

# Tripped toggle reveals truth about texts

In a way, I really enjoyed being a night janitor. Sure, the hours were lousy and the pay was worse, but for some reason, ever since I was a kid I had always enjoyed cleaning things. That's why when the University maintenance crew took me on as head work-study janitor for PLC they got the biggest bargain ever, because I left no corner unmopped and no book undusted in my relentless pursuit of spotlessness.

So it was that in the midst of a particularly industrious fit of midnight polishing, I make my momentous discovery. I was working in the office of a psychology professor — coincidentally, one of my psychology professors — when I got the notion to scrub the underside of the heating register. I was really getting into the job, determined to make the old neglected aluminum gleam so that anyone who might, improbably, squat down and inspect it would see his or her own startled face peering back, when my cloth struck, and flipped, a toggle switch hidden in the deepest recess of the space beneath the register.

Suddenly the whirring sound of some invisible motor filled the room, and, spinning around, I saw an ornate, framed diploma bearing my professor's name swing away from the wall, revealing an empty space behind.

My curiosity thoroughly aroused, I stood and crossed the room to peer inside the mysterious cavern. At first it appeared to be empty, but as my eyes adjusted to the gloom I was able to discern a thin pamphlet resting against the back of the depression. Warily, I reached inside and brought the little volume into the bright neon light of the office. The cover bore this inscription:

"Translation: Cognition and Post-Machiavellian Abstractionism."

I didn't know what to make of that. I knew that "Cognition..." was the name of a textbook, because it was the main text for "Existentialization of Neo-interrationality," the class that I was taking from this professor. But I couldn't imagine what was meant by "Translation," because the textbook was a truly mammoth tome, and a verbatim translation into any language wouldn't even come close to fitting in the pamphlet that I held. Consequently, my curiosity was burning as I opened the cover and read the first page. All that was written there, however, was:

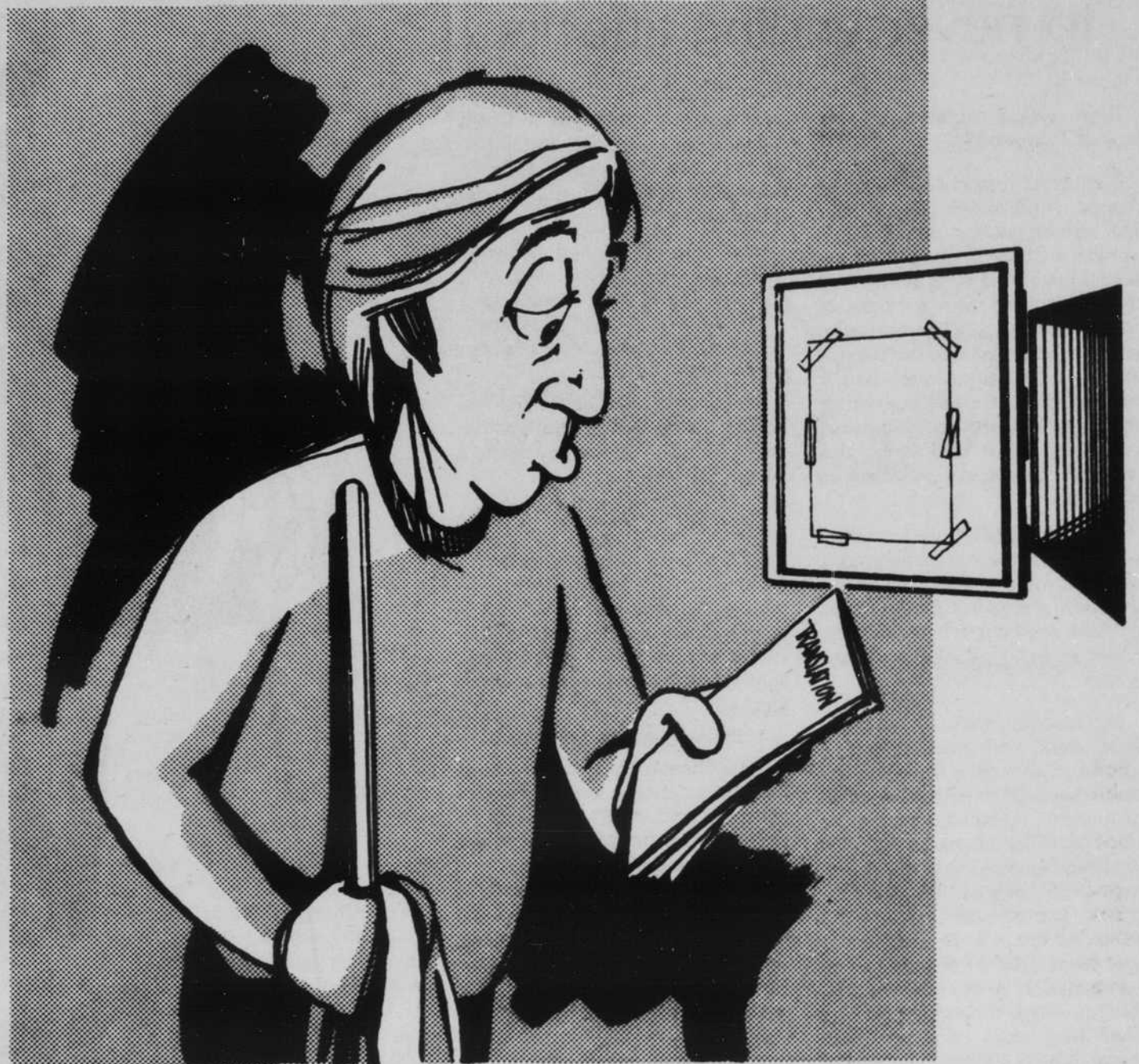
"Chapter 1  
People think."

