

## The Panoptic Sibyl System and the Dystopia in Gen Urobuchi's *Psycho Pass*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to prove that Sibyl System is the Panopticon and to analyze the causes of dystopia in Gen Urobuchi's *Psycho Pass*. In *Psycho Pass*, Sibyl System is the governing system which possesses a resemblance to the Panopticon. It implies that Sibyl System may actually be a Panopticon; thus, we want to prove this using the theory of the Panopticon by Michel Foucault. Moreover, Sibyl System shows signs of being the cause of the dystopian society in *Psycho Pass* even though it was designed to create utopia. To find out more about this, we analyze each characteristic of the dystopian society and trace their causes to Sibyl System's aspects. Through the analysis, by comparing Sibyl System's aspects to six of the Panopticon's aspects, it is found that Sibyl System is indeed a Panopticon, and these panoptic aspects with its loopholes are the causes of the dystopian society. In conclusion, a Panopticon such as Sibyl System, though designed with noble intentions, can have flaws that prove fatal in changing the society into a dystopian one.

Keywords: Panopticon, dystopia, Sibyl System

Anime, or Japanese animation, is derived from the word '*animēshiyon*', Japanese reading of the English word 'animation'. Anime first gained popularity in Japan in the 1960s due to Ozamu Tezuka's works, and in the last two decades, "anime began to attain wide international popularity with the *Pokémon* television series and films such as Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2002), winner of an Academy Award for best animated feature film" (Wallenfeldt, 2009). A genre that has always been popular for anime is science fiction. In fact, the first popular anime, *Astro Boy*, is a science fiction anime, and ever since then science fiction has always been a favorite genre for both producers and audiences. A Japanese writer with a worthy contribution to science fiction is Gen Urobuchi who is known for writing dark and tragic stories. He becomes popular recently due to his work, the anime *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, which is praised widely and has won many awards; among them are Anime Kobe Awards 2011 and Tokyo International Anime Fair 2012, both for Best Television Animation Award ("News," n.d.). One of Gen Urobuchi's most recent works is the anime *Psycho Pass*.

*Psycho Pass* is an interesting text to be analyzed because it portrays a unique variation of dystopian world that is dominated by advanced technology with emphasis on justice and government system. It is set in a futuristic Japan in 2112 which is governed by the so-called perfect computer system, Sibyl System, which judges and monitors the citizen's psycho pass (emotions, desires, and inclinations) and crime coefficients (a measure of the person's probability to commit crime). *Psycho Pass* tells the story of Tsunemori Akane, an Inspector, and Kougami Shinya, an Enforcer under Tsunemori, who have to face Makishima Shougo who opposes Sibyl System through anarchy and manipulation. Makishima's efforts to topple Sibyl System reveal the darker aspects of Sibyl System, especially the fact that Sibyl System is actually a cyborg system, conducted by the brains of criminally asymptomatic people who used to be criminals, that seeks to control the society.

The story of *Psycho Pass* raises many questions, especially regarding Sibyl System. Sibyl System gives the judgment on how people should live best and monitors the psychological condition of the people, which greatly resembles some aspects of the Panopticon, a prison design by Jeremy Bentham. This raises the question as to whether Sibyl System is a Panopticon through and through. Another thing to be questioned is how Sibyl System is not accepted by all despite it being advertised as a perfect system. Sibyl System is created for a good cause which to create a perfect society without crime. However, it is later revealed that the perfect society is only an illusion for there are some darker aspects to Sibyl System. Thus, *Psycho Pass*' society qualifies as a dystopia instead of utopia.

Sibyl System is based on Panopticon's design and therefore, sharing its goal and possessing its aspects. When it is proved that Sibyl System is a Panopticon, *Psycho Pass*' dystopian society will imply that the Panopticon in that world fails. We are interested to look into the Panopticon's failures and discover why they can create a dystopia. Therefore, we want to look further into the aspects of Sibyl System to prove whether it is a Panopticon, and from its proved aspects, analyze the causes why the society in *Psycho Pass* that is supposed to be a utopia turns into a dystopia.

