

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
Carey Perloff, Artistic Director • Ellen Richard, Executive Director

PRESENTS

WORDS ^{on} PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

No Exit

BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH BY PAUL BOWLES

PERFORMED IN CONCERT WITH *THE VALET*,
BY JONATHON YOUNG

CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY KIM COLLIER

ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY THE VIRTUAL STAGE AND
ELECTRIC COMPANY THEATRE

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

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VISION STATEMENT

BY JONATHON YOUNG

In this new vision for *No Exit*, the sense of entrapment and alienation is complete and palpable: the characters are literally cut off from us, and the essentially “live” component of theater is hidden behind the four walls of a tiny, claustrophobic hotel room.

Inside the room there are hidden cameras, which capture footage that is then projected to the audience. The projected image therefore becomes our primary access point to the story, as only in selected moments do we see the main characters live. The filmed version of the hell they are enduring speaks to our experience of watching human suffering, removed emotionally and physically by the media that stands in for the real thing.

When the projected image is shown in such striking contrast to the presence of the living, breathing performer, it draws attention to how video (and media in general) represents a kind of death. The characters Inez, Cradeau, and Estelle are “made dead” by the technology that mediates between performer and spectator.

The other significant difference between our interpretation and other productions of *No Exit* is that the character of The Valet is given greater presence, inhabiting the “live” space that surrounds the hotel room. As in the original script, The Valet is responsible for showing the recently deceased to their quarters, but in our production he serves as a kind of go-between, a link between the audience (with whom he interacts), his never-seen uncle (who works on the third floor and calls him on occasion), and the main characters of the play. We watch The Valet watching. His presence as an omniscient viewer, having to endure this play yet another time, gives rise to a number of questions: Whose hell is this? Is it being shown for him, or for us? What is the purpose of recording their suffering? Is it still relevant? Do we see ourselves caught in a similar predicament? And how do we as audience fit into this cycle of watching, watcher, and watched?

This conceptualization of *No Exit* gives us a platform to, first, continue our investigations of the intersection between live theater and film, and, second, to investigate how the presence of a new narrative can reframe an existing, well-known play.



Jonathon Young as The Valet.
Photo by Michael Julian Berz.