A contest over titles

The canonisation of the Frankfurt School as 'permanent exiles'

Ryan Crawford

Prevailing images of the Frankfurt School have long relied upon an idea of their origins that is far from self-evident. Premised upon the curious allure associated with such notions as 'transcendental homelessness' and 'extraterritoriality', and enhanced more recently by a vogue for all things 'exilic', this canonised image of critical theory has identified members' life and work with an especially melancholic form of messianic philosophy, and their origins with a quintessentially Jewish story of estrangement. In this way, the Frankfurt School's status as exemplary German-Jewish exiles has become a byword for conditions of displacement and isolation celebrated, strangely, as a position of privilege for the critical intellectual as such. Like all such stories, however, the power of this particular tale rests upon its simplicity, an effacement of history pleasing more to its interpreters than to its subjects. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that the Frankfurt School's canonisation should begin with a contest over titles and identities in which its earliest representatives criticised the very practice of assigning retroactive origins to former members of the Institute for Social Research in a way that has since become hegemonic. To understand how this image of the Frankfurt School was first created, and how it continues to obscure what is most radical about the social and political import of critical theory's past, means returning to the circumstances of the Frankfurt School's inaugural history.

The first comprehensive account of what has come to be called the 'first-generation' of critical theory, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*, began its life in 1967 when a twenty-three-year-old doctoral candidate made the felicitous decision to focus upon a little-researched area of study at an especially auspicious time and place. For Martin Jay, the budding American historian who would soon become the foremost Anglophone authority on the Frankfurt School, it was indeed a 'stroke of good fortune.'[1] His advisor, H. Stuart Hughes, was close personal friends with several former Institute members and associates, and thus able to provide his student with letters of introduction to figures instrumental to the latter's research. Equally significant was the sense of excitement with which the American New Left greeted any sign of the Frankfurt School's potential relevance for their own intellectual and political pursuits.[2] And yet, despite this fascination, there were as yet very few published translations of Institute members' work, and a paucity of research into their origins. To address this situation, Jay set out in the summer of 1968 for Berkeley, California, to meet and examine the voluminous correspondence of Leo Löwenthal, a former Institute member then working at the local state university. That material, as Jay would later recall, came to constitute the 'richest primary source' for his book, and provided the occasion for a lifelong friendship between the two.[3] Not long afterwards, during the winter and early spring of 1969, Jay continued his research by travelling first to West Germany, and then on to Switzerland, for interviews with such early luminaries as one-time Institute directors Friedrich Pollock and Max Horkheimer, then-director Theodor W. Adorno, as well as 'second-generation' figures like Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Schmidt and Albrecht Wellmer. Over the course of his research, Jay would benefit from further interviews with Herbert Marcuse, Erich

Fromm and other former members of the Institute, as well as correspondence, conversations and manuscript notes from a wide range of figures, among whom Jay would later mention Felix J. Weil in particular, the Institute's longtime benefactor and a central force behind its origin and development, with whom Jay 'carried on an extensive and spirited correspondence', even though their 'interpretation of certain issues remain[ed] somewhat at odds.'[4] Composed at a time when many of its central figures were still alive and able to tell their stories, that inaugural history's unique incorporation of first-hand testimony and inclusion of extensive archival research combined to create the standard reference work that *The Dialectical Imagination* remains to this day. This did not mean, however, that Jay's relations with former Institute members were without their share of controversy, or that the resulting work did not elicit criticisms at the time. In the decades since the book's 1973 publication, Jay has answered his critics with characteristic aplomb at the same time as he has facilitated the work of several generations of scholars, writing often and admirably about those forms of identification which first drew him to his subjects, friendships with former Institute members that may have affected his judgment, as well as those conflicts that only reached him, as it were, 'from beyond the grave.'[5]

One such controversy emerged in the years immediately prior to the publication of that first book-length, pathbreaking study, pitting its author against critical theory's earliest representatives in a contest over titles. For while *The Dialectical Imagination* has long since proven so apt a title as to have inspired imitators of its own, that title was not the first choice of its author. Revising for publication the dissertation upon which his book would be based, Jay was then searching for a catchier title than the more strictly academic one he had used before, and initially considered calling his book 'Permanent Exiles'–a phrase he already used some years before in 'The Permanent Exile of Theodor W. Adorno', an essay written upon Adorno's 1969 death and published in the American Zionist magazine, *Midstream*, to which Jay frequently contributed during those early years.[6] In the winter of 1972, however, Jay was still in contact with several surviving Institute members and quickly learned of their absolute abhorrence of his proposed title. 'Fundamentally wrong and damaging' is how Weil described it; 'an outrage' is how Horkheimer was said to have regarded it.[7] 'I just talked to Horkheimer', Weil informed the young historian, 'and discovered that he dislikes your book title "Permanent Exiles" even more than I do, because it is so utterly misleading.'[8] And, indeed, Horkheimer's own letters to Jay had already made clear just how 'problematic' and 'misleading' the former viewed such a characterisation of their work.[9] For even the most generous accounting of the historical record can hardly support the idea that their exile was in any way permanent, as Horkheimer and Weil were at pains to point out. That Jay was aware of that claim's historical inaccuracy can hardly be doubted. For him, however, its appropriateness did not rest solely on its conformity with the facts, but on how it functioned as a metaphor for describing his own view of Frankfurt School members' life, work and identity. Fifty years ago – and still today – that appellation does indeed exude the aura of some unplaceable allure. What to our ears sounds like a compliment, however, is precisely what seemed to Weil, not only inaccurate, but an insult and an outrage. Indeed, so clearly did that intended honorific appear to Weil a smear that, upon hearing it, he made a thinly veiled threat to persuade Jay against it: suggesting that if Jay still used the title, in defiance of Horkheimer and Weil's protests, then the book's opening pages might no longer include the promised foreword from Horkheimer that Weil had himself helped to secure. In its absence, that first history of the Institute would no longer appear as though it had been endorsed by the Institute's longtime director in a way which might lead readers to believe that Jay's book was an authorised, court history.[10] Understandably, the proposed title was then dropped, the published book included Horkheimer's foreword, and continues to bear its now-inimitable title. But even though Jay abandoned that title some fifty years ago, that does not mean he thought it inappropriate. Less than a decade and a half later, in fact, he used that very title again, explaining how the phrase 'permanent exiles' seemed to him an 'accurate and evocative term to describe the Frankfurt School as a whole.'[11] And on this point several former Institute members appear to have agreed. Löwenthal and Marcuse, for instance, were said to have thought the title 'rang true' and encouraged Jay to use it.[12] So what, then, did Weil and Horkheimer find so objectionable in that title and proposed description of their lives and work?

Note first the distance separating what has come to be called critical theory from what Institute members understood by that term in the fact that our own ears no longer bristle at the sound of a phrase – *permanent exiles*–which once sent two of its earliest representatives into such vehement and united opposition. At the time of the Jay-Weil correspondence, Institute members' understanding of their own lives clearly belonged to a historical sensorium which has since been almost entirely lost. For the contemporary reader, however, that difference is still discernible wherever Weil's 1971-1972 correspondence turns its attention to that contest over titles and identities from which *The Dialectical Imagination* eventually emerged. Indeed, it is at precisely those points where Weil contradicts critical theory's received image, insisting that Jay reconsider and remove reference to an aspect of that image against which he constantly protested – but which is today seen as so self-evident as to seem beyond dispute – that the so-called foundations of critical theory become considerably less stable than Jay supposed or as we might ourselves still think today. For what the correspondence between Weil and Jay demonstrates is that Institute members' opposition to that title was but a single point around which a far larger concern came to concentrate itself – namely, Weil's sense that Jay sought to place the Frankfurt School within a distinctly Jewish tradition that Weil questioned and criticised in almost every single letter. Indeed, it is only within the larger context of Weil's critique of what he called Jay's 'treatment of the "Jewish" question' that Institute members' opposition to still-popular designations of the Frankfurt School as 'permanent exiles' becomes at all comprehensible.[13]

