

Maurice Stevens, Department of Comparative Studies,  
[stevens.368@osu.edu](mailto:stevens.368@osu.edu), 621-256-0558.

Maurice Stevens is Associate Professor of Comparative Studies and has been teaching at Ohio State University since 2003. Over the recent years, his research has focused on the performative and culturally productive activities of individuals or communities invested in producing narratives that respond to overwhelming historical events. From genocide and enslavement to hate crime and domestic violence, he has focused on the ways subjectivity and knowledge/power are produced and performed, through various media, in relation to "trauma" and its effects. More recently his concerns, and current book project, have turned to examine the sets of practice that cohere around problematic notions of trauma as they make their way into the broad social institutions of the clinic, the law, specific academic formations, and popular cultural representation.

Courses he has taught include:

Comparative Studies 367.01 "American identity in the World: Writing Self in the Midst of Global Change," Comparative Studies 205 "Literature and Ethnicity: Struggling Over Signs of Difference," Comparative Studies 358 "Film and Literature as Narrative Art: Trauma and Recovery in Film and Literature," Comparative Studies 651X "Topics in Comparative Studies: Catastrophe, Torture, Terror, Trauma and Cataclysm -- Questions of Narrative and Cultural Recovery," Comparative Studies 201 "Literature and Society: Texts In/Of Memory," Comparative Studies 694G "Intersections: Approaches to Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality," Comparative Studies 792M "Trauma and Trans(per)formance: African-American Cultural Production and Representational Struggle," Comparative Studies 274 "Introduction to Comparative Cultural Studies," Comparative Studies 545 "Intersections: Approaches to Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality," Comparative Studies H358 "Film and Literature as Narrative Art," and Comparative Studies 715 "Theorizing America"

In 2005 Dr. Stevens was awarded the University's Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award.

## **After Shock!!**

### **Making the Self Anew in Times of Catastrophe**

Maurice Stevens

Department of Comparative Studies

Course Credits: 2 with a course grade to be assigned

The adjectives are, by now, familiar: catastrophic, cataclysmic, torturous, terrorizing and traumatic. The kinds of events they describe, natural and environmental disasters, enslavement, domestic and public violence, police brutality, hate crimes, torture, disappearance, human acts of cataclysmic proportion and terrorism, also seem ever more common. Two features all of these categories of events share is that in the moment of their occurrence they are simply too overwhelming to experience fully; and later, when they are being remembered, when they become part of our story we tell ourselves about what happened, they are too complex to be easily represented. Still, one thing that can be observed about overwhelming events is that they cause problems for the production of self-narratives—stories we tell that answer questions like *Where do I come from?* or *Who and what am I?*—and often simply destroy our senses of self and individuals or as parts of communities. Another thing that is consistent about catastrophic events is that in their wake, when stories of self lay scattered and ruined around us, we very quickly work to make new narratives of self that can incorporate the disaster and provide us with a new and whole sense of self.

*After Shock!!: Making the Self Anew in Times of Catastrophe* is a course that look closely at how individuals and communities remake themselves through the crafting of new narratives of self, how they work through overwhelming events in an effort to produce a sense of wholeness. In the class we will examine what narrative strategies individuals and communities employ; what types of trauma end up in which narrative contexts; and how and why particular modes of narrative performance get connected with specific individuals and communities. In this class students will be introduced to:

- Trauma Theory
- Theories of Film and Visual Culture
- Theories of Identity Formation and Management
- Concepts of Memory and Forgetting
- Theories of Ideology

In addition to examining particular narratives that are visual (films, documentaries, photography, etc.), literary (novels,

poetry, essays, etc.), and performative (theater, body modification, activism, "community therapy," etc.), students in this interdisciplinary course will be challenged to examine their own understandings of self in cosmos, self in history, self in community, and self in relation to psyche. How do others, and how might we, use tale telling to understand, represent, and "make sense" of events that themselves trouble all sense-making activities? How, that is, does narrative production allow us to pick through the ruins of experience and recover the textured sense of self we understand as culture? Take this class and help answer this question!

