimes may be beyond your comprehension. Trust them, but at the same time, be cautious of them” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 22, 21:07-21:22). By referring to enforcers as humans and not hunting dogs, Akane’s rhetoric instills these humanistic values in the new, wide-eyed agent, starting a cycle of hope and empathy that will, in Akane’s eyes, one day dismantle the Sibyl System.

In Shogo’s case, he had been able to run undetected because the Sibyl System had run almost perfectly, allowing him to hide in the cracks. In other words: “When a model

is smoothly running in the background, there is little need to attend to it or to question its objectivity or validity” (Kolkman and Kemper). Shogo also exhibits anarchist behavior, yet “because he likes destruction so much, he’s quite different from the original meaning of the word” as noted in episode nineteen (*Psycho-Pass* 08:51-08:55). In this same episode, anarchism is defined as “a denial of governing and authority” and “denying an inhuman control system and building a more human system” (*Psycho-Pass* 08:36-08:43). Shogo throws a wrench in the entire Sibyl System by disseminating parts of the system. One major impact Shogo created was when he enticed citizens to riot. At the beginning of episode fifteen, there is a clear crime of a man in a helmet beating someone to death in a busy street; however, the usual brain scan and security drones that would normally pick up his latent criminality did not perceive this man as a threat, so no security was called. This murder started a chain of events that caused people in helmets to rob places and threaten people, while others began protecting themselves and started attacking those in helmets. This chain reaction caused many people in this area to commit crimes and have the overall crime coefficient to raise, causing riots and wavering of faith in the Sibyl System through interruptions in the system, all caused by the mastermind glitch. The helmets were later revealed to be distributed by Shogo and one of his accomplices to start to create this distrust in Sibyl.

Later, after learning the reality of the Sibyl System, Shogo takes fate into his own hands. He becomes an actor-network that “constantly interrupts the movement” and “deletes and conflates mediators” in society (Latour, “On Actor-Network” 378). As he is invited to become a disembodied brain and part of the hive mind of the Sibyl System, Shogo has different plans; namely, to overthrow the system and bring society back to how they were before The Sibyl System. In episode seventeen, instead of becoming one with the Sibyl System, Shogo instead destroys one of the Joshu bodies the system uses, thus allowing him to escape his chains and

disrupting the Sibyl System. Even though Shogo's plan to cause societal collapse almost succeeds, he chooses to die rather than be detained and be a product of the system. Shogo willingly chose the freedom of his own death over becoming a part of the disembodied brain-hive of the Sibyl System.

In Shogo's eyes, making flaws in the system obvious through riots as well as destroying the food supply would cause the whole system to fall apart and society would have no choice but to revolt, thus interrupting both the flow of movement and destroying those complacent with the system. This interruption, then, coincides with glitch ideology in that Menkman urges would-be glitch practitioners to interrupt such static and linear systems via intentional disturbances and breaks, yet "somewhere within the destructed ruins of meaning hope exists" (3-4). Just as well, it is through master-minding the previously noted riots and plotting to destroy Tokyo's food supply to force their borders to open that Shogo "seeks to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified, social structure" (qtd. in Seeman 789). Thus, Shogo manifests his glitchiness in his solution to cause total economic collapse. Just as well, in episode twenty-one, Shogo points out the biggest flaw in the current world, the sense of loneliness for everyone:

Solitude? Does that apply only to me? Who isn't alone in this society? The time when our connection to others was the basis of ourselves is long gone. In this world where everyone is watched over by the system and live within the system's standards, a community isn't necessary. Everyone just lives in their own little cell, and the system tames them by giving them each their own personal serenity.

(Psycho-Pass 20:42 -21:13)

Shogo's own ideologies tie into Weyher's comments on estrangement being a lack of social nature. This ideology, then, claims that society in *Psycho-Pass I* is one of true estrangement, and unfortunately, creates a majority of alienated people - not connecting to one another, but instead going through the motions of simply existing as the system dictates.

