

Please join us for a café-bookclub conversation with

**Marc Robinson (Yale)**

on the topic of his new forthcoming book from Cambridge UP (2025)

***American Performance in 1976: The Evolution of an Avant-Garde***


Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 9:30 am to 11am  
Club des enseignants – Sorbonne Université – 17 rue de la Sorbonne

***American Performance in 1976: The Evolution of an Avant-Garde*** is set in a febrile, transitional period of cultural history: after the end of Watergate and the Vietnam War; before the AIDS epidemic and the ascendancy of the Conservative movement. The year 1976 offers an especially sharp view of the era's instability. Bicentennial triumphalism, peaking in the middle of that hinge year, sounded dissonant in the face of a violent past and an uncertain future: the year was "post-war" with none of the forward momentum and confidence, much less historical understanding, the term once conveyed.

My book opens with an account of how innovative artists in multiple disciplines—drama, theatre, dance, music, film, and visual art—responded to this period in representative works. It then zeroes in on avant-garde theatre performance in 1976. Over the course of that *annus mirabilis* for live art, five landmark productions could be seen within months of one another. In March, the composer and pianist Cecil Taylor presented *A Rat's Mass / Procession in Shout*, his jazz opera based on Adrienne Kennedy's play *A Rat's Mass*. Meredith Monk's opera *Quarry* opened in April. November brought the Robert Wilson/Philip Glass opera *Einstein on the Beach* and Joseph Chaikin's production of Adrienne Kennedy's play *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. A few weeks later, in mid-December, the Wooster Group held its first open rehearsal of Spalding Gray's and Elizabeth LeCompte's *Rumstick Road*. In close readings of these five works, I hope to define the poetics of a transforming, transformative moment in American culture.

**Marc Robinson** is Dean of Humanities and Malcolm G. Chace '56 Professor of Theater, Dance, & Performance Studies and English. He is also Professor in the Practice of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale. His books include *The American Play: 1787-2000* (Yale Univ. Press, 2009) and *The Other American Drama* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994). In addition, he is the editor of four books: *Adrienne Kennedy: Collected Plays and Other Writings* (Library of America, 2023), *The Myopia and Other Plays* by David Greenspan (Critical Performances series, Univ. of Michigan Press, 2012), *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), and *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* (Faber and Faber, 1994). His new book, *American Performance in 1976*, is forthcoming in the Theatre and Performance Theory series from Cambridge Univ. Press. He has been awarded the 2009 George Jean Nathan Award and the 2010 George Freedley Special Jury Prize (both for *The American Play*), the 2012 Lambda Literary Award in LGBTQ Drama (for *The Myopia and Other Plays* by David Greenspan), and the 2004 Betty Jean Jones Award for Outstanding Teaching of American Drama. He is a fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities.

Please sign up if you wish to attend: [julie.vatain@sorbonne-universite.fr](mailto:julie.vatain@sorbonne-universite.fr)

This event is sponsored by the  ether project.