### **Course Requirements:**

The level of success attained in this Freshman Seminar will be directly correlated with the intensity and nuance of our class discussions. The ability of our discussions to critically evaluate and meaningfully respond to assigned readings will depend entirely on the degree to which all seminar members actively participate. The greatest proportion of your grade will depend on how plainly you demonstrate your serious engagement with the course material *in class*. This course also assumes and draws upon the fact that each of you brings various levels of expertise in diverse areas of knowledge to the seminar space. The knowledge we produce together will be informed by the readings, my contributions and your reflections in relation to your own experiences and interests. To maximize your opportunities to both come to know one another as intellectual resources and to know yourselves as serious scholars in your own right, you will produce reading response notes every other week that *engage the readings and the visual text to be discussed that week* [2 pages single space, 11-12 point]. You will supply these responses to the group via e-mail attachment by Tuesday night before our Friday class meeting.

Serious Seminar Discussion Engagement:	40%
Reading Notes:	30%
Final Paper:	30%
<b>Total Possible:</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Final Paper and Presentation:**

Your Final Paper, due week 10, will be between 1500 and 2500 words and will take as its object a personal narrative produced in response to an overwhelming event. Where you acquire this narrative will be up to you. You may find it already archived in a library or elsewhere, you may interview someone you know, or you may even produce it yourself.

### **Learning Accommodations:**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please arrange an appointment with me as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Office For Disability Services to assist me in verifying the need for accommodations and in developing appropriate strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office For Disability Services, I encourage you to do so as early in the quarter as possible.

### **The Writing Center:**

The Writing Program at the Writing Center provides on-campus individual conferences on any kind of writing project. At some point during the quarter you should take advantage of this free service to receive additional feedback on your writing assignments. It is necessary to make an appointment in advance (keep in mind that appointments near the end of the quarter are

nearly impossible to get so plan ahead). The phone number is (614) 688-4291. The Writing Center is located at 475 Mendenhall, 125 S. Oval Mall. Visit their office or website for more information.

([http://cstw.ohio-state.edu/writing\\_center/index.htm](http://cstw.ohio-state.edu/writing_center/index.htm))

#### **Course Policies:**

Please take advantage of my office hours. Don't wait for problems to arise before coming to see me. Let me know how you are doing with the readings, if you have any ideas for discussion topics, if you find any component of the class particularly engaging or challenging, etc. This is one of the ways I come to know if the class is effective in helping you meet the course requirements.

#### **Academic Dishonesty:**

I consider any act that misrepresents a student's own academic work or that compromises the academic work of another to be scholastically dishonest. Therefore, cheating on assignments, unauthorized collaboration on assignments, sabotaging another student's work and plagiarizing are all absolutely unacceptable. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as your own, intentionally or not, by failing to put quotation marks around passages taken from a text or failing to properly cite quoted material. Please familiarize yourself with University guidelines regarding academic dishonesty.

**Required Course Reader:**

Your only "required text" will be a packet of collected articles we will be reading over the quarter. While you not be required to read many articles, those you will read are very challenging and will necessitate your reading them more than once.

**Required Visual Texts** (*portions of which will be screened in class every other week*):

Marlon Fuentes, "Bontoc Eulogy"  
Lourdes Portillo "Seniorita Extraviada"  
Susan Muska, "The Brandon Teena Story"  
Haile Garima, "Sankofa"  
Alain Resnais, "Hiroshima mon amour"

**Recommended Visual Texts:** (*these will not be screened, but you may find them of interest*):

"Death and the Maiden"  
Rachel Mira Perez "True Stories"  
"Who Killed Vincent Chin"  
"Lynching Postcards from a Heinous Past"  
Flavyn Feller "The Amazing Normal Story"  
Guo Farfang and Maggie Siggins "Nanjing Nightmares"  
Emiko Omori, *Rabbit in the Moon*  
Frances-Anne Solomon, *What My Mother Told Me*  
Tracy Moffatt "Nice Colored Girls"  
Jan Krawitz, "In Harm's Way"  
Joshua Green and Shiva Kumar, "Witness: Voices From the Holocaust"  
Beverly Peterson "71 West Broadway: Ground Zero, N.Y."  
Kenneth Krauss and Miriam Jobrani, "With Us or Against Us"

## Block 1:

*CATASTROPHE: An event causing great and often sudden damage or suffering, the denouement of a drama; disastrous end; event subversive of order; sudden disaster from the Greek katastrophe overturning, sudden turn.*

### Week 1:

In this class meeting we will review the course syllabus and talk about its premises and goals.

We will get to know one another and assess how we currently believe about how the self

comes to be and what forces contribute to its formation. We will also watch and discuss Marlon

Fuentes' documentary *Bontoc Eulogy*. You will read June Jordan's "Unrecorded Agonies" for next week.

