Politics Gone Missing

Disappearance, Containment and Flight in Contemporary Brazil

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Every year, 20-25,000 people are reported missing in São Paulo, Brazil. Many are found. Many others are not. In this talk I examine how contemporary disappearance operates as a political condition and a mode of containment. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in cemeteries, public institutions and with families of the missing, as well as documents from an organised crime group, I trace how political disappearance is both new, and nothing of the sort. I aim to show that the rapid acceleration of disappearance and flight on remade terms is increasingly unmistakeable in the material paradigm of mundane but ‘clandestine’ cemeteries. The spatial remaking of cemeteries, something that has only happened, historically, in the midst of major structural and epistemic change, implies a distinctive regime of knowledge, borders and global political ordering.

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