In order to analyze and prove that Sibyl System is a Panopticon, we use Michel Foucault's theory of the Panopticon. The Panopticon is an architectural design of prison by Jeremy Bentham in 1787 which is discussed at length by Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. The Panopticon has a circular structure with a tower at the center. This particular design of the Panopticon plays an important role for its main function which is the observation of inmates' behavior without the inmates knowing whether they are being observed at the moment. This main function is shared by Sibyl System which is why we state that Sibyl System and the Panopticon are similar. To prove that Sibyl System is a Panopticon, we enclose six of the Panopticon's aspects that are provided by Foucault to be compared to Sibyl System's aspects. These six aspects are visibility and unverifiability, automatic and disindividualized power, royal menagerie and laboratory, multiple applications, economical in terms of material, personnel, and time, and efficient.

To trace the causes of dystopia, we use the characteristics of dystopian society. Dystopia, according to John Joseph Adams, describes "an unfavorable society in which to live". In a dystopian society, the illusion of a perfect society is maintained by the government to hide the flaw(s) that lies beneath. There are many characteristics that can define a society as dystopian, but we use only three of them: the first is the restriction of information, independent thought, and freedom; the second is the dehumanization of citizens; and the last is the division of people into castes or groups with specialized functions (NCTE, as cited in Chung, n.d.; Wells, 2011; Witalec (ed.), 2003).

## **THE PANOPTIC SIBYL SYSTEM**

In this part, we want to prove that Sibyl System serves as the Panopticon in *Psycho Pass* by comparing each aspects of Panopticon with those of Sibyl System. When it is found that Sibyl System possesses the Panopticon's aspects despite the differences, then Sibyl System is proved as the Panopticon in this series.

### **Visible and Unverifiable Scanners**

Sibyl System shares the Panopticon's main functions which are visibility and unverifiability. The Panopticon has a central tower which is visible to all the inmates but its covered windows prevent the inmates to see whether there is a supervisor inside, providing unverifiability, causing the inmates to keep their behavior in check. Sibyl System also possesses these "towers", called the scanners. They are tools designed specially to measure a person's stress patterns that affect his/her psycho pass through Hue Assessment.

Sibyl System makes sure that the citizens know that it is always keeping an eye on them by placing its scanners everywhere so that it is easily spotted. The citizens become aware of the scanners around them, so they strive to keep their psycho pass clear (under the regulation value). Other than guaranteeing visibility, these scanners also provide unverifiability because they do not always perform the Hue Assessment according to a particular schedule, causing the citizens to not knowing exactly when they are assessed, but they may always be sure that they are always assessed. Unless they keep their psycho pass clear at all times, the scanners are bound to detect them at unexpected times. For example, in episode two, a person is detected having a cloudy psycho pass when he is going out in the mall. A criminal thought just suddenly strikes him at that time, but Sibyl System is able to detect him right away through the scanners and judges him as a criminal.

As mentioned and explained above, the scanners provide Sibyl System with the visibility and unverifiability aspects of the Panopticon. These aspects ensure that the citizens maintain their stress and control their thoughts every time.

### **Automatic and Disindividualized Power of Sibyl's Computerized System**

Sibyl System, like Panopticon, also automatizes and disindividualizes power. Due to its computerized system, Sibyl System's power is automatic and is not accountable to a particular person

or group; therefore, anyone can operate Sibyl System no matter who and why. The citizens do not know who are behind Sibyl System, just like the inmates in the Panopticon do not know who the supervisors in the tower are. All they know is that they are watched, and that is enough for them to behave themselves. Consequently, the fact that the brains behind Sibyl System are mostly ex-criminals whose motives are questionable does not become a problem. For instance, Touma Kouzaburou, a member of Sibyl System, admits in episode seventeen that he enjoys being a member because he can feel an infinite pleasure with the world under his rule. To most people, this motive will be unacceptable; however, since the citizens have no way to find out, they can only try to live according to the regulations in a blissful ignorance. In episode twenty, this aspect is affirmed by Sibyl System itself, "What is needed is a perfect and infallible system. Who manages it and how it is managed are irrelevant. ... In a truly completed system, its operator's will is not questioned" (Wada, Tabori & Okamura, 8 Mar. 2013). This aspect of Sibyl System's power proves that it is an automatized and disindividualized power, the same as the Panopticon's.

