

Metamorphadox

Jarrett Heckbert

Porcupine's Quill (Apr 30, 2016)

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In a society that thrives on technology, Metamorphadox provides a timely reminder that while knowledge is important, so is retaining a sense of self.

In *Metamorphadox*, Jarrett Heckbert presents a chilling glimpse of an all-too-possible future. Through stark imagery, this graphic novel portrays a world that has finally achieved lasting peace, but at the devastating cost of individualism.

No text accompanies the imagery in *Metamorphadox*, whose illustrations are deceptively simple. Absent of any color, the wood engravings support the disturbing connotations of the graphic novel's dystopian society. If color adds individuality, then a world that deprecates its importance will be free of such variance. Not only does the black-and-white palette support the sameness that pervades this society, it also suggests intolerance toward anyone who refuses to assimilate into the new order.

While the lack of text may present a challenge, the sequence of images more than adequately lays out a clear narrative. The absence of words does leave room for interpretation, yet the only logical conclusions to draw from the story veer toward the menacing end of the spectrum.

It seems surprising that a peaceful utopia could be easily established in the wake of a catastrophic war, but *Metamorphadox* postulates the factors leading to the conflict, as well as the instability fostered by the aftermath. As often observed in real-life events, such uncertainty can give rise to radical social movements. In many instances, religion provides the basis for these society-shaping ideologies, but in Heckbert's utopia-turned-dystopia, technology becomes the vehicle for humanity's downfall.

The hypothesis is hardly a novel one. What makes Heckbert's cautionary tale unique is that humanity is not oppressed by technology that has become sentient or violent. Instead, humanity oppresses itself in the name of peace—a decision that rings even more uncomfortably true to life. In *Metamorphadox*, people join a collective consciousness where all knowledge is shared. This collective pool of human-driven information accelerates innovation and discovery, but it simultaneously leaves little room for those unable or unwilling to comply. The removal of these dissidents from the system remains explicitly ambiguous, although the implications are ominously clear.

The nameless protagonist of Heckbert's graphic novel seemingly breaks free of the technological controls oppressing individuality to explore the various aspects of this unusual futuristic society. Ultimately, however, even this personal journey may be nothing more than another boundary set by the communal consciousness, raising the question of what is real and what is illusion.

In a society that thrives on technology that links our world together, *Metamorphadox* provides a timely reminder that while knowledge is important, so is retaining a sense of self. Computers, social media, and the internet are necessary tools in modern society, but should not come at the cost of losing touch with what makes people human.

VERNIEDA VERGARA (July 22, 2016)

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