“Who’s interested in ... E.P. Thompson’s “The Poverty of Theory”?

In Marx’s “18th Brumaire”, we identified one of the central topics of 20th-century Humanities and Social Sciences: the relationship between social being and social consciousness, along with Marx’s historical methodology revolving around the notion of ‘class’. E.P. Thompson, a member of the British New Left, intervened powerfully in the 1970s, against the – then dominant – Althusserian understanding of the question. In The Poverty of Theory, Thompson casts the foundations of what became known as “neo-Marxism”: a humanist Marxism that argues in favor of a far more dynamic and complex view of the social being-social consciousness relationship, emphasizing the relative autonomy of “superstructure” as well as underscoring Marx’s perpetual exhortation to “do the analysis” and not to treat his theory as a deductive grid. In doing the latter, Thompson also develops one of the most convincing proposals for a hermeneutic-historiographic methodology, of critical importance for the Humanities and Social Sciences of today.

Photocopies of The Poverty of Theory are available upon request.