

Tension/Spannung  
Berlin, 4th February 2009  
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Project title:  
Missing/Vermisst/Scomparso

### Abstract

This work is intended as an analysis and a representation of the psychosocial aspects raised by the phenomenon of missing people in contemporary cities. The question guiding my project entails the nature of the missing subject, the dynamics enacted by his disappearance and the elements inhabiting the space of the newly created absence.

The concept of “missing” will be represented as an attempt to draw the boundaries of an inexplicable void and to gauge the tension tightening the borderlines of the unmapped territory covered by the relationship connecting – and simultaneously separating – the missing person and the community. *Spannung* as tension, *Spannung* as suspace, *Spannung* as a wasteland marked only by the signs of an ongoing research and an increasing sense of incertitude.

The project consists in enacting a disappearance and in collecting all the material concerning both the active search (posters, flyers) and the reactions to the search (phone calls, emails). The gathering of the materials will take place in an installation aimed at illuminating the tension between a missing subject and all those who try to bridge the immeasurable distance of the absence.

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Missing/Vermisst/Scomparso

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## 1. The topic, the questions, and goals of project

### 1.1. Have you seen him?

As long as our companion opens his mouth, we are utterly disappointed. What he says remains lies infinitely beneath the words that, had he remained silent, we would have expected from him with paramount joy and utmost pleasure.

*Ombre corte*, Walter Benjamin

Who is someone who goes missing? Who is someone who, insofar as “missing” “vermisst”, becomes the object of a search? Or else, as a famous Italian TV program goes, who becomes the “him” in *Have you seen him?*

In the first days of January 2009 I moved to Berlin. I have left my home country with the idea of letting myself drift and be dissolved in a new environment in which I could maybe make myself -once more- at home. Being used to living in a small town where someone has hardly a chance to go missing, I was impressed when I saw here in Berlin some of these troubling posters displaying the smiling face of someone his loved ones were anxiously seeking. I was struck by the emotional intensity of these pictures. I could not help wondering: “Who is someone who goes missing and why does he do it”? (If we assume that he does so out of his own will) and again “What do people do when they look for him and why do they do it? Which relationship takes place between these two parties? Which distance separates and unites the person who is gone and those who are in search of him?”

Just like a string which is pulled, the tension is created and maintained from the moment of disappearance to the moment when the mystery is solved and the reason of the absence revealed. The relationship between these two moments in time involves ongoing tension.

### 1.2. Tension is a pulling string

“Every muscular tension contains its own history  
and the meaning of its own origin”

Wilhelm Reich

I will try to elaborate the metaphor of the string in order to articulate the concept of “tension.” Tension here is the force which expresses itself when the two ends of the string are pulled towards opposite directions, or, as in this particular case, when one end of the string tries to move away while the other end tries to retain it. The string will reach maximum tension the moment before snapping, the moment when the relationship between the two diverging points is definitely compromised.

In a similar way can apply the same dynamics to the case of the MISSING person: at the opposing ends of the string we have the one who is gone and those who are looking for him. While the latter try to have the two ends meet again in a circle, the missing person maintains the tension by producing a distance which not only physical but personal and emotional as well.

Tension is at its highest just before the string snapped. In that precise moment the story can still evolve in one way or another: with the return of the missing person to the loved ones or with the missing person making it clear that he intends to remain

gone. But as long as this does not happen, what lies there in between? In the force of the pulled string?

The moment of total relaxation takes place at the relational and spatial coincidence of the two points. The string will change its degree of tension or relaxation according to the material it is made of. The more it is flexible the more the tension increases. On the contrary a rigid material will make the string more easily breakable. An elastic material suggests more similarities with human relationships, the more flexible they are the longer they last.

How does the external environment affect the evolution of such movement? Temperature is a crucial element, it affects the material as well as it affects relationships. The quality of relational space affects relations themselves. The world of relationship in this project will be dealt with as a physical space, I intend to investigate the material it is made of, its qualities and properties.

### **1.3. Locating “out-of-placeness”**

This work is partly autobiographical since it is rooted in my own “out-of-place/ness.” I lost my father when I was 16 and this loss has always been sitting by me with ineluctable presence; almost as if his absence had been the origin of my resources and the fuel of an ongoing relationship with the traces he had impressed in my memory. My father’s entity, substantiated in his non-being, has represented for me the seminal experience of a relationship entertained through ultimate absence, and in the distance between me and him, I could retrace myself.

The project I am presenting focuses on distance as the instrument of perception in the moment when someone is inexplicably gone, lost, missing. The people I am referring to are not alive, are not dead, are simply not there; one does not even know whether to talk about them in the present or in the past tense since the former enhances high hopes prone to deep delusions and the latter belies the depths of despair one would always try to avoid.

Missing/*Vermisst* is a suspended dimension, a possibility not yet expressed, an ongoing quest, one and many narratives, one of which may be the real one. I will try to locate the elements characterizing this dimension in the attempt and to shed light on the obscure parts of severed relationships and existences.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. The Space and the Objects of Absence

I will develop my work by using two groups of instruments. The former entails the communication of the disappearance of a subject and involves *transmission instruments* such as posters, flyers, stickers and web sites. The latter counts *reception objects* through which pieces of information concerning the missing subjects are collected: voice mail, emails, text messages.