Shogo had been truly alienated and isolated from society since his youth. Shogo's revenge on the Sibyl System stems from the sense of isolation he felt when he was denied and outcast from that system. Indicated by Shinya in episode nineteen, "in this society, if the Sibyl System doesn't acknowledge you, in a sense, isn't it the same as not being recognized as a human being?" (*Psycho-Pass* 12:10-12:15). Shogo, as revealed in episode nineteen, could also control his psycho-pass and this immediately outcast him. Being denied by the system, he internalizes the need to control himself and society. Shogo, being represented as highly intellectual, also exhibits isolation. This isolation started with "shame" - the shame of not being recognized by the Sibyl System - which shame "marks the beginning of a potential generalization into 'alienation'" (Weyher 352). From being alienated by the oppressive society, he begins to plan how to deconstruct the system. Shogo came to the realization that change requires sacrifice as he continues living through his isolation. Even after learning the true nature of the system, Shogo refuses to be a part of the very thing that alienated him in the first place. Shogo's isolation became the catalyst for him to exact his revenge, resulting in his death.

While Shogo is criminally asymptomatic, Akane's constant positive and clear psycho-pass hue could also be considered criminally asymptomatic, thus furthering the connection between her and Shogo. Akane and Shogo have similarities in that their ideals challenge the Sibyl System, therefore both acting as glitches, despite them being completely different people. However, because of the way their glitching manifests, both Akane and Shogo also experience

varying forms of alienation due to their glitchiness of the Sibyl System. These two different individuals share an intimate connection.

Which glitch is more effective in generating their desired outcome? Shogo's main goal was to take down the Sibyl System and alter the public's faith in it, while Akane's main goal was to find a balance between being an effective inspector while still adhering to her humanity and personal justice. On first glance, one might argue that Shogo Makishima is a murderer and, therefore, an obvious criminal; however, peeling back his layers shows a complicated individual doomed from his own alienation and sense of estrangement because of a system that didn't recognize him. On the flip side, it's easy to simply say that Akane Tsunemori is just because she always pursued the criminal while maintaining her emotions, but when looking deeper into her actions, she still disobeyed the law, albeit in a way to dismantle an unjust society. Akane, however, still adheres to her humanistic ideals. Shogo represents those who are ousted in the society of *Psycho-Pass I*, while Akane represents justice and emotionality. Shogo and Akane's actions involve "the emotional link between 'thought' and 'action'," in that emotions are vital to the process of change" (Weyher 356). In the end, Akane relapses back into true estrangement, while Shogo goes through true transcendence by death. Even though The Sibyl System is still in power, the effects of Shogo and Akane's actions have begun to ripple out, showing that while their goals have not been completely fulfilled, the seeds of doubt in The Sibyl System and the small steps to dismantle it have started. Through the Sibyl System's true nature and how both Akane and Shogo experience and don't accept this system, the implications of this society show that the seemingly utopian system is a dystopian hell for those deemed as criminals and pursuing free will.

Implications

What might unalienated life look like without the Sibyl System? Expanding further, how might unalienated life look like in reality? The truth is, we do not know, nor can we know for sure, but we can speculate. *Psycho-Pass I*, through Shogo's ideology and descent into chaos, speculates that the way to unalienated life will be chaotic and messy if people try to speed up the fall of an unfair system; however, by making subtle changes and slowly creating positive ripples, the way to dismantle this type of system can slowly start to take effect. Unfortunately, the slow and painful method is often overlooked because of having to live under cruel conditions while changes are currently being implemented. Oftentimes, thinking about dismantling a system that's been in place for a long time feels near impossible, as Fredric Jameson once said: "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (76). Capitalism, here, is synonymous with the Sibyl System, and the latter system reflects when technology attempts to take emotions out of the law running the world. The world of *Psycho-Pass I* would not begin to imagine how life would be without The Sibyl System, and this was part of Akane's internal struggle. Shogo, not necessarily caring about the chaos that would happen with the transformative destruction of The Sibyl System, became determined to dismantle the system that created alienated and estranged souls. One poignant relevant issue between our world and the world of *Psycho-Pass I* is the current state of affairs in which society is stuck in the way it has been run (politics, parliament, government, the system, etc.). We haven't thought of how the world would look by dismantling it. However, "domination is inherently both contestable and reversible," in that complacency does not get society anywhere, but with little – or big – impacts, the dominant system can come tumbling down (Ritzer). It is for challenging their operation, then, that glitches are necessary for an actor-network, as seen in the case of *Psycho-Pass I*.