Minefields from the history of ideas

From late January 1971 to early April 1972, and over the course of nearly three dozen letters, Weil was at all times concerned about how the Institute would be characterised and, upon reading Jay's manuscript and discussing the content with its author, made clear that he neither understood nor agreed with the paramount importance *The Dialectical Imagination* accorded the Frankfurt School's supposed Jewishness. Though 'fascinated by the amount of research' which went into the manuscript, and complimentary of Jay's 'excellent understanding of that turbulent period', Weil continually opposed the terms, arguments and evidence upon which the author relied when attributing Jewish identity and influence to Institute members' life and work.[14] And while Jay would neither then nor afterwards accept his correspondent's account of the Institute's origins, development and influences, he could have hardly found a better, more knowledgeable source about such matters than Felix Weil. For Weil was not only the founder and chief benefactor of the Institute; he was also the single most important force behind the idea and implementation of that form of social research for which the Frankfurt School later attained such renown: a distinctly Marxist form of intellectual production both pluralistic and undogmatic, as well as a unique framework for collective, multidisciplinary work whose socialist inspiration created an independent structure unprecedented for the time.[15]

To realise such a project, Weil drew upon his experience with various then-contemporary social, political and intellectual currents – including his engagement with socialist and communist movements – and then, with the aid of his father's wealth and his own, went on to establish the conditions for the Institute's success. The result was an institution through which Weil and the organisational bodies he created and coordinated ex-

ercised considerable autonomy in selecting the directors of the Institute with whom Weil then collaborated, overseeing the personnel, production and overall direction of the Institute. Given Weil's outsized role in the Institute's origin and development, it is no surprise that he should have considered the Institute his 'life's work', and found himself particularly concerned by Jay's decision to refract the Frankfurt School's social and institutional history through the prism of Jewish identity and influence, rather than the far more diverse, and indeed decidedly more political, range of factors uniting the Institute's life and work.[16] Later empowered by Horkheimer to review, assess and approve Jay's manuscript before its author was granted permission to use Horkheimer's foreword or the materials culled from their respective interviews and correspondence,[17] Weil would consistently take up and criticise Jay's treatment of the "'Jewish" question' in his role as the last living and still-healthy representative of that group of 'three survivors [from] the 1920-1930 period of the Institute', as Weil referred to Pollock, Horkheimer and himself;[18] the original 'triumvirate', as Horkheimer called them.[19] For this reason, and at the time dismayed by the 'necrology' which followed Pollock's recent death, as well as the continuing confusion 'about who did what when', Weil resolved, as he said, to 'do my part in setting the record straight', using various archival materials at his disposal, dedicating his early morning hours to reading Jay's manuscript when he should have been asleep, and planning to allocate time on weekends and holidays to helping as best he could.[20]

'Re[garding] your M[anuscript]', Weil writes Jay on 16 May 1971, 'there is one respect in which I dislike it and would like you to change it.'[21] For what Weil had discovered in the very first chapter of Jay's manuscript was that he was described there, to his surprise and increasing exasperation, as the son of a 'German-born Jewish merchant', while Friedrich Pollock was called the son of a 'Jewish businessman', Horkheimer the son of a 'prominent Jewish manufacturer', and Henryk Grossman was said to come from a 'family of Jewish mine-owners.'[22] And because Weil could not understand the rationale behind such designations, he implored Jay to explain: 'why do you feel the need of stressing wherever you introduce a new character, that he is or was Jewish?'[23] For Weil, Jay's repeated identification of Institute members according to their supposed Jewishness was especially peculiar because, when it came to other Institute members, that same tendency was not applied consistently. Instead, whenever Institute members' 'religion (or race?)' might be characterised as either Christian or Aryan, those markers of identity went unmentioned.[24] 'Now the question is', Weil remarks, 'whether you understand "Jewish" as a religion or as a race or nationality.'[25] And concludes: 'I can't imagine you, like Hitler, consider it a race.'[26] For while Löwenthal and Fromm undoubtedly came from 'Jewish orthodox families', according to Weil, 'all the others were of Jewish-liberal or even baptized Christian origin … and not one ever was a service-attending Jew', while still others were unmistakably 'Christian by origin'.[27] Concerning himself, Weil tells Jay he was born Catholic and, like his parents before him, never attended religious services or considered himself Jewish in the least. 'I, [for instance]', Weil continues, 'was not the son of a German-born Jewish merchant, but the son of a German-born merchant who was an atheist.'[28] For even though Weil's parents had indeed been born into Orthodox and Reform Jewish families, 'both refused to join a Jewish congregation after they immigrated into Argentina around 1890.'[29] Indeed, his parents were either atheists or agnostics, and not only scandalised the local Jewish community of Argentina by not having Weil circumcised, but also made no protest when their son's name was supplemented by the name of the Catholic saint on whose day he was born; in sum, then, as Weil informed Jay, he 'grew up creedless, as I wasn't baptized either.'[30] 'Now', he continues, 'can you honestly say that I came from a Jewish family?' 'Only', he concludes, 'if you accept the Hitler method of the Jewish grandmother.'[31]

Concerning other Institute members, the situation seemed to Weil no less vexed. In the case of Pollock and Horkheimer, both 'ceased to be "Jewish" in the religious sense' as soon as 'they became adults.'[32] For this reason, Institute members could hardly be said to have been united by the fact that they were all 'assimilated Jews', as Weil made clear in his very first letter, since Jay uses that term 'without explaining it' – and despite the fact that it encompasses a vast and by no means homogenous range of people: from baptised Jews to the children of baptised Jews, from avowed atheists to those who considered Judaism no more than a religion and thus regarded themselves as 'good German[s]' instead.[33] Not to mention, of course, those who never considered themselves Jews in

the first place and were never 'considered Jews until the Nürnberg Act made them Jews' on the basis of racist determinations of their ancestry.[34] Regardless of whether Institute members might be more 'accurately' described – in Nazi terms, Weil adds – as either Aryan or Jewish, such designations would be in each case inaccurate, since they all 'felt as plain atheists.'[35] For this reason, Weil recommended dropping those religious, ethnic and/or racial references, including a note of clarification instead. Should Jay still wish to address the issue, however, he might defer to Weil, raising the question of 'whether it was true that almost all of the earlier Institut members were of Jewish origin', and then quote Weil as saying:

> The answer depends upon what you consider 'Jewish': before the Nazis branded me and other persons 'with at least one Jewish grandparent' as 'Jews', even if they belonged to a Christian religion, I would not have considered myself nor anyone in our group a Jew, and certainly there was not a single one among us who ever attended Jewish religious services – orthodox or liberal – other than as a guest as a wedding. And there were some among us who even Hitler could not have branded as 'Jews': for instance, [Institute members and associates] Wittfogel, Korsch, or Massing.[36]

If unsatisfied with this addendum, however, Jay might take up the commonplace according to which 'it has sometimes been stated that the Institut group "were all Jews" ', and then conclude, on the basis of his own authority, but no longer deferring to Weil, that in Jay's own estimation 'none of them was a Jew.'[37] 'Of course, I like the second suggestion *much better*', Weil tells Jay, since the latter would make the point even 'more authoritative'.[38]

Given their continuing debate about such matters, as well as *The Dialectical Imagination's* inclusion of the very "'Jewish" references' Weil recommended excluding, the book's author appears to have been largely unpersuaded by Weil's arguments.[39] Nonetheless, Weil persisted because he could not understand whether Jay's attribution of Jewish identity was meant to rest upon notions of descent or ancestry, race or religion, ethnicity or nationality. 'It seems that for you', he tells his correspondent, '… "Jewish" simultaneously means the religion, the nationality … and perhaps also the race', with the result, Weil concludes, that 'if "religion" doesn't apply' for the putative Jewishness of any specific individual, then Jewishness can still be assigned because, in such cases, 'you [mean] the ethnic descent or the race, or vice versa.'[40] This kind of peculiar logic of identity, based as it is on religious or non-elective forms of identity-based inheritance, creates untold confusions, as Weil makes clear by referring to the self-evident absurdities resulting from similar determinations during the time of the Third Reich. Yet, to Weil's dismay, Jay's manuscript consistently employed such categories, as when writing, for instance, about how 'obvious' it is that 'if one seeks a common thread which runs through [Institute members'] individual biographies', then that 'common thread' is quite clearly their shared birth in Jewish families.[41] For Weil, however, it was by no means 'obvious' that their purported Jewishness ever served such a function, which is why he 'most *emphatically* stress[es] that the "Jewish" origins of most members of the Institut group was mere coincidence', and that Jay's repeated reference to 'Jewish families', identities and influences is not only 'misleading' but 'convey[s] a totally wrong impression.'[42] After time and again finding in Jay's manuscript such attributions of ill-fitting identity assigned to colleagues he knew so well, Weil hazards a guess about the criteria used in words designed to provoke: 'I was sort of waiting to see you hold, with Hitler', he writes Jay, in parentheses, 'that "a Jew is a person descended from Jews", while Goering said, repeating the 1880 Mayor of Vienna, Lueger, "I shall tell who is a Jew or not!" '[43]

