Call for Papers
Reading Terror: Representations and Resistance

Keynote speakers:
Robin Wagner-Pacifi (The New School)
and another TBC

The students of the Department of Comparative Literature and the Italian Specialization at The Graduate Center, CUNY, present the annual interdisciplinary conference, this year titled Reading Terror: Representations and Resistance. The conference will be held on Thursday, November 5 and Friday, November 6 2015.

The human experience of terror spans centuries of thought and debate, with many writers and thinkers working to investigate its form and nature. Aristotle includes pity and terror in his definition of tragedy; Burke defines terror (along with pain) as the strongest of emotions, tying it intrinsically to experiences of the sublime; the figures of Death and Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost serve as suitable instances of Burke’s sublime in literature. The aesthetic and philosophical weight of terror also holds a particular relationship to experience and ethics that Burke remarked was present during the French Revolution: the Reign of Terror underscored the uncontrollable and visceral aspect of this side to human nature. In a modern context, terror can be tied to class and race struggles, military imperialism, neoliberalism, eco-catastrophe, and police brutality, among other issues. Following the events of 9/11 our perception of terror has taken on a new nature; is it possible to disassociate terror from what we now recognize as terrorism and terrorists; the ‘other’ who is recognized as an enemy; the mentality of fighting in a ‘war against terrorism’? These new, provocative connotations have morphed the significance and effect of the word terror, as well as altered the forms of
resistance to such activity. Our inquiry into the mutable character of terror seeks to understand how and why its definitions have changed over time in an attempt to clarify this elusive concept.

This conference asks: What is the nature of terror? How have representations, definitions and our understanding of terror changed over time? How is terror used aesthetically, politically and socially? How is terror translated textually and visually? What are some of the modes of resistance to terror, through literature, art, and the media? How can we address the global and radicalizing nature of the conception of terror in a political theater, in the aftermath of movements such as Je Suis Charlie or Black Lives Matter?

We invite papers from all disciplines and fields focusing on works from any period, including literature, theory, philosophy, gender; intellectual history; art history; film and media studies; economic studies; psychology and psychoanalysis. In addition to whatever topics you might imagine, you might wish to consider the following:

- The relationship of terror to the sublime
- Literary and cinematic representations of terror (differences in effect)
- The relationship of terror to horror
- Writing as a resistance to/recording of terror
- Terror and beauty
- Terror and race
- The role of the media in shaping perceptions of terror
- Images of terror (the use of terror in propaganda)
- International perspectives and experiences of terror
- Terror in the age of the ‘trigger warning’
- Terror and censorship
- Terror and colonialism and postcolonialism
- Micro-terrors and micro-aggressions
- Terror and affect theory
- Terror and intentionality
- Terror and the necessity of the ‘other’
- Terror and the self (personal trauma, nostalgia, collective historical memory)

Please submit a 300-word abstract for a 15-20 minute paper by September 30, 2015 to gcfallconference2015@gmail.com. Proposals should include the title of the paper, presenter’s name, institutional and departmental affiliation, and any technology requests. We also welcome panel proposals of three to four papers.