### **Occupation Aptitude Test and Rehabilitation Facility**

Two other Panopticon's functions that Sibyl System also possesses are the functions of royal menagerie and laboratory. The Panopticon classifies its inmates into groups through its royal menagerie function, and experiments on the alteration of its inmates' behavior through its laboratory function. These two functions of Panopticon are applied in Sibyl System through an aptitude test and rehabilitation facilities.

Sibyl System can function as a royal menagerie because it can draw up differences in aptitudes among its citizens through the Occupation Aptitude Test. Each person's aptitudes are determined through their talent and intelligence which will influence what are the most suitable fields of jobs for them and how good they are in it. That is why, based on the result of the test, people will find out which fields of jobs are suitable for them along with the rank that signifies how good they are in that field. The examples of the test results can be found in episode two where Tsunemori gets A ranking for the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Technology while Funahara, her friend, only gets C ranking for blue collar work.

Sibyl System functions as a laboratory through its rehabilitation facility because it seeks to alter its patients' mind behavior and correct their thoughts and desires so that the patients can have clear psycho pass again. In the rehabilitation facility, everyone who is judged as latent criminal is kept in isolated cell to be monitored and then receives treatment in the form of therapy to recover their psycho pass. Once their psycho pass successfully recover, the patients will be allowed to return to the society as a regular citizen.

All in all, Sibyl System possesses the royal menagerie and laboratory functions of the Panopticon through the Occupation Aptitude Test which serves to draw up differences between the citizens and the rehabilitation facility which serves to treat and reform latent criminals.

### **Sibyl System's Multiple Applications**

Sibyl System has multiple applications which are implemented in many kinds of institutions. Through these applications which are the rehabilitation facility, aptitude test and Hue Assessments, Sibyl System does all of these things: reform and treat the latent criminals, instruct students, confine the untreatable latent criminals, supervise workers, and put everyone to work.

Through the rehabilitation facility, Sibyl System can reform and treat the latent criminals as proven by its laboratory function, and in some cases, confine the untreatable latent criminals. For those untreatable latent criminals who work as the Enforcers, Sibyl System confines them within the Public Safety Bureau building. Through the aptitude test, Sibyl System can instruct students on their career path and at the same time, put everyone to work. The fact that Sibyl System puts everyone to work is implied at episode four; when Tsunemori finds out that the murder victim is revealed to be unemployed, she reacts in surprise and asks, "Unemployed? Do people like that exist in this day and age?" (Wada, Tabori & Okamura, 2 Nov. 2012). Her reaction implies that unemployment is a rare thing. Sibyl System also supervises workers through the Hue Assessments. By installing the scanners in buildings, the system is able to supervise the psycho pass of every worker that can indicate their performance in work. When a worker's psycho pass gets cloudy, Sibyl System transfers the worker immediately.

In conclusion, just like a Panopticon, Sibyl System has many applications and through these applications, Sibyl System is able to perform many tasks for different institutions as shown above.

### **Economical in Terms of Material, Personnel, and Time**

Sibyl System is economical in terms of its material, personnel, and time, like the Panopticon, because the system is done mostly by the computer. Sibyl System only needs material pertaining to the hardware of the technology. Sibyl System is also similar to the Panopticon that only needs minimum number of personnel to observe maximum number of people. As stated in episode seventeen by Joushu Kasei, the avatar of Sibyl System, “The system currently has 247 constituent members. By having about 200 of the 247 connected in sessions at any given time, we can continuously monitor and judge the psycho pass of every single person in this country” (Wada, Tabori & Okamura, 15 Feb. 2013). Lastly, Sibyl System is also economical in time, as it doesn’t spend much time for the system to react to any events. As shown in episode two, when a person is detected having a cloudy psycho pass, an alarm in the Public Safety Bureau building will be sounded immediately with a warning about the crime and its location, prompting the Inspectors and Enforcers in duty to act at once. To conclude, Sibyl System is as economical as the Panopticon due to its minimum material, personnel, and time.