Aside from Weil's concerns about such retroactive ascriptions of Jewish identity, what he found perhaps even more galling was Jay's portrayal of such identities' influence on the Institute's life and work. 'You seem to hold', Weil observes, 'that we became Socialists and Revolutionaries as a consequence of our Jewishness.'[44] To this, however, Weil can only repeat that 'with us neither religion nor ethnic origin played any role.'[45] 'When our initial group got together to foster revolutionary socialism, nothing was farther from our mind than ideas about Jewish [sic], or any other religion, ancestry, ethnic kinship, skin color, etc., as a common element. We looked for total dedication from scientific conviction.'[46] And so he tells Jay that if his manuscript is to be published in the form in which it was written, then he will write a review challenging its claims. 'I would write this in a review', he tells Jay, and goes on to address an imaginary reader interested in Jay's book:

> Although couched in cautious terms … the author evidently wants to see our group's work, although he admires it and approves of it, as a consequence of our Jewishness, without realizing that nothing was farther from our mind and that he thus revives the old chestnut of the all-encompassing Jewish conspiracy against Germany (and thus justifies whatever is left of this Nazi concept).[47]

'I shudder at the idea [of] how our work will be interpreted after our deaths', Weil continues, 'when we no longer can talk back.'[48] For while Pollock, 'now already gone', Weil adds, himself 'talked back' in a letter to Jay, 'evidently to no avail', Weil will not for that reason remain silent.[49] 'Well, I am still alive for some time', he writes, continuing his mock-review, 'and vehemently disagree with the author's interpretation (not to say prejudice).'[50] For while Jay has every right to his own opinion, interpretations should be based on 'solid evidence', according to Weil, not on the author's own 'preconceived notions', adding to his mock-review the following caricature of '[t]he author's interpretation', which, according to Weil

> reminds me of the German scholar who as editor of an edition of Goethe's Diaries appended a endnote to Goethe's words 'Of all women in my life I loved Christine the most.' The endnote [from the scholar] read 'Here Goethe erred. On the contrary, his love for Lilly was by far greater …'[51]

This is an unkind parody of Jay's position, no doubt, but it was also informed by concerns both substantial and not at all uncommon in relations between historical actors and their interpreters. Elsewhere, Weil suggests a compromise of sorts. Since Jay had already made it '*quite clear* that almost all of our group were of Jewish descent', the author is told he might 'justifiably ventilate the question whether our radicalism had anything to do with this' – but on the condition that he then 'print Pollock's and my letters saying this was not the case.'[52] Concerning the purported influence of antisemitism on their early thinking – a claim the whole 'triumvirate' appears to have opposed – Weil underscored Pollock's earlier statements about the absence of any Weimar-era legal barriers for those considered Jewish, adding that whatever discrimination persisted was of a purely social nature – vacation landlords who wouldn't rent to people with Jewish-sounding names ('Abraham Lincoln', he notes, 'would have been rejected out-of-hand'), as well as student fraternities that did not accept Jews – but that these kinds of discrimination did not matter at all.[53]

Closing his letter, Weil ends in resignation: 'All I can do now is to help you at least to be as accurate as possible.'[54]

In time, however, Weil would relent in several respects, telling Jay that 'as long as you don't write that I was the son of a Jewish merchant, I am satisfied',[55] even if he continued to point out how Jay confuses 'the "Jewish" question' by using 'Jewish' for one person when referring to a religion and then, without explanation, using 'Jewish' as a stand-in for ethnic descent for another.[56] Where his own person is concerned, however, Weil is adamant that Jay exclude any reference to his own purported Jewishness. 'For if you say that I came from a Jewish family or joined with our group because of our common Jewishness it would be wrong – and I would resent it. True, I had on my father's side orthodox Jewish grandparents and liberal on my mother's side, but it was only Hitler who declared me a Jew … So don't you do it, too, please.'[57] Further, Weil explains that, on account of his Argentine birth, even the idea that Hitler declared him a Jew is not quite accurate – 'I don't mean me personally', he writes, 'I was never a German!' – and that Hitler's declaration of who was and was not Jewish did not affect his own sense of identity: 'I deliberately did not say "*made* me a Jew", as I still don't [think?] "Jewish" '.[58] 'In other words', Weil adds, 'despite all my sympathy for Israel, I still don't feel as a Jew, although I know where I come from, and I would never [pretend?] to be a Goy'.[59] A few weeks later, Weil seems to think his arguments and entreaties are having some effect: 'I am glad you are beginning to see the "Jewish" matters my way', he tells Jay, and congratulates him on 'so quickly finding a professorship' at the University of California at Berkeley, where Jay first met Löwenthal, a member of the faculty, three years before.[60] By this time, the controversy surrounding Jay's handling of the so-called "'Jewish" question' had been muted amid discussions about publisher proofs, Weil's request that Jay share his letters with other scholars and suggestions for titles Jay might consider for his forthcoming book – 'gift[s]', Weil called them, like 'The Young Scholars' and 'Rebels With a Cause.'[61]

Not long thereafter, however, Jay appears to have made clear his own preference for the book's title. And Weil, upon learning that Jay wished to call his inaugural history of the Frankfurt School by the title 'Permanent Exiles', went silent for nearly a month, his more conciliatory attitude coming to an abrupt stop. 'I haven't answered your … letter so far', Weil began his next letter, 'because I didn't want to be negative all the time … But I mulled and I mulled about "Permanent Exiles", and the longer I mulled the less I liked it.'[62] 'I think I can discern your reasoning behind it', Weil continues, supposing that what Jay likely meant was that 'they were spiritually already exiles while still in Germany'.[63] About this sort of claim, however, Weil and others always made clear that they did not experience discrimination before 1933, while Weil had long insisted that the identity-based foundation of Jay's claim to the Frankfurt School's 'spiritual exile' was no less mistaken. It could hardly be said, then, that the pre-1933 Institute could be in any way characterised as existing in a state of exile, spiritual or historical, identity-based or socially imposed. From 1933 to 1950, they were indeed exiles from Germany but, as Weil points out, 'the Frankfurt School continued and flourished especially after 1950, and from then on they didn't feel exiled any more – they were back home and in a non-nationalist environment.'[64] In this sense, too, it would be mistaken to speak of the life of the Institute in terms of some nebulous notion of exile, spiritual or otherwise. As a result, the claim to 'permanent exile' can hardly be considered accurate.

A month later, Weil informs Jay that he has just gotten off the phone with Horkheimer, recently returned home after two stays in the hospital, and that Horkheimer 'dislikes your book title "Permanent Exiles" even more than I do, because it is so utterly misleading.'[65] As a result, Weil repeats once more his earlier suggestions, and then, a month later, tells Jay that if he means 'Permanent Exiles in the sense of Permanent Outsiders', as Jay appears to have suggested, then 'why not *say* The Permanent Outsiders' instead?[66] At this point, Weil's mention of Horkheimer's opposition could have hardly surprised the author since Jay already received from Horkheimer several letters to that effect. There Horkheimer pointed out that any claim to permanent exile 'seems to me problematic' since Adorno, Pollock and Horkheimer had long since lost any exiled status after returning home to Germany, while others, like Löwenthal and Marcuse, could hardly be considered 'permanent' exiles as they had long since 'made America their home.'[67] In response, Jay sought to explain how his characterisation of their exile as permanent was only meant 'metaphorically', a claim supported, in Jay's mind, by the idea that 'even

before their actual emigration, Institute members had been anxious to avoid co-optation and after the war, Critical Theory had maintained its distance from any real "homecoming".'[68] But Horkheimer, as Jay recalls, 'was not placated' by this explanation, and sent Jay an urgent telegram and letter explaining why, as he said, the 'title still seems misleading to me.'[69] There Horkheimer made clear how the interpretation Jay and others would later advance about the Institute's pre-exile (1923-1933) and exile period (1933-1950), according to which they were collectively 'obsessed by "the fear of co-optation and integration" ', as Horkheimer writes, quoting Jay, 'is certainly not precise.'[70] Before Horkheimer himself became director (1923-1931), 'this surely was not the case', he writes, and once he assumed the directorship 'several of us definitely were non-conformists in some ways', Horkheimer admits, 'but no "Exiles" '.[71] Turning to their time in American exile, Horkheimer acknowledges that 'most of us were exiles with regard to fascist Germany, but certainly not with regard to democratic states like the USA and postwar Germany.'[72] Were that to have been the case, Horkheimer points out, they would have never developed close relations with conservative Americans like the President of Columbia University, nor would people like Franz Neumann have returned to postwar Germany to help organise the university in West Berlin, nor would Horkheimer himself have done the same in Frankfurt 'with American and German public funds'.[73]

