

**Editors Lair - A Tribute To Bob Young (1935-2019)**  
 Kurt Jacobsen



Clichés sometimes have their place, as do rituals, which are especially helpful in the experiences of mourning and loss we all undergo. There is a familiar rustic Irish lament (from an unapologetic sexist era) regarding any remarkable departed figure that "we will never see his like again," which seems all too fitting for *Free Associations* journal founder and co-editor Bob Young, who died July 5 in Whittington Hospital in London. In his honor in this issue - and it could have been any number of other essays so far as representative candidates are concerned - we reprint an article in which Bob stated concisely what he was all about. Luckily, Bob insisted on making his books and essays available online free of pay barriers, like this journal, so as to disseminate all the profound and arresting and humane things he had to say as far and wide as possible. At the website (<http://www.psychanalysis-and-therapy.com/rmyoung/index.html>) you'll spy in the upper left corner a tiny Sisyphusean animation pushing a boulder up a steep incline again and again. It was kidding on the square. Bob, in my many conversations with him over the last decade of his life, certainly felt that way about his work but took Camus' view of imagining Sisyphus was happy or, better still, just could not act otherwise.

Entering his cavernous groaning room of books, computer and memorabilia at 26 Freegrove Road was to trespass into an alluring magisterial reality. Here was an authentic intellectual's "Life of The Mind" theme park, in the very best sense of the expression. All the exciting and terrifying rides you could ever crave were tucked up there on the dusty

bookshelves, already thumbed through and threatening at any second to inundate you. Bob was chided for a complicated relation with "stuff" by people beset with our middle class minimalist IKEA sensibility about decor, but it wasn't hard to understand that the surroundings grounded him. He wore the decor like a million medals, and it suited him perfectly. If something was always tipping over or on the verge of it, well, that, as Lacanians, for whom he didn't care much, like to say, 'signifies' how real thinkers think. Nothing was quite fixed for Bob, except of course a deep core belief in human dignity and in the curative power of truth. So far as I know, Bob was an atheist, but he was far more moral and soulful than many an "eejit" (forgive the additional Irishism) I have encountered in religious communities.

Bob distrusted, if not detested, clubs, from Bullingdon boors to professional cabals, with their compulsory complacency, groupthink and self-satisfaction - mental barricades to going where unencumbered thought and experience takes you. He picked up this aversion from hard goings in the South. Bob was born 26 September 1935 in an upscale area of deeply racist Dallas, Texas, though his own parents weren't particularly loaded. He and one older sister were both raised as much or more by a cherished black servant as they were by their emotionally troubled mother. When Bob saw the 2011 movie *The Help* he enthused that it depicted exactly what he beheld, including his beloved black upbringer becoming emboldened by the civil rights movement that his white associates reviled. Yet Bob, a champion swimmer whirling with boyish military fantasies, initially was on track to getting his name engraved on the glistening black Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC or else to end up a bristly reactionary Oliver North clone. In High School he rose to the highest ROTC cadet status of Colonel, but he had the temerity to turn down an offer to attend West Point, which drew the wrath of his adult commanding officer and many fellow cadets. Bob told me thereupon he resigned his cadet status. He already had glimpsed an escape route through a scholarship to Yale instead. It was a turning point for someone who ever after insisted on following his own path whatever the cost.

At Yale he was intellectually smitten - engaging with the likes of young instructor Richard Rorty and class mate Joel Kovel - and thrived, soon jetting academically ahead of many an elite Prep School product to his bachelors degree in 1957 in philosophy. He entered Rochester University medical school in psychiatry, but he earlier had spent an eye-opening summer as a volunteer aide in an Arizona 'snake pit' asylum, which instilled in him an abiding leeriness about the conventional (and, he judged, abusive and clueless) ways medicine treated mental maladies. A difficult early marriage plus his own budding zeal to investigate the history of medicine drew him into a fellowship at Kings College, Cambridge in 1960, resulting a few years later in the classic *Mind, Brain and Adaptation*, published by OUP, without, Bob believably bragged, a single substantive change. The quest to "localize" human actions with specific brain sites, he explained, was a snipe hunt driven by ideological assumptions - resurrected today on a different plane in genetic determinist hubris. Cambridge invited him to stay on as a don and, eventually, first director of the new Wellcome Unit on History of Medicine, until his surprising resignation in 1976. Bob told me that famous American sociologist Edward Shils, who held a dual appointment at Chicago and Cambridge, approached him one fine Cambridge

afternoon to inveigle him to inform on American students to US intelligence agencies. I would encounter the same brilliant but vile Shils at Chicago. Bob kicked him out of his office.