Now I was really confused. I had read that chapter two months ago, and though I couldn't remember exactly what it said, I recalled that it was a long section, at least 80 pages, and that it had taken me a week to get through it.

Determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, I trotted out to the hall, got my backpack, and pulled out the textbook, using the "clean and jerk" method to avoid straining my back. I flipped to the first paragraph of Chapter One and began to read:

"The cognitive intro-extro inspectionism of self-and-environmentally investigative homo erectus, coupled expansionistically with the inherent evaluatory subliminal conscious reasoning capabilities of closed and open cycle reflection (and, as a necessary adjunct, correction) must, imperatively, react with an innate, polylevel, associative 'perceptual set,' imbued with superstructural dogmatism that, while circumscribing certain revelatory assumptions, allows for creative expression in a context of morality-aware discoveryism. This superstructure is delineated by..."

It went on like that through all 80 pages, liberally sprinkled with notations for footnotes that screamed "Ibid. pg.



Graphic by Steve Sandstrom

alienation, nonrealization of idealized communal id-satiators, and dissipation of image-construction mechanisms on a dramatically descending continuum. Under the vicissitudes of modified pre-Veblenism..." and on and on, I remembered it faintly from a bleary-eyed all-nighter I had pulled at midterm time. I flipped through the little pamphlet to the "Chapter 17" page and read:

"Society can screw you over."

I spent the rest of that night clomping around all nine floors of the building, flipping switches and reading pamphlets, and by the time a rosy glow began to spread behind the art museum I was thoroughly disgusted. We had all been duped, I realized, all 16,500 of us, by this cruel plot.

Some of the "translations" — ironically, the ones for the largest texts — scarcely filled two tiny pages, and in one political science professor's office I discovered a pamphlet for the text "Bourgeois Ipsi-Factism and God" that simply stated "This book doesn't say anything."

the glass doors I nearly ripped them from their hinges as I raced out into the crisp morning air. But a chillingly calm voice followed me through those doors, and I glanced around to see my psychology professor pointing menacingly through the glass.

"Don't worry about it," he was saying to his colleagues. "I know who he is."

Impossibly, I increased my speed after that, zooming through campus and down two blocks to my little studio apartment. I tore open the door and dived for the phone, but it rang before I could reach it.

"Uh, hello?" I panted.

"Well, well, well, and how's our little janitor today?" said an icy, ominous voice. "Been doing a little extra-duty cleaning, I hear."