Two weeks after Horkheimer's letter, Weil would write Jay again to offer 'one more word of caution and argument against the title "Permanent Exiles" ', which Weil considers 'fundamentally wrong and damaging'

> especially because of the reinforcement of the misunderstanding you give by your insistence on saying, or broadly hinting at, the influence the so-called joint ethnical origin of our group is supposed to have had on our way of thinking, the 'Exiles' title will lead retroactively to justify all the attacks our enemies launched against the Institute and the Frankfurt School, to wit, that we as rotten outsiders had no business nor justification in trying to instill 'undeutsche Gedanken' [ungerman thinking] = subversive feelings into German students.[74]

For Horkheimer and Weil, then, when such a title is read alongside the book's related speculations about how the Institute's ideas may have been influenced by 'the so-called joint ethnical origin of our group', as Weil understood Jay to say – and which subsequently has been repeated so often as to have become received wisdom when discussing the Frankfurt School – the proposed title could not help but present an image of the Frankfurt School that was not only fundamentally mistaken and contrary to the lives and works of Institute members, but which also undermined their prior efforts. For this reason, Weil informs Jay that 'Horkheimer considers the Exiles title an outrage', and warns him against its use because, if he were to do so, then Weil tells Jay: 'Don't be surprised if [Horkheimer] now refuses to write a Foreword!'[75] A little more than a week later, this conflict over titles will be brought to a close once a new title, 'The Dialectical Imagination', was proposed as its replacement. In response, Weil tells Jay just how much he and Horkheimer like the new title: it 'sounds intriguing', Weil writes, 'and may help with the sales.'[76]

From pariahdom to prestige

It was undoubtedly right for Weil to have feared how Jay's identification of the Frankfurt School as 'permanent exiles' might lend credence to right-wing fantasies of an alien force peddling ideas designed to undermine the nation, as Jay has himself recently acknowledged. Against the backdrop of the current century's antisemitic and conspiratorial scapegoating of the Frankfurt School as the newest scourge of civilisation, Jay now admits that 'the fears he [Horkheimer] and Weil had about the dangers of foregrounding the Jewish identity of their colleagues were, alas, justified.'[77] At the time, however, as Jay would later say, he did not fully 'understand the source of their anxiety', did not recognise how Weil and Horkheimer 'still felt the sting' of those historical 'slanders', and did not take seriously enough the nationalist right's past and present vilification of those considered 'rootless cosmopolitans'.[78] As we have seen, however, Weil and Horkheimer's objections to Jay's treatment of the 'Jewish question' were in no way reducible to such fears. Nor was it a matter, for them, of coarse political calculation in the sense that their purported Jewishness should be concealed so as not to provoke an antisemitic response. For Weil, the problem was, instead, that it was simply inaccurate to designate Institute members as Jews, either individually or collectively, and that it was especially dubious to do so on the basis of assumptions about

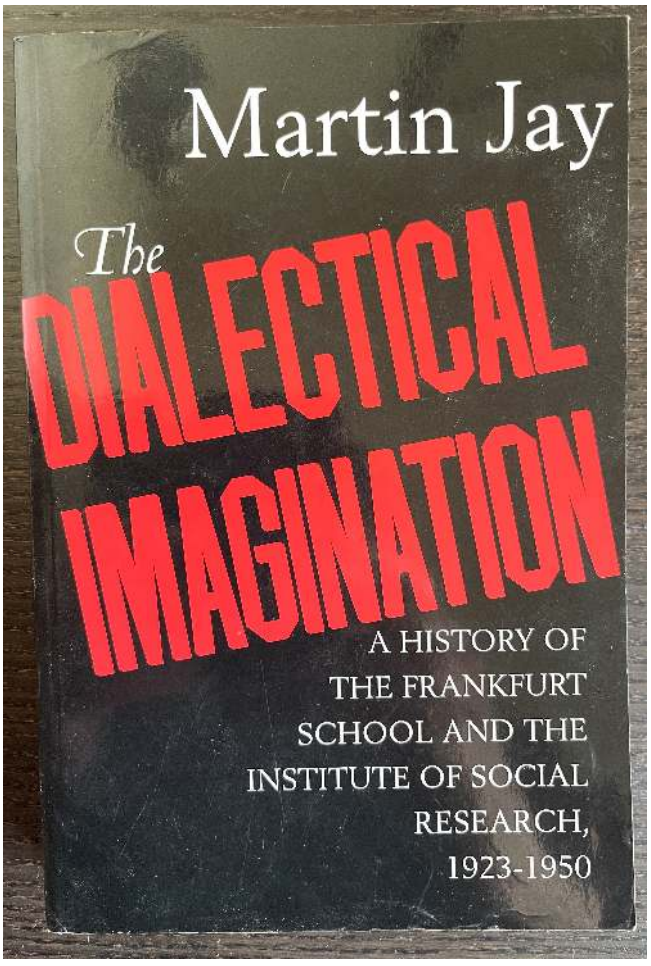
Jewish identity and influence which transform people's origins and ends into the stuff of myths refractory to the facts. In such cases, Jewish identity, ancestry and otherness is accorded an explanatory power that is not only a poor substitute for historical understanding, but which regularly devolves into the very antisemitic stereotypes critical theory meant to surmount. In this sense, it is difficult to ignore how the association of a term like 'permanent exiles' with antisemitic tropes about 'rootless cosmopolitans' and the 'eternally wandering Jew' might have made it difficult for Weil and Horkheimer to regard such a title as a 'badge of honor', as Jay intended.[79] The very homology that has long existed between antisemitic and philosemitic stereotypes like these may thus explain, in part, why Weil and Horkheimer regarded that title as a 'source of reproach' instead, leaving Jay feeling as though he had 'unintentionally entered a minefield' while corresponding with Weil and Horkheimer about such matters.[80]

What Jay then appears to have assumed, 'perhaps naively', as he would later write, was that his search for critical theory's origins in individual Institute members' 'Jewish' ancestry, implicit classification of those people in terms of ethnic, religious or racial descent, and subsequent identification of those 'origins' as a cardinal source for the Institute's life and work would resonate, instead, with a substantially more philosemitic, but not for that reason any less problematic, tradition of ascribing positive characteristics to Jewish identity.[81] Integral to that tradition is a set of practices which frequently reproduce the antisemitic practice of 'unmasking' individuals and groups as Jews, no matter their protests, and which accord outsized influence to non-elective ethnic and/or racial identities in the determination of life and character.[82] Indeed, it was likely considerations such as these which once led Habermas to worry – if only for a moment – that celebrating the German Idealism of such 'Jewish philosophers' as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Lukács might thereby 'pin a Jewish star on the exiled and the beaten once again.'[83] More recently, Jay appears to have become more sensitive to certain aspects of these matters since he now notes how the 'exaltation of the eternally marginal Jew' can have its dangers, '[r]omanticizing the unchosen condition of displacement and homelessness' that it is the historian's task to demonstrate as historical through and through.[84]

At the time of *The Dialectical Imagination's* writing, however, Jay's thinking about such matters was still affected by a range of quite different influences. In this sense, *The Dialectical Imagination* is perhaps best seen, like every other act of historical interpretation, as the sum of a complex interplay of interests and identifications, equivocations and antipathies in which projective fantasies and transferential relations combine to create that peculiar form of individual investment necessary for academic labour. Only recently, however, has Jay begun to more fully articulate how the conditions of his own milieu first drew him to his subjects, informing his presentation of the Institute in a way which might make his ideas about the "'Jewish" question', as Weil called it, considerably more comprehensible. In retrospective accounts, Jay has presented his early interest in the Frankfurt School as having been guided by three overriding interests. The first concerns the specific milieu to which Jay and a number of scholars from the late 1960s American reception of critical theory belonged, and which Jay characterises as a 'a generation that was in a sense both part of the New Left and part of the counter culture [sic].' [85] Though by no means 'a full-fledged member of any militant New Left position', Jay considered himself a 'sympathizer' and found in the tradition of Hegelian Marxism, and in Herbert Marcuse in particular, a 'self-justification' of sorts, providing himself and others with the 'permission to be radical.'[86] At the time, however, those interested in such ideas 'had no idea where [Marcuse] came from', and it was precisely this 'unknown dimension' Jay came to regard as a 'mystery to be solved', leaving him 'fascinated by trying to figure out … Marcuse's own background.'[87] The second source for Jay's early interest was his realisation that so many of those responsible for the so-called intellectual migration from Nazi Germany to the United States were getting older, retiring or passing away, and that those who had 'so enriched American intellectual life' were now 'interested in telling their stories.'[88] These two influences comprise the 'two-part' answer Jay 'normally' gives when asked about his initial interest in critical theory.[89] They do not, however, tell the full story for 'there was [also] a third reason', Jay acknowledges, a 'very personal reason', which involves Jay's own identification with an assimilated, but religiously non-observant, Jewish tradition.[90] And because Jay believed that 'most of the members of the Frankfurt School [also] came from