Bob, averse to arbitrary authority in all its guises, became increasingly radical in politics as well as methodological approaches over this tumultuous period and quit to form a bevy of new journals, including this one and *Radical Science Journal* (now *Science as Culture*), and start *Free Associations Press*, which turned out some three hundred books before he was elbowed out of control. Leftists, a mutual friend observed, might know how to analyze the business world but rarely know how to handle themselves in it. He published another contemporary classic, *Darwin's Metaphor*, in 1985 with Cambridge University Press, which located the ideological thrust of Darwinism not only in bourgeois Victorian culture but also in its meanest and most cruel expression, Malthusianism. Science is, in his oft-repeated phrase, social relations, and a labour process. For over a decade in the darkest Tory days Bob and comrades annually staged the inspiring and rambunctious "Psychoanalysis and Public Sphere" conferences, terminating with what was the false dawn of a New Labour government besotted with the market.

Other major books include *Mental Space, Group Relations: An Introduction, Changing Perspective in The History of Science* (with M. Teich), *Science, Technology and The Labour Process* (with Les Levidow), *Oedipus Complex, and The Guise of Solutions*. Just as Margaret Thatcher balefully slouched into 10 Downing Street, Bob produced and narrated an exciting 12 part documentary series entitled *Crucible: Science in Society*, which was broadcast on ITV. His bruising encounters with the cutthroat maneuvering typical in high media circles propelled him into analysis, where he ultimately found a new profession: Kleinian psychotherapist. He despaired at desertion by many former associates he regarded as sell-outs and climbers, perhaps unfairly in some cases but utterly true in others where people he had helped up the ladder carefully distanced themselves from this now toxic left wing genius. Many slights of this nature gnawed at Bob. Still, he remained a generous, jovial, compassionate, and questing spirit to the end. I watched him get teary-eyed as he described the retrieval, shall we call it, of schizophrenics in the documentary *Take These Broken Wings*. On the other hand, as co-editor I learned that the ROTC colonel incarnation of Bob could make an occasional peremptory reappearance, but we got past that. A life with several divorces was hardly an advertisement for the wonders of domesticity, but he took utterly unambivalent pleasure in all his children and grandchildren. "If it goes right," he testified on the topic of raising kids, "as experiences go, it's one of the best." I suppose that if we ever do see his like again - and we will, life is like that - it will be precisely because his phenomenal and much-needed *oeuvre* has seeped into and seeded the culture, whether the culture likes it or not.

One of Bob's oft-expressed wishes was for a revitalized *Free Associations Journal* to carry on in its founding radical political spirit as part of his intellectual legacy. We strived mightily to achieve that goal over the last three years, with me taking up duties formerly performed by three people plus some institutional backing, bringing FA up from desultoriness (10 issues in the previous 7 years) to a thrice yearly pace with a quarterly as

ultimate aim when the number of top quality submissions permitted. With the accomplished and politically astute psychoanalyst David Morgan, who runs the Political Mind seminars at the British Psychoanalytic Society, and at the top of Bob's list as successor in our discussions, agreeing to fill Bob's spot as co-editor there is every reason to expect we can fulfill those wishes. A new film review editor has signed on and a new book review editor is in the offing. There's even fresh talk of returning to a print edition.

Over September 28-29 a sort of son of "Psychoanalysis and The Public Sphere" conference entitled "Psychoanalysis, Values, and Webs of Power" will take place in London in conjunction with the Freud Museum. It is really an ill-disguised way of honoring Bob who was intended to deliver the welcoming address. Instead, alas, we will dedicate the conference, brimming with old hands, to Bob and add a panel on his life and work. For anyone thirsting for further glimpses of the great man, a forthcoming documentary I co-directed (with Warren Leming) on the life and times of writer Clancy Sigal has Bob commenting on Sigal's fraught entanglement with R. D. Laing. Rest in Peace, Bob, though I can't quite picture it. "The end is nothing," as Willa Cather summed up. "The road is all."