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Obituary | Unapologetic Irreverence: The Life and Legacy of William “Jock” Young (1942-2013)

Robert Donald Weide¹

¹New York University

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I first met my dear friend and mentor Jock Young while I was a doe faced graduate student, "full of it," as he would have probably described me at the time. It was a quality he apparently admired in me, unlike many of my other academic mentors. Our dear friend, colleague and another cherished mentor, David Charles Brotherton, made the introduction and while Jock shook my hand, he gave me the cock-eyed look of a madman as he peered into my soul, remarking to David with a deviant smirk, "Oh look, we have another trouble maker here!" Well it takes one to know one I suppose. Little did I realize at the time the profound impact this man's work, guidance, and example would have on me, and the impact it had already had on so many before me.

Trapped in the gilded cage of an R1 department with no consciousness of critical perspectives outside the mainstream of the sociological enterprise, I was taken aback by this pugnacious fellow, whose very words caused a profound cognitive dissonance in my budding conceptions of the field I had chosen, shattering the stale perspectives I had been exposed to at that early stage in my academic career. In Jock's company, I felt at home in my element as I never had in other academic settings and was sitting in his course the next semester eager as a schoolboy on his first day ditching classes. Over the course of that semester, Jock proceeded to systematically preempt every reservation I had ever had in all of the courses I had taken up until that point, all of which I had been too terrified to voice in other academic venues, unduly intimidated by those who would rather not entertain alternative perspectives, and certainly not from the likes of me.

At a local Irish pub in Midtown, over libations of tequila and coke with lime for me and that awful dry pinot grigio Jock favored, I would lament my discouragement over the terribly intimidating culture of censorship in academia I was only just coming to comprehend at that time. Entering academia with an expectation of a scholarly environment dedicated to a free exchange of ideas and unrestricted interrogation of differing perspectives, I was shocked to find the ugly truth that the mainstream of the modern sociological and criminological enterprise was anything but. The major journals were packed with mind numbing regression analyses, most of which seemed to miraculously contradict the findings of their predecessor. Nearly all were taken from questionable data sets and utterly devoid of any substantive understanding or empathy with of the lives their empirical data represented or the history that had structured their circumstances. While other professors exalted classical proponents of qualitative analysis like C. Wright Mills and Howie Becker, I found few scholars at the helm of our field actually engaging with the marginalized communities their research purported to represent. Worse yet, I felt a terrible coercion against expressing any of my own misgivings, for each time I had made a clumsy attempt to do so, I had been shot down and further marginalized and isolated within my own department. When I expressed these trepidations to Jock, his response could be summed up in one word, "Rubbish!"

Jock staunchly advocated an unapologetic irreverence for the gate keepers in our discipline and all other reactionary bastions of authority. For Jock it wasn't just "question authority," it was "ignore authority." In Jock's mind, life was too short for us to waste time censoring ourselves to appease those who seek to marginalize us. His advice was always the same, "Tell those bastards what you really think, Robert, and don't pull your punches! The last thing you want is to be a bore." My response was always, "Well, that's easy for you to say Mr. Distinguished Professor with tenure. I'll be lucky if I even finish grad school." His advice was not so easily acted upon for a young grad student like myself, perpetually on the verge of being expelled from my own department and unlikely to be embraced on the job market by a sociological and criminological field that tends to favor rank conformists and careerists. Of course, I couldn't help myself at times, ruffling the feathers of heavy weights in the field with my critical comments at yearly academic conferences, but I also made my best effort to conform to their expectations. Jock would often spy me at a conference cocktail party, brown nosing pillars of the mainstream criminological establishment in the false hope that one day they might throw me a bone. Jock would shoot me a cock-eyed smirk that said all of what he would tell me later unreservedly, "Why are you wasting your time on that twit? They're never going to accept you, Robert."

It was sage advice from a man whose career had experienced an ephemeral brush with the mainstream in the 1980s, but ended up being wholly devoted to resisting mainstream perspectives on criminality and deviance. Oddly enough, Jock got his start in academia studying biochemistry of all things at University College London. However, a fortuitous encounter and engaging discussion with sociologist Steve Box piqued Jock's curiosity in a way that hard science never could. As a result, Jock forewent his pursuit of the hard sciences and instead enrolled in the prestigious London School of Economics (LSE) in 1962 to study sociology. In tune with the emergence of subcultures of resistance going on all around him during the turbulent 1960s, he and his radical co-conspirators in the British sociological Left established the National Deviancy Conference in 1968 to examine crime from a critical subcultural perspective, offering a direct challenge to orthodox views of criminality and deviance. Disillusioned by the ivory tower that LSE represented, Jock made the move to Middlesex (then Polytechnic) University, where he had taught since 1968 and stayed there for the bulk of his career, eventually heading the Centre for Criminology at Middlesex and being appointed Full Professor in 1987. In 2002, he made the move to New York City and was made a Distinguished Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, with a later co-appointment at the University of Kent in England.