Because futuristic Tokyo wished to create an overarching supercomputer, the Sibyl System was born and became the overseer of society, and through it the dominators, crime coefficients, and all the other technological components that rule the world of *Psycho-Pass I* came to fruition. Although current American society is not controlled by a seemingly objective supercomputer, technology does have substantial impacts on daily lives, including the dissemination of news and the constant need for connectivity. The latter, in the form of social media, can sometimes also be alienating to people who constantly use it, exemplifying the effects of missing out and becoming isolated. These technologies can influence happiness, sense of self, and sense of identity for those actively engaging in them. Dissemination of news, where anyone can post content on the internet and pass it off as truth, is just as damaging, as false news can spread like wildfire, creating a further divide between political affiliations in society – an example of this being the disbelief in Covid-19 vaccinations. These types of forums can, unfortunately, also be used to oppress voices, such as Facebook’s algorithm in flagging “controversial” speech; “controversial” being defined by the company, similar to how the Sibyl System defines criminals. This is not to say that all technology is bad, but the over-reliance on technology to determine human connection and identity is something to be wary of, and the real world isn’t a far cry from the society revealed in *Psycho-Pass I*. One step to an ideal, unalienated life, then, is a better understanding of how technology works, especially those types of technology that humans become over-reliant on, such as social media to tell them what and how to think.

Although the Sibyl System argues that “the intelligence of science finally uncovered the secret of souls,” Shogo states that “people’s wills are not a part of that assessment” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 11, 16:33-16:39). The quantifying of one’s soul does not determine a person’s will, and

in the case of criminally asymptomatic individuals, their will is stronger than what the program measures. The Sibyl System markets itself as a culmination of science that can ascend human emotion, but this is false. Unfortunately, this scientific transcendence beyond human emotion is prevalent in science studies – that technology and science are objective; however, that is not the case. As seen in the theoretical frameworks used in this analysis, as well as the characters of *Psycho-Pass I*, humans need both emotion and reason to be fully realized. Part of *Psycho-Pass I*'s critique of society is that the more technical/logical humans strive to be, the less emotional we become, causing isolation from each other. Akane and Shogo made the realization that the system needs to be changed. The implications for challenging the Sibyl System, then, stem from Akane and Shogo recognizing that humans cannot be reduced to objective data, and that to be human is to have both logic and emotion – something the Sibyl System tries to deny. However, being made of former humans, the Sibyl System acts a bit hypocritical in passing its judgment as objective – as seen through the fallibility of algorithms.

Shogo's actions may have been inhumane, but the tyranny of the Sibyl System pushed him to the edges of society where he felt as though the only way to stop the system was total and complete anarchy. When offered to join the System, Shogo argues that he loves “this game that people call life from the bottom of [his] heart,” and that he would rather be an individual than “reduced to a cog in a machine” (*Psycho-Pass*, ep. 17, 17:19-20:06). Shogo and Akane both exhibit the willingness to be human and emotional individuals that disobey an unjust law set in stone. While taken to an extreme, *Psycho-Pass I* calls into question and critiques the idea of humans being given limited choices. While humans no longer have to burden themselves with hard decisions, that lack of will also take away a piece of their humanity, and they might as well just be cogs in a machine doing what they are told to do. The society of *Psycho-Pass I*, then, is