Jewish backgrounds more or less lacking a strong religious dimension', he came to develop what he called 'a certain identification with these people' in whom he saw represented 'a kind of ideal version of the way in which a truly cultured figure might be.'[91] Elsewhere, and no less candidly, Jay has spoken of having long viewed the representatives of critical theory 'as exemplars of a certain kind of … normative or aspirational moment of high German-Jewish excellence' with which he early and still continues to identify.[92]

The problem, of course, is that the very people to whom Jay attributed those identities often rejected such ascriptions of Jewishness, and opposed explanations of their life and work based upon those identities. Indeed, as Jay noted in a contemporaneous letter to Leo Löwenthal, throughout his interviews and correspondence he discovered how '[t]he Jewish question is certainly a sensitive one as every time I broach it, I am corrected.'[93] To support his own identity-based interpretation, then, Jay would have to rely upon the writings and ideas of figures more sympathetic to his views. Concerning 'Permanent Exiles', for example, Jay contrasted Weil's and Horkheimer's opposition with the approval of Löwenthal and Marcuse, both of whom remained in the United States, and maintained, in Jay's estimation, a more conflictual relationship with the contemporary world.[94] Still more significant for the resulting book, however, were the resources upon which Jay relied when according Institute members a particular form of Jewish identity despite their opposition. This is perhaps nowhere better evidenced than in the above-mentioned episode in which the title and trope of 'permanent exiles' appeared to Weil, not as the honorific Jay intended, but indissociable from that armband of antisemitic ideology from which a racial, religious and/or ethnic identity was concocted for them, reproducing the very same noxious racial stereotypes in the process. That a pernicious homology between antisemitic and philosemitic stereotypes has long existed, been instrumentalised philosemitically to dubious historical effect,[95] and early criticised by the Frankfurt School itself is today well understood.[96] At the time of *The Dialectical Imagination's* composition, however, Jay may well have found Institute members' reactions inconceivable, as he would later claim, because he was then 'under the indirect influence' of a work he afterwards credited with '[t]urning the insult of "rootless cosmopolitanism" into a virtue, celebrating the burdensome role of "wandering Jew", [and] valuing restless "homelessness" over stable settlement.'[97] That book, George Steiner's *Language and Silence*, which Jay recalls first encountering in 1968, was one which 'powerfully resonated', as Jay later wrote, 'with the understanding of the Frankfurt School I was beginning to formulate in my dissertation.'[98] And it was, indeed, on the basis of such ideas as these, ideas Jay found suggestive for celebrating 'the virtues of exile and displacement', and 'stress[ing] the benefits of marginalization over its costs', that the historian imagined he had discovered 'a key to make sense of what their [Institute members'] Jewish backgrounds might mean.'[99] The resulting work thus came to crystallise a conflict between Institute members' own sense of the social, political and intellectual spurs to their work and that ascription of Jewish influence to which Jay has remained committed for the last half-century.



Such a conflict is already evident in the published version of *The Dialectical Imagination* itself. In the latter Jay appears to have followed Weil's advice, making explicit

Institute members' 'vehement rejection of the meaningfulness of Jewishness in their backgrounds',[100] as well as the extent to which they 'den[ied] any significance at all to their ethnic roots.'[101] Indeed, Jay writes, it is clear that 'the overt impact of Judaism as a system of belief seems to have been negligible', that 'the manifest intellectual content of Judaism played no role in the thinking of the Institute's members', and that – aside from Löwenthal, Fromm and Benjamin – '[t]o the others Judaism was a closed book.'[102] Here, as elsewhere, Jay makes clear that his speculations do not intend to suggest that 'the Institut's program can be solely, or even predominantly, attributed to its members' ethnic roots', while also arguing that 'to ignore them entirely is to lose sight of one contributing factor.'[103] As a result, Jay continued searching for 'indirect ways' in which their purported Jewishness 'might have played a role', and thus turned to what he termed 'more broadly sociological or cultural explanations.'[104] For this purpose, Jay adduced a series of speculative links between the Frankfurt School and their purported Jewishness, ranging from the 'elective affinity' said to exist between political radicalism and Judaism to the widespread antisemitism of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany – Institute members denied both – and from the plainly less compelling idea that Frankfurt School members were prey to 'self-delusions' about the threat of Nazism to the presence of what Jay classified as typically Jewish father-son relations among Institute members, their interest in psychoanalysis, as well as the idea that their writings' 'strong ethical tone' may have derived from the 'values likely to be espoused in a close-knit Jewish home.'[105]

In light of such 'sociological' and 'cultural' explanations, it is perhaps unsurprising that Jay does not simply write of Frankfurt School members having denied significance to their purported ethnic roots, but instead writes that they were '*anxious* to deny *any significance at all* to their ethnic roots'; that Weil did not simply oppose Jay's interpretation but '*heatedly* rejected' the significance of their supposed Jewishness; that Institute members were not assimilated Jews, but "'assimilated" Jews' – the scare quotes Jay's, and presented in such a way as to suggest that their self-professed assimilation was not to be entirely believed.[106] When characterised in this way, it becomes clearer why Jay should have found surprising 'the intensity with which many of the Institut's members denied, and in some cases still deny, any meaning at all to their Jewish identities.'[107] Because *The Dialectical Imagination* neither takes seriously the potential validity of Institute members' refusing such identities, traditions and influences nor inquires into the actual social, intellectual and historical reasons for Frankfurt School members' rejection of Jewish identity, but instead renders such opposition suspicious by speaking of it in terms of just how 'anxious' and 'heated' was the 'intensity' of such denials, compounded in Jay's estimation by the 'general blindness' and 'self-delusions' of Institute members,[108] it is no wonder Jay should come to the conclusion that, as he writes, 'for all their claims to total assimilation and assertions about the lack of discrimination in Weimar, one cannot avoid a sense of their protesting too much.'[109]

For Jay, then, Institute members' accounts of their own lives inevitably appear implausible because the very stridency of their claims is interpreted as evidence of its opposite. Such suspicions as Jay entertains here, however, appear reminiscent of a series of ill-founded assumptions which have long sought to render ridiculous Weimar intellectuals' rejection of ethnic identity and experience of successful assimilation and waning antisemitism by setting it against the backdrop of the Shoah's supposed inevitability. From this perspective, the destruction of European Jewry is made to appear both foreseeable and foreordained, while those who did not earlier accept their 'origins' are belittled, in the words of Samuel Moyn, as being 'wholly self-deluded in their attempted integration … [since] they were fated from the beginning to disappear.'[110] On the basis of this kind of teleological vision of history, however, a 'negative idealisation' of the past, as Moyn calls it,[111] it is perhaps more readily understandable (if not for that reason any less regrettable) that Jay should have gone on to characterise so uncharitably Institute members' protests against his interpretation of the "'Jewish" question', as when he dubbed their reactions a form of 'role-playing' performed by 'the Jew eager to forget his origins.'[112] Yet, as Moyn has noted of similar judgments, such characterisations may owe their success to an 'underlying prejudice', 'a form of "ethnic absolutism" or 'essentialising reduction of identity',[113] as he calls it, most recently suggested by Jay's insistence that 'their Jewish identities, however attenuated, preclude[d] their ever being fully at home in the hegemonic culture of Europe.'[114]

