

2 Staging Remembrance: Refigurations on the West German Stage (1960 – 1990)

We finished the last chapter with the suggestion that Ernst Deutsch's Shylock interpretations – in 1957 at the Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, 1963 at the Freie Volksbühne Berlin, and 1967 at Vienna's Burgtheater – initiated a new approach to the play: the connection of *The Merchant of Venice* and Holocaust remembrance, which was to become the dominant form of reception in the following two decades. Two major cultural debates contributed to this revision. They included, firstly, the key events confronting German society with the National Socialist past and the Holocaust, in particular the Eichmann trial at Jerusalem (1961) and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials (1963–1965), whose extensive media coverage caused an unprecedented public discussion about the genocide. Secondly, the refigurations of *Merchant* were also the result of a wide-reaching politicization of German theatres during the 1960s and 1970s.

These two ruptures in the post-war consensus were closely related. To a considerable extent, the challenges to theatre conventions in West Germany were voiced and represented by actors and directors of the Weimar avant-garde, some of them Jewish, who had been forced to emigrate after 1933 and remigrated to Germany after the war: among them were Fritz Kortner, Ernst Deutsch, Therese Giehse, Wolfgang Heinz, Wolfgang Langhoff, Berthold Viertel, Bertolt Brecht, and Erwin Piscator. They were joined by a younger generation of Jewish remigrants, such as Peter Zadek and George Tabori, who brought with them the experience of British and American theatre and film. These remigrants were key players in the process of modernizing the German theatre, often referred to as the transition to a *Regietheater* ('directors' theatre').¹ Yet these changes were difficult and slow, as Klaus Wannemacher has pointed out. This was firstly due to the fact, already discussed in the last chapter, that many theatre directors and managers had kept their posts at the end of the war. Secondly, modernization was hindered by the resilience of authoritarian and anti-democratic convictions, which blended with the new anti-communism of the Cold War.² Many West Germans longed for an end of the Allied denazification policy,

¹ For a discussion of the connection between the avant-garde theatre of the early twentieth century and the experiments undertaken in the second half of the century, see Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Is More Beautiful than War: German Stage Directing in the Late Twentieth Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), x.

² Klaus Wannemacher, "Der Amnesie des Publikums begegnen: Nachkriegstheater als Inkubator des 'Aufarbeitungs'-Diskurses," in *Erfolgsgeschichte Bundesrepublik? Die Nachkriegsgesell-*