### **Sibyl System’s Efficacy**

The last aspects of the Panopticon that Sibyl System possesses are its efficacy. Sibyl System is efficient because of its preventative character that is pre-crime intervention: it intervenes in a crime before the crime happens. Its continuous function also makes Sibyl System efficient because it functions all the time without rest. Lastly, it is efficient because without any instrument other than the computerized system, it has direct action over individuals.

Sibyl System has a preventative character because of its ability to directly observe people’s mind. As shown in episode two, once someone thinks criminally, Sibyl System can detect it right away and send warning to the Public Safety Bureau building so that the crime can be prevented before it happens. Sibyl System also has a continuous function as it is also implied in episode two that it functions for twenty-four hours every day, as the Inspectors and Enforcers also have night duty to be able to respond at once to Sibyl System’s warning anytime. Lastly, Sibyl System also has direct actions over individuals through the ‘power of mind over mind’. This ‘power of mind over mind’ in Sibyl System’s case can be interpreted in the way that Sibyl System’s power lies in the fact that it does not need any other instrument but its computerized system. The citizens are aware of the computer system which has the power to directly access their mind and judge their psycho pass. This effect of this power is that the citizens keep trying not to get their psycho pass cloudy throughout the series.

All in all, Sibyl System possesses the efficacy of Panopticon because of its intervention before a crime can happen. It is also efficient because of its continuous function for twenty-four seven, and its direct actions over individuals through its mechanism of computerized system.

## **THE CAUSES OF THE DYSTOPIA**

In this part, we want to seek out the causes of the dystopia in *Psycho Pass*. The causes lie within Sibyl System as the governing system, so we analyze each dystopian characteristic that the society shows in *Psycho Pass*, and then trace its cause to Sibyl System’s aspects.

### **Restricted Freedom**

The first and foremost reason why the society in *Psycho Pass* is a dystopia instead of utopia is because the citizens have restricted freedom. Their freedom is restricted in the sense that they have to live their life in accordance to Sibyl System’s will no matter what. The path of their future is decided by Sibyl System through the aptitude test and they have to follow through Sibyl System’s decision or else they will be either condemned to live in the rehabilitation facility or sentenced to be killed. From this example, it is shown that it is Sibyl System’s royal menagerie role that causes this problem.

The royal menagerie function causes restricted freedom through the Occupation Aptitude Test. It points out to people their talents and tells them that they should make a living by following their

talents. Sibyl System sets up the test this way because it wants people to gain happiness. Sibyl System thinks that to gain happiness, a person has to live and work according to their talent. While this reasoning is not wrong, the problem is that Sibyl System does not count into their consideration that people also gain happiness from following their own will even if it does not have anything to do with their talents. As Makishima says in episode eleven, “The intelligence of science finally uncovered the secret of souls, and this society changed drastically. However, people’s wills are not a part of the assessment” (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 21 Dec. 2012). Makishima’s words confirm how Sibyl System does not include people’s wills into its assessment. There are many cases in *Psycho Pass* that reveal how Sibyl System’s good intention actually backfires by causing people to be unhappy. One such case is revealed in episode six when Rikako Oryo says to Yoshika Okubo:

It seems you can’t choose the life you wish. I understand how hard it is. In this era, the System determines everyone’s aptitudes and we all have no choice but to live by it and be satisfied with only a happiness forced upon us as we are unable to make our real dreams come true (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 16 Nov. 2012).

Oryo’s words reveal how the system does not actually help people to gain happiness, but instead force the happiness onto people.

To conclude, the first cause of dystopia is Sibyl System’s obligatory Occupation Aptitude Test. It should have led to a utopia where all the citizens live in happiness, but it leads to a dystopia where the citizens are not free to choose their own lives and have to obey Sibyl System’s will which result in unhappiness. This happens because the system does not involve its citizens’ wills into their assessment.