### Week 2:

We will discuss June Jordan's essay "Unrecorded Agonies," and begin our exploration of identity formation as it occurs in relation to the important institutions of the family, media, churches, and government organizations. We will also encounter the model that understands identity as the effect produced by the workings of narratives of self in cosmos, self in history, self in community, and self in relation to psyche. Read Marguerite Feitlowitz' "Night and Fog in Argentina."

## Block 2:

*TORTURE: The action or practice of inflicting severe pain on someone as a punishment or in order to force them to do or say something. Great physical or mental suffering or anxiety. From the Latin tortura twisting, writhing, torment, or tortus or torquere to twist or wring.*

### Week 3:

Today we will screen Lourdes Portillo's documentary "Seniorita Extraviada." Our discussion will revolve around ways in which group identity and community narratives of self are not simply invented, but are, instead, contested and struggled over in relation to social forces.

### Week 4:

Today we will continue our conversations about the limits of self-narrating and discuss "Night and Fog in Argentina." How are individuals' narratives-of-self effected by torture and captivity? How do they recover their selfhood through new narrative production? Read Mike McAlary's "The Last Cop Story" for next week.

## Block 3:

*TERROR: Extreme Fear.*

### Week 5:

Today we will screen and Susan Muska's documentary, "The Brandon Teena Story." In this instance we have a filmmaker producing a narrative about someone after their death in the interest of encouraging the viewer to alter their own self-conceptions in the wake of someone else's trauma. To what degree can catastrophes that befall others (who we often find to be quite different from ourselves) inform the transformation of our narratives-of-self? When and why can they not? Read the excerpt from Jack Henry Abbott's In the Belly of the Beast for next week.

### Week 6:

Today we will discuss In the Belly of the Beast, an autobiographical account of one person's experience of being raised by the State through foster care, juvenile detention, and prison. What can this narrative tell us about the limits and possibilities for fashioning self-narratives in the face of terror? How might we come to agree on methods to assess the reliability of the narratives we produce?

## Block 4:

*TRAUMA: Wound.*

### Week 7:

Today we will screen portions of Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, and discuss the question of historical trauma and their impact on contemporary narratives of communal selfhood. What is the relationship between history, memory, and the institutions that house them (archives, monuments, museums, etc)? What role does forgetting have to play in our narratives of self? Readings for next week will be determined based on class input and will be taken from current news events.

### Week 8:

Today we will discuss the reading selected based on class feedback. We will identify and discuss emergent themes central to the readings and the events they depict. We will begin discussing your final paper project.

## Block 5:

*CATAclysm: Deluge or sudden and violent upheaval.*



**Week 9: Final Paper Due Today!!**

Today we will screen excerpts from Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour* and consider how nations produce narratives of self, especially in and after times of war. What is the relationship between individual narratives of self and those used by nations to produce an image of the National Self or National Body? Read Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11" and Diana Taylor's "Lost in the Field of Vision: Witnessing 9/11"

**Week 10:**

Taking as our point of departure Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Taylor's essays, we will review our goals and accomplishments in this seminar. What have you learned about your own process of self-making through narrative production? What methods have you developed to recognize and assess the narratives other individuals and communities have produced. How do you see them operating in connection and/or contestation with social forces and institutions? What do they require of those for whom they are important? How would you evaluate your experience in this Seminar?

**After Shock!!:**  
**Making the Self Anew in Times of Catastrophe**  
**Bibliography of Reader Articles:**

June Jordon, "Unrecorded Agonies," *The Progressive*, v.53, n.12  
(December 1989)

Marguerite Feitlowitz, "Night and Fog in Argentina," *Salmagundi*,  
n.94-95 (Spring-Summer 1992)

Mike McAlary, "The Last Cop Story," *Esquire*, v.128, n.6 (Dec  
1997)

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb  
Memories: Reflections on 9/11," from TACTICAL MEDIA  
[http://www.nyu.edu/fas/projects/vcb/case\\_911\\_FLASHcontent.html](http://www.nyu.edu/fas/projects/vcb/case_911_FLASHcontent.html)

Diana Taylor "Lost in the Field of Vision: Witnessing 9/11" from  
TACTICAL MEDIA  
[http://www.nyu.edu/fas/projects/vcb/case\\_911\\_FLASHcontent.html](http://www.nyu.edu/fas/projects/vcb/case_911_FLASHcontent.html)