"Who is this?"

"Never mind about that," said the voice. "The important question is, what do you plan to do now? Believe me, it would be best for you, me, and this little piece of paper I have here in front of me if you'd just keep it as our little secret."

"Like hell I will!" I bellowed. "Listen, what I saw tonight was the lowest, most despicable, depraved...uh...what piece of paper?"

"Oh, it's a cute little thing," said the voice. "It's a beautiful blonde color with bright, perky blue writing at the top that says 'Financial Aid Grant.'"

"No!" I cried. "You fiend, you sick, twisted fiend! If you've done anything to hurt that..."

"Now, now, your little grant is just fine."

"I don't believe you! Let me hear it!"

There was a sound of rustling paper in the earpiece. "Okay, okay," I said, trying to steady myself. I took a deep, shuddering breath and let it out slowly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing much, really," the voice said casually. Then, intently, "Just forget what you saw last night."

"But I can't...you shouldn't...they wouldn't..."

"Or maybe you'd like us to mail your grant back to you?" the voice whispered venomously, "one piece at a time!" This was followed by an ominous, mirthless laugh that rose to a piercing cackle. I slammed the receiver into the cradle and sat down heavily, in a quandary.

And I still don't know what to do. Like an American Solzhenitzen, I've teetered on the brink of publishing what I know dozens of times, only to find my conviction weakening as a vision of myself being forced to drop out and plant trees in Veneta wells up into my conscious mind. So for the time being, I've decided to sit tight, and follow the advice of a "translation" of an ROTC textbook entitled "Prerequisites for Advancement in the Military Milieu." This pamphlet wasn't divided into chapters, since apparently one short phrase served to sum up the entire volume.

"Don't make waves."

## Hidden translations reveal it's all a sham

1,284" and "Finkelstein et al." at the bottom of each page, sometimes in such profusion that the footnotes shoved the text off the page altogether. But no matter how much I read, it all said the same thing...people think.

I suddenly realized that I was on to something — something big. That switch was no architectural afterthought — it was built right into the room's circuitry, and I was willing to bet it wasn't the only one in the building. I smelled a conspiracy, a gigantic one, and as I raced down the hallway, I was determined to find out how many professors were involved in this heinous crime that condemned students to pay exorbitant book prices, study long hours, and pull shoulders out of sockets as they struggled with huge, useless volumes of prattle.

I skidded to a halt in front of my sociology professor's office, jammed the pass key into the lock, rushed inside, found the hidden toggle switch, flipped it, and pulled another tiny volume from behind the hinged diploma. The title of this one was "Translation: Pseudo-Interactionality for Discorporated Gestaltism" and I pulled the appropriate text — deadlifting this time — out of my pack and opened it at random; to Chapter 17, as it turned out.

"Various socializing exigencies," the text read, "can level demoralizing remonstrances at non-ego-insulated personalities, exacerbating existing guilt-self-recriminations, and fostering a normless climate that gives rise to anomie,

As I sat in the last office of the building, thumbing through a matchbook-sized "translation" of a graduate philosophy text titled "Metaphorically Masochistic Metaphysics," I tried to decide what my next move should be. I would release the information, of course, but the question was — to whom? The Emerald? Too small. The Register-Guard? Still too small, this was big news. Finally, I decided to give Daniel Schorr a call — the nation had to know about it.

I had just finished the translation of Chapter 33, which read "people exist," when I heard a key rattle in the office door. The professor! Panicked, I flew across the room and threw the tiny leaflet back into the vault, but it was too late. As the door opened the withered old man, with a battered pipe clutched in his false teeth, saw me shoving the diploma back into place.

"Oh my God!" he cried, clutching his heart. "You there! What are you doing! Stop, I say, stop!"

But I didn't stop, I leaped over him as he collapsed in the doorway, gasping, and I charged topspeed down the hall.

"Stop him!" croaked the old professor. "He knows! Lord help us, he knows!"

Cries of alarm began ringing through the hall along with the desperate, clumping sound of shuffling sexagenarians in vain pursuit, but I didn't look back. Charging full-tilt up to