### **Inequality in Future Jobs**

*Psycho Pass*’ society is regarded as a dystopia is because there is inequality that results in some people getting more chance at getting better jobs and better living because they have better aptitudes. Similar to the cause of limited freedom, inequality is also caused by the royal menagerie functions of Sibyl System.

As mentioned before, in regards to its royal menagerie function, Sibyl System actually wants people to gain happiness. However, in this case, Sibyl System does not consider the fate of the less-talented people. Since everyone has to follow through the test result, those less-talented people will not have many choices of job offers and they will be stuck with jobs that are not good for their whole life. This inequality is revealed during the riots in episode fifteen in which a dissatisfied student who has just killed two honor students says, “What’s terrible is not us, but the Sibyl System. Based on Sibyl’s Judgment, we know that we no longer can get a decent job. A life with no hope for the future” (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 1 Feb. 2013). These words reveal how there is an inequality between the honor students and less-talented ones. Sibyl System judges that the honor students will have promising futures, but the less-talented students will not.

In conclusion, the inequality happens because Sibyl System judges people based on their aptitude and forces them to live their life according to their talents, giving those with better aptitudes the privileges of a bright future while dooming the less-talented ones to a bleak future.

### **Sheep-like Citizens**

The society in *Psycho Pass* is called dystopia also because of its sheep-like citizens. The citizens, like a flock of sheep, cannot think for themselves or judge things by themselves. As a result, have to rely on Sibyl System’s decision and judgment. The causes of these sheep-like citizens can be traced to the royal menagerie function and the efficacy of Sibyl System.

The royal menagerie function contributes to this aspect of dystopia because of the obligatory nature of the aptitude test. Because Sibyl System measures the aptitudes of the citizens and points out the path of their careers, the citizens are not required to think much about their future. That is why, in episode two, Kagari seems astounded by Tsunemori who says that she becomes an Inspector to find out the reason why she was born. His reaction implies that no one thinks the way Tsunemori thinks anymore. Many citizens obey Sibyl System without question, believing that the path it points out to them will lead them to happiness.

Another cause for the sheep-like citizens is the efficacy of Sibyl System. Sibyl System is so efficient that it can prevent a crime and even if the crime happens, Sibyl System can deliver

immediate and proper punishment. Thus, the citizens do not have to worry about crime because Sibyl System takes care of it for them. They trust Sibyl System's judgment completely and the result of this trust is best explained by Ginoza in episode fourteen:

We no longer have to prepare ourselves to doubt or be cautious of others. You know that those strangers you see on the street are all safe, good citizens because they've had their psycho pass verified. This society maintains its order based on that assumption (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 25 Jan. 2013).

At first glance, it seems like a good thing that people no longer have to doubt each other; however, this notion is destroyed in the same episode. Makishima creates a helmet that copies the clearest psycho pass in the area for the wearer, causing the wearer to be able to commit a crime without being found out by Sibyl System. A helmet wearer brutally kills a woman in public, but the people around only watch the crime happening in front of them passively. When they are asked about it, they testify that they cannot understand what is going on. This situation reveals how the people do not question Sibyl System's judgment even though they see a crime happening in front of their own eyes. Because Sibyl System does not judge the helmet wearer to be a criminal, the people do not think that the murder in front of them is a crime. Makishima reveals that the helmet's purpose is exactly to reveal how the citizens have become like sheep:

This was a tool to promote awareness for people to live like human beings and to stop them from living idle lives like livestock. ... People have been misled by Sibyl and have become unable to properly evaluate the danger in front of them (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 8 Mar. 2013).

Through the helmet, Makishima manages to expose how Sibyl System's efficacy plays a role in producing sheep-like citizens and the horrific effect of these sheep-like citizens.

All in all, the royal menagerie function and the efficacy of Sibyl System both play a role in creating sheep-like citizens. The aptitude test causes the citizens to let Sibyl System make the decision for them while the efficacy causes them to put much trust in its judgment which results in them unable to make decision for themselves or judge a person or situation by themselves.