At the time of *The Dialectical Imagination*'s 1973 publication, the objections raised by Weil and Horkheimer did still have some effect: their protests were at least excerpted and recorded in the published book, its title was changed and the attribution of Jewish identity to Weil's father was omitted. But in the decades since, Jay has continued modifying his account of the Frankfurt School's relationship to Judaism and exile, strengthening his earlier interpretation in the process. Following his 1972 decision to give up 'Permanent Exiles' as a title, for example, Jay employed the very same title some thirteen years later for a volume on the Frankfurt School and other former exiles. In his defense, Jay explained that, with reference to the protests of Weil, Pollock and Horkheimer, 'it has always been my conviction that the homecoming of certain Frankfurt School members to Germany did not really end the exile of Critical Theory.'[115] In still later accounts, Jay has returned to the terms of that earlier dispute, claiming of Frankfurt School members that 'they themselves were *content* with being permanent exiles', and insisting that the Frankfurt School's 'history cannot be told, *pace* Felix Weil, without taking into account the Jewish star in the constellation of influences' determining their work.[116] As a result, it should hardly surprise that, in a recent essay on the foundations of critical theory, Jay restores in part what he had initially omitted, describing his former correspondent's father, Hermann Weil, as a 'German-Jewish grain merchant' – just as countless others have done before and since, antisemitically and philosemitically by turns.[117] In this context, it is perhaps instructive to recall the barbed joke Weil once related after questioning Jay's 'treatment of the "Jewish" question.' In that letter, Weil closed with a postscript: 'Do you know the story of the Jew declaiming "I am a Jew and proud of it. If I weren't, I'd be a Jew anyway … So I might as well be proud of it"?' 'I don't know whether I read this somewhere or made it up myself', Weil observed, 'but I am sure it was your treatment of the matter that inspired me …'[118]

As the decades passed, this early and important dispute about the Frankfurt School's identity and influences receded from view as the idea took hold that their 'Jewishness' was less a question than a certain origin. Two years after *The Dialectical Imagination* was first published, for instance, the Harvard professor and former doctoral advisor of Martin Jay, H. Stuart Hughes, published a book referencing and repeating without qualification his recent student's assertions, writing of the Frankfurt School that a 'point of common experience' between them was their shared 'Jewish origin', but that, like so many other 'German Jews', 'they preferred most of the time not to speak of the matter or to speak of it with a certain embarrassment.'[119] Less than a decade later, this interpretation received its most significant stamp of approval when George Mosse, the doyen of German Studies, published *German Jews Beyond Judaism* and included the Frankfurt School among its pantheon. Mosse not only drew upon Jay's work to acknowledge Institute members' denial of any link between their work and purported Jewishness, agreeing with them that Judaism ecumenically defined – as either an ancient, intellectual or religious tradition – played no part in their lives, but at the same time insisted upon the central importance of 'their Jewishness' regardless.[120]

In Mosse, as elsewhere, the 'Jewishness' of the Frankfurt School is explained by Institute members' supposed position as 'outsiders' in German society, attention to the notion of alienation, and affinity with left-wing political movements – ensuring that, '[w]hatever their individual concerns were', as Mosse writes, 'the Frankfurt School as a whole' should be considered 'a part of the German-Jewish tradition of *Bildung* and Enlightenment.'[121] By 1990, this interpretation had become canonical enough for Steven S. Schwarzschild to observe that 'The Jewishness of the Frankfurt School … is long since a truism.'[122] And, indeed, the following thirty years have only witnessed the further strengthening of this truism. In more recent secondary literature, Jack Jacobs' *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* is perhaps the most obvious example. For while Jacobs is careful to qualify his assertions about 'Jewish influence' on the Frankfurt School by making clear that the Institute 'was never an explicitly Jewish institution', that he himself does 'not believe that Critical Theory is a Jewish theory', and that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not at all a 'Jewish book in any significant sense', his book-length insistence upon what he calls the Frankfurt School's 'Jewish origin', 'Jewish life paths', 'Jewish roads' and 'Jewish consciousness' cannot help but make his qualifications appear, if not disingenuous, then at least somewhat perfunctory.[123] More recently, this canonised interpretation has reached its apogee in the work of Peter E. Gordon, a former stu-

dent of Jay who, in a nod to his teacher's momentarily-abandoned title, seeks to now repurpose it by arguing that 'we are all "permanent exiles" ' today.[124]

In line with this interpretation, the past half-century has transformed into a commonplace the idea that the Frankfurt School consisted of German-Jews committed to the reinterpretation of particularly Jewish themes, and that the group's putative distance from prevailing ideologies was not only constitutive of its work, but may also be seen as characteristically Jewish as well – as though Jewish identity, isolation, extraterritoriality and exile should now be seen as the very origin and the end of critical theory's work. When confronted with Weil's objections and arguments, however, that commonplace appears decidedly less compelling, and may inspire in today's reader a palpable sense of discomfort. Indeed, that discomfort is also my own. And yet this earlier contest over origins, titles and identities may also allow us to ask whether more recent notions of identity and intellectual work are sufficient for understanding critical theory's earlier impulses.

At the time of their correspondence, it was precisely this difference between the lives of Institute members and that of their interpreters which led Weil to empathise with Jay, underscoring, with regret, how the impulses of that earlier generation appear to have been lost in the meantime. 'I realize how difficult it must be for a scholar with your background to grasp the political and societal urgency in which we founding members lived and worked', he told Jay: 'We wanted to do our share to have socialism … if not yesterday then tomorrow.'[125] Such social, political and historical factors, Weil suggests, are at once both more accurate and more illuminating than any identity-based explanatory model. Indeed, the facts of Weil's own history clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of any form of religious, racial, cultural or ethnic Jewishness for understanding his life and work.

Contrary to the well-worn idea that Weil and other Institute members belong to the pantheon of German-Jewish intellectuals driven by *Bildung,* and whose radicalism was motivated by shared Jewish backgrounds, it should be remembered that the most formative influences on the life of the Institute's founder were all of an eminently social and political nature, as Weil's biographer, Hans-Peter Gruber, has recently made clear.[126] These influences include, for instance, Weil's early awareness of South American social injustice, as well as the effects of the First World War, November Revolution, Communist movement and political instability in Weimar Germany. Weil, it should be remembered, was neither Jewish nor German, but an atheist and internationalist born in Argentina whose mother tongue was Spanish. His social consciousness was formed, not by Jewish identity and antisemitism, but by his early apprehension of the divide between his own family's wealth and that of the masses of impoverished workers with whom he grew up. Indeed, it was in solidarity with the indigenous family that was for him a second family that Weil's sense of historical injustice was formed in opposition to the ruling *latifundistas*. Later, upon his relocation to Germany, Weil participated, albeit briefly, in the November Revolution of 1919, became a socialist student agitator, and was imprisoned and expelled from the state of Württemberg for his 'seditious' activities. Moving ever farther to the left, Weil worked for years as a delegate to the Bolshevik-led Communist International in Argentina, and founded the Institute for Social Research as an avowedly Marxist centre for study and research, while also becoming a patron, promoter and publisher of left-wing avant-garde art and literature.

There is little doubt, then, that the spurs to Weil's intellectual and organisational activities were of a manifestly socialist and political nature: in Argentina, the boy who was like an older brother to him was murdered for organising local workers; in Germany, he was imprisoned and expelled for political agitation; in the United States, he was surveilled and suspected for what were believed to be his past and present communist activities. Moreover, as Gruber points out towards the end of his exhaustively researched biography, 'There is not the slightest doubt about Felix Weil's areligious attitude.'[127] For Weil was not only ignorant of and uninterested in his 'origins', but remained an 'avowed atheist' who, his biographer notes, 'understood religion only as a belief system and therefore did not consider himself a Jew.'[128] And, in this, Weil was not at all unusual since 'he came from an areligious family', according to Gruber, in which his sister was also an atheist and both his parents early distanced themselves 'from any religious ideas and practices.'[129] Yet the pull of identity-based explanatory models remains so strong that even Weil's own biographer cannot entirely avoid its effects. For, despite this, Gruber will nevertheless

claim that Weil's life represents, in certain respects, a 'personified Jewish history' and that 'his biography … is exemplary … of a group of left-wing intellectuals of Jewish origin.'[130]

The First German Institute for the Study of Marxism

As Neil McLaughlin reminds us, the prevalence of certain origin myths in the Frankfurt School's canonisation 'are not about accurate historical reconstruction', but are best conceived as so many integral 'part[s] of a process whereby "contemporary preferences" are legitimated by "providing them with an honorable past".'[131] That the vogue today enjoyed by exile or pariahdom become prestige should accord itself an illustrious pedigree in the life and work of critical theory's past is no guarantee that such identities and equivalences constitute a faithful reconstruction of the Frankfurt School's past. Indeed, it may be more plausibly argued that it is only after abandoning such prejudices that one can then entertain the idea that what critical theory's representatives had to say themselves about their origins and impulses might actually be worth taking seriously. This would mean resisting an otherwise unquestioning reliance upon identity-based models of explanation and exercising greater caution when claiming for contemporary ideas greater validity than those possessed by the people who lived through those times themselves.

