

DISCOVERIES...

The Theory & Society Book Catalogue

From Sue Curry JANSEN

George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford University Press, 1975.

Steiner is a master-servant of hermeneutic scholarship. Yet, social scientists, including the intrepid few who have nurtured an enthusiasm for the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur, have ignored Steiner's impressive corpus on language and culture. Rejecting the mathematical analogy which has dominated the social sciences since their inception, Steiner does not tease the reader with promises of intellectual revolutions or startling breakthroughs. Like Wittgenstein, Tarski and Hymes, Steiner maintains that formal logic cannot capture the vagueness, contextuality, metaphor, and polysemy which are fundamental impulses of all living languages. In his view, instrumental communication constitutes only one (perhaps secondary) aspect of speech. He regards the potentials of fiction, counter-factuality and indeterminate futurity as the indwelling of human freedom. Because they allow rejection of the empirical givenness of the world, these forms endow human consciousness with the capacity to renegotiate its compacts with "reality."

Contra-Chomsky, Steiner embraces translation as the model of human communication. His famous dictum – every act of communication is an act of translation – is exhaustively explored in this carefully-wrought treatise on natural language. The primary data are the philosophical and psychological reflections of translators on the possibilities of authentic transfers of meaning between languages.

From David MATZA and David WELLMAN

George Benet, *A Place in Colusa*. San Pedro, California: Singlejack Books, 1977.

George Benet is a San Francisco longshoreman. He is also a writer who is rapidly becoming well-known in northern California and, according to one report, is the best-selling author at City Lights bookstore. His collection of poems and short stories, *A Place in Colusa*, revives the tradition of proletarian writing in a manner that avoids the cult of the proletariat and instead deals authentically and incisively with the life of working men. For that reason, the book is of special importance to sociologists and anthropologists interested in the phenomena of working class life.

Benet's style reflects the working virtue of sharp and experienced craft. Sentiment, indignation, even emotion, are eschewed – beside the point. Thus, a clean proletarian style is evident in this small collection. It would appear