### **Eustress Deficiency**

The next reason the society in *Psycho Pass* is a dystopia one is the emergence of a disease named eustress deficiency cerebral infarction, known simply as eustress deficiency. Those who suffer from this disease usually die of a heart failure and it is said to be caused by the side effect of excessive stress care. The root of this disease emergence is the unverifiability of Sibyl System. Sibyl System actually wants the citizens to possess a healthy and sound mind, and therefore, constantly observing their psycho pass to ensure that they are indeed healthy and sound in mind. However, because of the constant observation, the citizens are under constant pressure of keeping their psycho pass clear. Psycho pass can be affected negatively by stress, so the citizens try hard not to get stressed at all. They do not realize that actually a little bit of stress is good. This good stress, called eustress, is important because it can stimulate the immune system and provides motivation in life. Makishima relates the Hue Assessments, or psycho pass checks in Makishima's words, to the disease in episode seven:

However, once psycho pass checks become routine, people have found their sense of stress numbed so much that patients who can't even recognize stimulation itself started appearing. Once that happens, they're the same as living corpses. Soon their autonomic nervous system stops functioning on its own and their vital functions shut down (Wada, Tobori & Okamura, 23 Nov. 2012).

The constant pressure of the Hue Assessments causes the very stress that the citizens try to avoid having which ultimately leads them to live in a dehumanized state. To conclude, the unverifiability of Sibyl System causes constant pressure that the humans cannot handle which leads to eustress deficiency.

### **Criminally Asymptomatic People**

The last reason why the society in *Psycho Pass* is dystopian is the existence of criminally asymptomatic people among the citizens. Criminally asymptomatic is the term used to refer to people whose criminal psychology does not match with their psycho pass and crime coefficient. Even if a

criminally asymptomatic person is to commit a crime, his/her psycho pass will show clear color with low crime coefficient. Sibyl System should be able to scan every person's mind and detect his/her criminal intent, yet it is unable to do so to these criminally asymptomatic people because of the loopholes in the system's program. This becomes extremely problematic because most of criminally asymptomatic people are implied to be psychopaths who have no qualms about committing terrible crimes. To deal with this, Sibyl System comes up with the idea to integrate them into the system by entrusting the management of Sibyl System to them. While this seems the logical solution to Sibyl System, it actually creates another problem related to Sibyl System's aspect of automatized and disindividualized power. Theoretically, it does not matter who operates the system and why he/she operates it because there should be no way for anyone to find out the truth behind Sibyl System. However, when there is a person such as Makishima who, after being shown the truth by Sibyl System, does not want to be integrated into the system and manages to escape Sibyl System, the truth behind Sibyl System is in danger of being exposed. If the truth is revealed to the citizens, Sibyl System's power will no longer be automatic and disindividualized which will lead to chaos. Tsunemori's reaction when finding out the truth behind Sibyl System is sufficient to illustrate how people will react: "Then are you saying that Sibyl is a monster that is a collection of wicked people's brains and that this monster has been running the world?!" (Wada, Tabori & Okamura, 8 Mar. 2013). Even though in the end Makishima is killed and Tsunemori keeps the secret, it cannot be denied that Sibyl System's power is hanging in the balance. There is no guarantee that there will not be others like Makishima who will someday find out the truth and expose it.

In conclusion, the existence of criminally asymptomatic people is caused by loopholes in the system. The solution Sibyl System offers to deal with these people, by making them the managers of Sibyl System despite their criminal status, will threaten Sibyl System's power and cause chaos if it is to be exposed.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis has proven that Sibyl System is a Panopticon and that Sibyl System's panoptic aspects are the causes of the society in *Psycho Pass* to turn into a dystopia. Despite having a different form and more advanced technology, Sibyl System possesses the aspects of the Panopticon in its system. Through Sibyl System, it is revealed how the Panopticon, even though designed with noble intentions, can still have flaws that may prove to be fatal. The analysis shows how Sibyl System, as a Panopticon, fails to create a utopian society that it strives for, and instead plays a great role in turning the society into a dystopian one. *Psycho Pass*, as an anime series, has managed to not only offer entertainment, but also raise the issue regarding the Panopticon and how it may cause a horrific change to the society.

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