Against the perennial practice of explaining away Institute members' rejection of Jewish identity and influence, then, one might follow instead the recent recommendation of Martin Jay to resist the temptation to 'condescendingly "understand" those of past generations by situating them in their historical situation and moment', and no longer chalk up to ignorance or self-delusion ideas which do not appear to have been confirmed by the course of history.[132] Doing so would not only lend greater credence to the many reasons why such identities and models were so strenuously rejected in the first place, but would also preserve that distance between past and present which is otherwise collapsed when making Institute members' life and work conform with our own present. For whenever one now finds the Frankfurt School's image aligned with readymade impulses said to issue from the depths of some individual, collective or social being, one might more plausibly ask after the way such characterisations obscure the extent to which critical theory's most radical contributions are to be found on the very surface of its work.

In this respect, one need look no further than the preface Horkheimer did in fact write when Jay's provisional title was abandoned. For when the Institute's former director discussed what united the various members of the Frankfurt School, he did not identify that 'common thread' of Jewish birth and family backgrounds against which Weil had so protested, but a 'critical approach to existing society' through which, Horkheimer writes, 'a group of men, interested in social theory and from different scholarly backgrounds, came together with the belief that formulating the negative in the epoch of transition was more meaningful than academic careers.'[133] And if this patently more social, political and, indeed, existential determination of critical theory's origins is in fact correct, then a far more compelling explanation for the singularity of critical theory is not only explicit in Horkheimer's words, but plainly evidenced throughout the history of its experiments in social and intellectual production. Upon *The Dialectical Imagination's* 1973 publication, the dubiousness of identity-based explanations was not lost on Jay's own contemporaries. Writing in 1975, for instance, the American critic Douglas Kellner echoed Weil's objections, unwittingly it appears, in his own review of Jay's book, arguing that the author

> seems to place more weight on the Jewish origins of the members of the School than on their commitment to Marxism as the 'common thread running through individual biographies' … In fact the most important 'common thread running through individual biographies' is a marked anti-capitalist and pro-socialist tendency.[134]

This is not to say, of course, that such attributions of Jewish identity may not serve a salutary purpose when they aim to produce less ethno-nationalism within the ambit of their own identity-based discursive concerns. In this sense, it is perhaps not inappropriate to ask if the prevailing image of the Frankfurt School as quintessentially Jewish is not itself a defense against more restrictive models of Jewish belonging, and might thereby constitute a progressive attempt at developing more expansive notions of diasporic, cosmopolitan Jewish identity as a result. Historically, of course, the ascription of identity is not infrequently developed in response to more

orthodox acts of identity exclusion in a way that may prove instructive for understanding the canonisation of critical theory as well. Consider, for instance, Steven S. Schwarzschild's more orthodox portrayal of the Frankfurt School as coming from 'completely acculturated, assimilated, de-Judaised' families whose sons were 'thoroughly ignorant of Jewish culture', and thus possessed only 'suppressed and semi-Jewish instincts.'[135] Such criticisms of the Frankfurt School's insufficient Jewishness led Schwarzschild to characterise Horkheimer's late religious turn as demonstrating 'knowledge the paucity of which would shame a schoolboy',[136] and Hannah Arendt to denounce people like Adorno as 'Aryan stragglers',[137] identifying him, ignominiously, as the 'only half-Jew among Jews'.[138]

Examples like these attest to an intra-Jewish tradition of refusing Jewish identity to those who do not appear to conform to what others consider the necessary attributes of proper Jewishness, a slippery slope, as Evelyn Wilcock has shown.[139] The efforts of Jay and others to advance a more inclusive concept of German-Jewish diasporic identity are, from this perspective, most certainly welcome. Yet, as examples from outside the field of critical theory have shown, even the most laudatory efforts at expanding the scope of Jewish identity to include figures similarly non-nationalistic, non-religious, and non-identifying can often reproduce the very same tendency of subordinating individual lives and works to the exigences of contemporary political expediency, corralling prominent historical figures into one identity, rather than another – and thus creating an illustrious and self-legitimating pedigree for oneself in the process.[140]

For this purpose, there exists today an ever-expanding set of typologies for assigning Jewish identity to those who never identified themselves as such, and who possessed neither a connection to contemporary Jewish communities nor knowledge of Jewish culture – but who, despite this, can still be dubbed Jewish, retroactively, on the basis of such recent redescriptions of refractory figures as 'Non-Jewish Jews',[141] 'German Jews Beyond Judaism', or 'post-traditional Jews',[142] to take a few recent examples. While the sheer variety of these more capacious notions of identity evince a worthy desire to move beyond older notions of blood-based inheritance, such typologies can also seem woefully anachronistic. In this sense, it is perhaps not inappropriate to ask whether prevailing ideas about the Frankfurt School derive less from the life and work of Institute members than from 'our own standpoint', as Jay argues elsewhere, 'a contingent historical context, which generates assumptions that often elude us', and which often acts as an obstacle to recognising, as their contrary, 'the potentially transcendent alternatives presented by earlier thinkers.'[143] By explaining away the social and political realities, and legitimate individual reasons, behind such figures' distance from particular traditions, one also loses sight of how those figures saw themselves as participating within entirely different historical traditions instead.

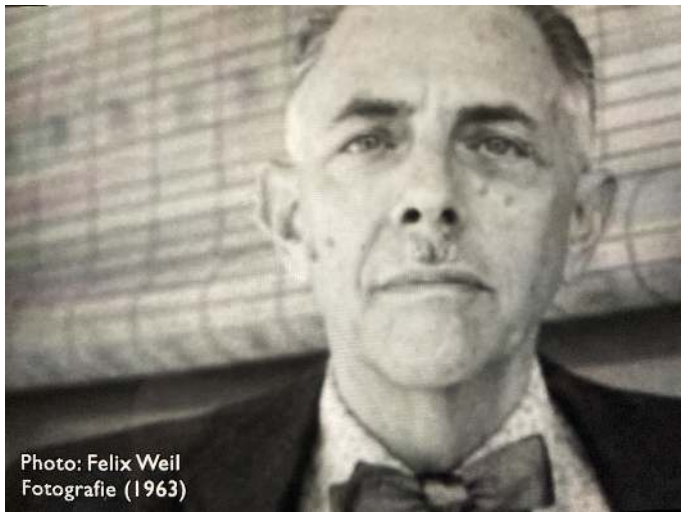


Photo: Felix Weil
Fotografie (1963)

In the case of early critical theory, its actions were determined by the ferment felt by those seeking to understand and transform the contemporary world, uniting Institute members in a series of unprecedented experiments in social and intellectual production irreducible to stories today told by way of identity, influence and other archetypes. Beholden as we now are, however, to the prevailing search for critical theory's roots, bedrock and related orthodoxies, this more radical legacy has been obscured. And yet it is precisely this often-elided history Felix Weil once intimated when suggesting, as the subtitle for Jay's canon-defining book, the idea of calling it – in a manner faithful to the Frankfurt School's past but obscured by its half-century-long canonisation – 'The story of the first German university institution for the study of Marxism.'[144] For it should not be today forgotten that, at the time of the Institute's 1923 inauguration, such an orientation was just as inimical to the social, political and scholarly norms of its time as it is to our own – and so at the moment that avowedly socialist impulse was first announced as the Institute's organising principle, 'we

[all] held our breath', as Weil later recounted, for 'here and now it had happened': 'Marxism was admitted as a teaching principle at a German university.' 'The taboo had been broken.'[145]

Ryan Crawford is Assistant Professor of Political Philosophy at Webster Vienna Private University. He is co-editor of Adorno and the Concept of Genocide *(2016) and* Delimiting Experience: Aesthetics and Philosophy *(2013).*