not much different from our current capitalistic culture where we are told what to do and what the best way is to achieve the maximum amount of happiness. Although not to this extremity, people are raised under the pretense of going to school until they are eighteen. After school, people are pressured to either attend college, enroll in the military, or immediately enter the workforce, basically choosing what they wish to accomplish in their life at the age of eighteen. The grind culture expects people to work to contribute to society in a meaningful way (the meaningful as dictated by culture and government, which usually means working at some type of service job). This “meaningful” type of work is similar to how the Sibyl System’s aptitude test dictates what career choices citizens have after graduating high school, leaving them with little choice. While these two societies appear easier, they take away important aspects of humanity. In the Sibyl System’s eyes, individuality is problematic and useless in a perfect system; however, as seen through the core characters, *Psycho-Pass I* critiques sameness as just being this cog in a machine and human, something prevalent globally, but especially in Japanese culture.

Sci-fi has always had important socio-political commentary on society’s needs and fallibility. *Psycho-Pass I*, then, as a sci-fi anime, reflects various underlying issues in Japanese society, which are also prevalent in American society. America and Japan have had these cultural partnerships since post-World War II. As McKevitt states, “as much as America has changed the world, the world has changed America;” in this sense, Japan’s cultural goods have impacted the States, as well as giving a bit of resistance power to non-elites (896). Anime’s popularity rose because of the “alienated” American youth banding together and forming fan groups, engaging “the processes of globalization by using the consumption of a foreign cultural product to create new social communities reflecting cultural heterogeneity in local U.S. settings” (McKevitt 896). Because the Japanese anime fans resisted and demanded cultural artifacts, cultural globalization

began to occur between America and Japan, helping to transcend global barriers (McKevitt 919). Consuming media has always been a way for people to become engaged in social issues; adding differing cultural media into the mix, the youth of America started to form a semblance of resistance “to reorient individual and group identities according to a new awareness of transnational or global interconnectedness” (McKevitt 896). In other words, the communal aspect of fandoms in the 70s, 80s, and 90s created a sense of resistance, demanding unfiltered cultural artifacts from Japan, while also allowing these fans “to experiment with new cultural identities” (McKevitt 905). It is through the cracks in society that Japanese anime became popularized in the States, thus showing the power of a bit of resistance. Japan and America influenced themselves reciprocally, and as a form of counter-cultural movement within America during the 70s and 80s, anime has become an integral part of consumed media for many youths. However, that is not to say that the globalization of anime has not been touched by capitalism; once anime started to become mainstream in the States, sales of the media started to rise, making the once counter-culture media form a commodity for the States. This commodification does not, however, counteract the cultural relevance that anime has had on youth in America, especially those who grew up in the 1970s-1990s. Because of the cultural connections between Japan and America, and the importance of sci-fi analysis, *Psycho-Pass I* became an ideal anime to analyze glitches, alienation, and actor-networks in relation to current American society.

Conclusion

By looking at the glitches in a futuristic society run by a technologically advanced actor-network, we can see parallels to the critiques of humanity’s reliance on technology and fitting in a system, becoming isolated. Although *Psycho-Pass I* takes place in 2112 Tokyo, the real world itself has become incredibly reliant on technology. That is not to say that advancements in

technology and scientific breakthroughs haven't been magnificent, especially in communication with others; however, it is when we forego our emotions and humanity in the name of being more objective, we take one step closer to the world of *Psycho-Pass I*. To put blind trust in a computer and ignore our will is what *Psycho-Pass I* critiques, especially in the case of individuals like Shogo who are allowed to continue to openly commit heinous crimes and not be punished for them. Technology and science can be wonderful components to help enhance our humanity, but we need to understand how and why they work and understand that technology is typically human-created, therefore not as objective as we initially perceive it to be. For this perspective to shift, change in thought needs to happen, even though this can take sacrifice and risk. Although our livelihood will be changed if we attempt to dismantle the system that isolates and dehumanizes us, in the end, it will be better for every living being. We don't have to do a huge major upheaval of society or attempt societal collapse like Shogo, but just by acknowledging the world as it is and making small changes, like Akane's rhetorical decision to use positive language, humans can start a ripple effect that starts to dismantle the isolating systems. However, we need everyone on board for these effects to take place.

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