Engaging with ideas being batted around in the late 1960s between his cohort and those at the Birmingham School, including such luminaries as Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen, Tony Jeffries, Ian Taylor and Paul Walton, Jock's dissertation published in 1971 under the title *The Drug Takers*, was an early predecessor to such foundations of subcultural analysis as Stuart and Tony's edited volume *Resistance Through Rituals* (1975) and Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (1979). This work, heavily influenced by Howie Becker's concept of moral entrepreneurs in his classic *Outsiders* (1963), along with

Jock's dear mate Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), established the concept of *moral panics*, laying the foundation for subsequent generations of critical scholars of deviance and crime. Shortly thereafter, Jock's co-publication with Ian and Paul, *The New Criminology* (1973), established a new unapologetically irreverent radical critical perspective on crime and criminality, infusing a breath of fresh air into then hackneyed perspectives of crime as a moral or social deficiency of criminalized groups and individuals.

With the trappings of legitimacy that academic success often brings, Jock was adopted as a darling of the liberal bourgeoisie Labor Party for a short tenure in the 1980s. He assumed a key role in the development of what he termed *left realist perspectives* with the publication of *What's to be Done About Law and Order?* (1984) with John Lea. Challenging radical Marxist perspectives emerging in the 1970s, Jock argued that those at greatest threat of crime are the same marginalized communities that are targeted for suppressive law enforcement tactics in the name of arresting crime. He took on topics in the 1980s that would later be of great significance in the US context, such as urban riots and aggressive proactive stop and frisk policing. However, the Labor Party's sharp turn to the punitive Right in the mid to late 1980s was a slap in the face to Jock, and he split ranks with the mainstream liberal establishment that had courted him only years earlier. Though we never discussed it directly, I suspect Jock had terrible misgivings about having entertained the mainstream liberal bourgeoisie only to get burned by them in the end. That was an unspoken lesson his guidance seemed to be perpetually embedded in, as he always shook off any suggestion on my part that it might be prudent to engage with the mainstream as "Rubbish!"

The last stage of his career was spent composing and disseminating his tripartite works, *The Exclusive Society* (1999), *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* (2007), and *The Criminological Imagination* (2011). Jock's prescient analysis of the move of Western Society from a society of inclusion to one of exclusion in *The Exclusive Society* predated the spectacular attack on Western hegemony carried out on September 11, 2001 by a small band of radical Islamist veterans of the US covert war against the USSR in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and he continued his analysis of exclusion to post 9-11 Western Society in *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* a few years later. These were perhaps his most lasting contributions to critical perspectives on contemporary society in the early 21st century and are sure to color the thinking of scholars of deviance, crime, and social relations to come for generations.

His final major work *The Criminological Imagination* was an out and out declaration of war on the modern criminological establishment, who reacted to his prescient critique with a deafening silence while Jock was still alive to defend it, reflecting their utter inability to respond with any substance to his unforgiving assessment of the kind of runaway abstract empiricism the vast majority of our field is characterized by in the contemporary era. Likening the modern criminological enterprise, its flagship journals, and the vast majority of their publications to a sauropod with a tiny brain of substantive

engagement and an obese body of meaningless statistical analysis using universally dubious data sets, Jock took direct aim at the gatekeepers of our discipline who would seek to censor and isolate those whose qualitative research sought to humanize and empathize with marginalized criminalized populations. When Jock's book came out in 2011, none of the scholars whose work was targeted by Jock's book stepped forward to answer Jock's challenge at that year's meeting of the American Society of Criminology, so David Garland graciously stepped in to give it his best shot. Of course it shouldn't have been David Garland, it should have been one of the pillars of the mainstream quantitative wing of the modern criminological field who stepped up to the plate to defend their research, their legacy, and their progeny. Their silence in the face of Jock's critique during his lifetime is perhaps his greatest victory.

Jock's legacy is nothing less than the audacity of ideas his work represented and a humanistic perspective that reflects the gentle decent man he was. It is a legacy that lives on in all of us who knew, loved, and learned from Jock, what my dear friend, colleague and mentor Mark Hamm described in me as a tendency to identify downward, an inclination to identify with the criminalized marginalized populations our research represents. Our solemn duty going forward after this immense loss that Jock's passing represents is to never back down, to never give up, and to always speak up, write, and act to protect those who are not, as C. Wright Mills put it over half a century ago, "aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history." That is Jock's legacy. Open your heart and open your mind so that you may let him live on in you as well. Jock was right indeed, life is too short.