Notes

1. Peter E. Gordon, 'Conversations with Martin Jay', *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 42:2 (2019), 1.
2. On the personal, professional and political interests driving American scholars' reception of critical theory, see Robert Zwarg, *Die Kritische Theorie in Amerika: Das Nachleben einer Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandernhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).
3. Gordon, 'Conversations with Martin Jay', 2.
4. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*: *A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xxxiii.
5. Martin Jay, 'The Ungrateful Dead', *Salmagundi* 123 (Summer 1999), 22–31.
6. Martin Jay, 'The Permanent Exile of Theodor W. Adorno', *Midstream* 15 (December 1969), 62–69. On the magazine's history, see Emily Alice Katz, '"A Questioning of the Jewish Status Quo": *Midstream*, Shlomo Katz, and American Zionist Letters at Midcentury', *Jewish History* 29 (2015), 57–96.
7. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 19 March 1972. Weil's letters are to be found in Martin Jay's personal collection and are here used with his permission. On Jay's correspondence with Weil and Horkheimer, see Martin Jay, *Splinters in Your Eye: Frankfurt School Provocations* (London: Verso, 2020), 19–32.
8. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 13 February 1972.
9. Max Horkheimer to Martin Jay, 31 January 1972; Max Horkheimer to Martin Jay, 5 March 1972, quoted in Jay, *Splinters*, 28.
10. See Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, xxxi; and Jay, *Splinters*, 30.
11. Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), xii.
12. Ibid.
13. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 July 1971
14. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 April 1971.
15. For the most complete account of Weil's life and work, see Hans-Peter Gruber, »*Aus der Art geschlagen« Eine politische Biografie von Felix Weil 1898–1975* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2022).
16. Felix Weil to Gustav Meyer, 16 January 1923; as quoted in Gruber, »*Aus der Art geschlagen*«, 207.
17. On Weil's offer to persuade Horkheimer to write a foreword for Jay's book, subsequent confirmation of Horkheimer's willingness to do so, and later threat that the foreword might no longer be forthcoming, see Weil's letters to Jay from 30 April 1971, 12 June 1971 and 19 March 1972, respectively. On Weil's specifications concerning Jay's permission to quote from interviews and correspondence with Pollock, Horkheimer and himself, see Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 30 March 1972.
18. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 28 February 1971.
19. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 April 1971.
20. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 28 February 1971; Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 28 April and 30 April 1971.
21. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 16 May 1971.
22. Ibid. For corresponding passages, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 5–6, 16.
23. Weil to Jay, 16 May 1971.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971.
29. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 16 July 1971.
30. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 July 1971.
31. Ibid.
32. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971.
33. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 31 January 1971.
34. Ibid.
35. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971.
36. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 16 May 1971.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971.
40. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 July 1971.
41. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 16 July 1971. For the corresponding passage, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 31.
42. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971; Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 29 July 1971; Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 6 June 1971.
43. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 11 June 1971.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 9 June 1971.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.

49. Ibid. For a short excerpt from Pollock's 'protest' letter, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 33.
50. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 9 June 1971.
51. Ibid.
52. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 4 September 1971.
53. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 9 June 1971.
54. Ibid.
55. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 9 August 1971.
56. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 24? August 1971.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 4 September 1971.
61. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 24 November 1971; Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 5 December 1971.
62. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 5 January 1972.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 13 February 1972.
66. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 1 March 1972.
67. Max Horkheimer to Martin Jay, 31 January 1972, quoted in Jay, *Splinters*, 28.
68. Jay, *Splinters*, 28.
69. Max Horkheimer to Martin Jay, 5 March 1972, quoted in Jay, *Splinters*, 28.
70. Ibid., quoted in Jay, *Splinters* 29.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 19 March 1972.
75. Ibid.
76. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 30 March 1972.
77. Jay, *Splinters*, 19. For related comments, see also Jay, *Splinters*, 151–172; and Martin Jay, 'Review Forum: Jack Jacobs, The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism', *The German Quarterly* 89.1 (Winter 2016), 86–90.
78. Jay, *Splinters*, 29.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. On the antisemitic practice of 'unmasking' Jews, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Spectre Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
83. Jürgen Habermas, 'The German Idealism of the German Philosophers', in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 57.
84. Martin Jay, 'After George Steiner: A Personal Recollection', *Salmagundi* 208-209 (Fall 2020-Winter 2021), 74.
85. Martin Jay, Azucena G. Blanco and Miguel Alirangues, 'Martin Jay: An Intellectual Picture', *Theory Now: Journal of Literature, Critique and Thought* 2:1 (January-June 2019), 239.
86. Ibid., 240.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid., 239.
90. Ibid., 240.
91. Ibid.
92. Martin Jay, *City Lights Live!: Martin Jay in Conversation with Paul Breines*. *YouTube*, uploaded by CityLightsBooks, 26 August 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pVrOzFjji4.
93. Letter from Martin Jay to Leo Löwenthal, 16 September 1970. As quoted in Zwarg, *Die Kritische Theorie in Amerika*, 111.
94. Jay, *Permanent Exiles*, xii.
95. See Frank Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1992); Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
96. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Prejudice in the Interview Material', in *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 603–653, especially 'Observations on Low-Scoring Subjects', 644–652; and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute.' *Gesammelte Schriften Band 20.1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 360–383.
97. Jay, 'After George Steiner', 74, 73.
98. Ibid., 74.
99. Ibid.
100. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 33.
101. Ibid., 32.
102. Ibid., 33.
103. Ibid., 34.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid., 32-35.
106. Ibid., 32; italics mine.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
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110. Samuel Moyn, 'German Jewry and the Question of Identity Historiography and Theory', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 41:1 (January 1996), 294.
111. Ibid.
112. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 34.
113. Moyn, 'German Jewry', 295.
114. Jay, 'After George Steiner', 74.
115. Jay, *Permanent Exiles*, xiii.
116. Jay, 'After George Steiner', 74 (my emphasis); Jay, 'Review Forum', 90.
117. Jay, *Splinters*, 6.

118. Weil to Jay, 29 July 1971. For the source of that joke, see Kurt Tucholsky, *Die Weltbühne*, 8 November 1932, p. 688. As quoted in Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals: A Political History of the Weltbühne and Its Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 27.
119. H. Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought 1930-1965* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 140–141.
120. George Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 61.
121. Ibid., 61-62.
122. Steven S. Schwarzschild, 'Adorno and Schoenberg as Jews Between Kant and Hegel', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 35:1 (January 1990), 449.
123. Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2, 6, 151, 2, 3, 4, 9.
124. Peter E. Gordon, *Migrants in the Profane: Critical Theory and the Question of Secularization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 148.
125. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 9 June 1971.
126. The following sketch of Weil's life relies, once more, upon the excellent work of Gruber's »*Aus der Art geschlagen*«.
127. Gruber, »*Aus der Art geschlagen*«, 727.
128. Ibid., 12.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid., 13.
131. Neil McLaughlin, 'Origin Myths in the Social Sciences: Fromm, the Frankfurt School and the Emergence of Critical Theory', *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 24:1 (Winter 1999), 111. McLaughlin, it should be noted, is here quoting and paraphrasing the work of Jennifer Platt.
132. Martin Jay, *Genesis and Validity: The Theory and Practice of Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 16.
133. Max Horkheimer, 'Foreword', in Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, xxv. For Jay's own use of Horkheimer's foreword, defending himself against Weil's objections, and tacitly supporting Horkheimer's late religious rewriting of critical theory, see, Jay, *Splinters*, 19–32. For critiques of those who take Institute members' religiously-inflected late statements at face value, see Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 27 June 1971; and Jonathon Catlin, 'Review: The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism, by Jack Jacobs', *Antisemitism Studies* 1: 2 (Fall 2017), 415–423.
134. Douglas Kellner, 'The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*', *New German Critique* 4 (Winter 1975), 133.
135. Schwarzschild, 'Adorno and Schoenberg', 450–451, 454.
136. Ibid., 451.
137. As quoted in Zwarg, *Die Kritische Theorie in Amerika*, 147.
138. Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, eds. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 644.
139. Evelyn Wilcock, 'Negative Identity: Mixed German Jewish Descent as Factor in the Reception of Theodor Adorno', *New German Critique* 81 (Autumn 2000), 169–187.
140. See, for instance, Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press; 2013); Sarah Hammerschlag, 'Outside the Canon: Judith Butler and the Trials of Jewish Philosophy', *Political Theology* 16:4 (2015), 367–370; and Julie E. Cooper, 'A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism: The Question of Jewish Political Agency', *Political Theory* 43:1 (February 2015), 80–110.
141. Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2017).
142. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Cultural Disjunctions: Post-Traditional Jewish Identities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).
143. Jay, *Genesis and Validity*, 16.
144. Felix J. Weil to Martin Jay, 5 December 1971.
145. As quoted in Gruber, »*Aus der Art geschlagen*«, 214