#### 2.1.1 Transmission instruments

- a. Fliers
- b. Posters
- c. Stickers
- d. Web site

#### 2.1.2. Reception Instruments

- a. Text messages
- b. e-mails
- c. voice mail

Once put together this material will create an environment encompassing both the absence of the subject, the traces of his presence and the possible reasons behind his status while defining the tension inhabiting this space through the usage of images, sounds, voices and inscriptions.

### 2.2 Dis-solution and dis-semination

After all it's always the others who die.  
*Inscription On Marcel Duchamp's grav*

What did Marcel Duchamp mean with this final message of his? His sentence raises questions about the nature of the intersection between the living and the dead. In our case, who really disappears? Is it the person who goes away or are all the others who are effaced from a frame of recognition? Is it possible to reconstruct and represent the space of this double absence, of this coexistence which, nevertheless, is reciprocally in denial?

If it is so, the only paradigm under which this reconstruction can be organized is the ultimate paradox interpellating both being and (dis)appearing: it is the disappearance of a subject which finally persists and lives on.

Nevertheless, since the traces of the presence/absence are gathered from the reaction of the community, each different community will respond in its own distinctive way exposing the values and practices underpinning its social texture. This is why in a subsequent phase, the enactment of the disappearance should be replicated in different European cities: the resulting documentation would represent a telling glimpse of how issues of nationality, ethnicity and urban peculiarities affect the creation and perception of tension. The final installation would then also figure as a comparative study of social patterns and trends providing a transnational snapshot on the topic under examination.

### 3. Preliminary fieldwork done

#### 3.1 Posters of missing people in Berlin



## 3.2. Web site about missing subjects

<http://www.findafonsotiago.blogspot.com/>

**afonso tiago - vermisst! missing! since 10/01/2009**

**Afonso Tiago - Havemos de te encontrar!**

Assinem e divulguem a Petição pf.  
<http://www.petitiononline.com/ATIago/>

Muito obrigada.

**Afonso Tiago - Wir werden Dich finden!**  
Bitte unterschreibt und verbreitet dieses Gesuch.  
Vielen Dank.

**Afonso Tiago - We will find you!**  
Please sign and forward this petition.  
Many thanks.

3 comentários

**kontaktieren sie uns! contact us!**  
[findafonsotiago@gmail.com](mailto:findafonsotiago@gmail.com)

**kontakt der deutschen polizei – german police contact**

27-jähriger Portugiese aus Kreuzberg wird vermisst

Tel: (030) 4664 912402 und 4664 912410  
Fax: (030) 4664 912499  
E-Mail: [vermisstenstelle@polizei.berlin.de](mailto:vermisstenstelle@polizei.berlin.de)

**vídeo**  
notícia RTP1  
rtp\_30-01-09  
rtp\_Jornal da tarde\_22-01-09 (ao minuto\_19)

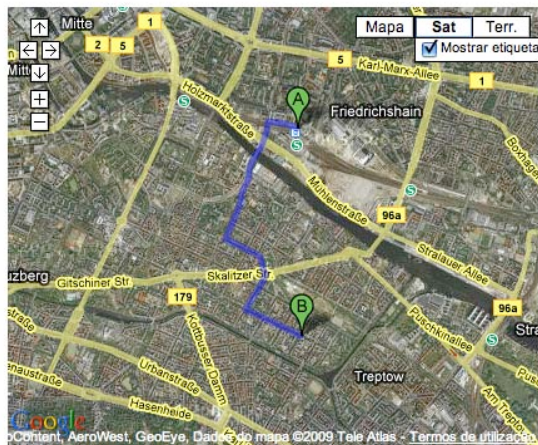
DESAPARECIDO! VERMISST!  
MISSING! DISPARU! SCOMPARSU! VERMISST!  
KAYIP! ABANTORI! +HACIDIRAVATI!

APELO - pelo Afonso!

DESAPARECIMENTO, em Berlim, do Engº AFONSO Freire Novais dos Santos TIAGO -27 anos de idade, natural de Oliveira de Azeméis- na madrugada de 10-Janeiro-2009.

Os subscritores, SETECENTOS (700) cidadãos, todos naturais e/ou residentes em Oliveira de Azeméis, das mais diversas áreas de actividade, certos de representar o sentir unânime de uma cidade profundamente abalada pelo desaparecimento misterioso de um dos seus filhos, expressam a sua solidariedade activa à família do Afonso Tiago, e fazem, por este meio, um veemente

APELO ao Estado Português e, por seu intermédio, às autoridades competentes da União Europeia, em particular da República da Alemanha, para que sejam usados todos os meios na busca do Afonso Tiago, até o trazer de volta ao nosso convívio.



## Missing!

Have you seen him?

He was seen for the last time in Berlin (point A in the map) and he was going home (point B in the map) at 4a.m. 10/01/2009

Contact us, please!









## **5. Form of publication**

### **5.1. Exhibits and catalogue**

During the months in which the project will be developed I will try to collect all possible material concerning a missing subject, possibly myself, and I will try to activate every possible way of communication keeping track of all the exchanges received. The objects, the recordings, the messages will become the objects of the exhibits. The catalogue of such material may become part of the exhibit itself and may include, in addition to all the exhibited material, some essays and/or written pieces concerning the topic. The whole structure will be designed together with ICI.

### **5.2 Installation**

1. Exhibition of posters, flyers, newspaper articles and other material
2. Maps of the places where the missing subject may have been located
3. Audio installation with the voice mail messages received
4. Web site
5. Print out of the e-mails and the text messages received
6. Print newspaper clippings
7. Catalogue