
**BODIES OF ABSENCE:
ANALYSIS OF THE
REPRESENTATION OF FAMILY
GRIEF IN THE FACE OF THE
ABDUCTION OF DAUGHTERS
IN *RUIDO* (NATALIA BERISTÁIN,
2022) AND *POROROCA*
(CONSTANTIN POPESCU, 2017)**

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the way in which the struggle and suffering on the part of the family in the face of a daughter's abduction is represented in two films, the Mexican film *Ruido* (Natalia Beristáin, 2022) and the Romanian film *Pororoca* (Constantin Popescu, 2017). The insecurity situation in México and Romania is so different to the point of establishing two models. The records of assassinations of police officers, political candidates, journalists and the forced disappearance of young people in México surpass those of any other country. Firstly, in the Mexican model, the analysis takes as an archetypal model the figure of Demeter, a Greek divinity (goddess of agriculture), whose daughter, Persephone, was abducted for sexual purposes by Hades, god of the underworld. The unexpected absence of the daughter, the desperate search, as well as the lack of clues and traces, plunge the mother into a spiral of pain that leads her to an anguished search. On the other hand, in the Romanian model, the loneliness of the searching father, solitary and without collective support, stands out. The analysis proposes, in the Mexican case, the category "strident sequence", whose function is to regulate the narrative flow and the subjective construction of the character in the face of the irreparable pain of loss.

Keywords: disappearance, abduction, family grief, Demeter, Persephone, Natalia Beristáin, "strident sequence", Constantin Popescu.

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Absences that kill. The catastrophe of Demeter

The right of the sword and the right of the first night. Despite being two models of violence, whose origins lie in myths of antiquity, they enjoy unquestionable validity. Such archetypal prevalence explains the aggression exercised today on the bodies of young people of both sexes, in some societies in a veiled form, as occurs in the most developed countries (on this, let us think of #MeToo and compulsory military service in Ukraine and Russia) and in a more evident and generalized way in less developed countries, as is the case of México.

The right of the first night refers to the appropriation that the hierarchy, as well as the group of men surrounding him, make of the body of the maidens for sexual purposes. On the other hand, the right of sword has to do with the appropriation that the hierarchy and his ruling group make of the young man for military purposes, so that he fights and dies for them, which shows an inseparable connection between the ruler and the territory, the president and the country. In the case of the female, to surrender to the king; as for the male, to die for his king. Although the first right is not widely in force today, as it was in other times, it is widespread in all countries, under the denomination "white slave trade" and in a

more nuanced way in the abuses denounced by movements akin to #MeToo. As for the right of the sword, it is so institutionally supported that in many countries it is compulsory military service.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the way in which the first model of violence, the abduction and disappearance of a daughter, is represented in two films, one from México – *Ruido*, directed by Natalia Beristáin (2022) and the other from Romania – *Pororoca*, directed by Constantin Popescu (2017). Films from two countries located in different continents have been chosen in order to construct two models that do not share elements in common. The first model, the Mexican one, corresponds to a risk society, characterized by a dominance of organized crime, managed by very economically powerful cartels, which maintain links with law enforcement. This results in the subjugation and subordination of members of the security forces as well as justice institutions, to the detriment of the security of citizens, who are often subjected to exceptional danger.

In the case of Romania, we are dealing with a country belonging to the European Union. There, citizen security is guaranteed by rigid rules. Therefore, the following set of questions is valuable for the construction of the model: How does the disappearance occur in one case and in the other, under what circumstances? What is the procedure of the authorities when the report is made? What are the response and actions carried out by the family of the missing daughter? Is there a social, collective dimension, in addition to the public force, that provides support and assistance to the family of the missing daughter?

Gilbert Durand (2013) has used the term “myth-analysis” in order to interpret artistic and cultural phenomena based on mythical structures. We can go further and state that this also works in the case of the interpretation of social and political phenomena. Forced disappearance is one of the most widely committed crimes in México. As of August 25 of last year, 2023, the number of missing persons during the administration of Andres Manuel López Obrador was 44,073 (Tzuc, 2023) and, according to data from the same period, there were some 2,710 clandestine graves.

In the absence of a solution from the government, mothers have had to organize themselves into collectives to carry out the search for their missing daughters, sons, and husbands. According to Gilbert Durand, the myth that sustains this searching and tracing activity is that of Demeter. Her daughter, Persephone, having disappeared, the goddess of agriculture searches for her in desperation, unaware that she has been abducted by Hades, god of the underworld.

Since the disappearances of young people associated with the Narco War, initiated by Felipe Calderón, December 20, 2016, collectives of tracing mothers were formed in order to search for the sons raised to be incorporated

into the ranks of the cartels in that bloody war. The group of parents of the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa (2014), because of its international visibility, in a way, made visible and institutionalized the movement of searchers of missing children. These collectives have become a new political character in the brave contemporary México, hit by drug violence. There are generally groups of women who search for their missing children and husbands without any help from the authorities and, more often than not, under great risk due to threats and attacks against them by criminal groups and public security authorities who serve them unconditionally. According to data from last year, as of August, there were 234 collectives of searching mothers in México (Voz en red, 2023).



VozenRed.com (01 August 2023) *Proliferan colectivos de buscadoras; suman 254 en el país.*
Photo source: <https://www.vozenred.com/2015/notas.php?i=340042>

Ruido deals with a terrifying and painful fact: the fruitless search that Julia (Julieta Egurrola), mother of Gertrudis, carries out in order to find her missing daughter. She must undertake this task because the judicial instances, to whom she has resorted to find her, do not provide any results after nine months. The story is a *via crucis* marked by an inseparable mixture of uncertainty, frustration, and anguish, which shows the increasing danger of the different scenarios where Julia appears accompanied by Abril (Teresa Ruiz), a reporter specialized in the

forced disappearance of women. The events depicted in this cartography of violence are evidence of the sinister alliance between criminal groups, cartels, and the authorities in charge of public security in México.

Despite being part of a family, together with her husband and son, Julia's search is an individual one, that is to say, solitary, precarious and hazardous, full of dangers to which she is exposed while the men of the family are safe. The account of the search takes place over a short period of time, a few days, despite the fact that the disappearance had occurred nine months earlier. The symbolism of gestation, nine months, should not be overlooked. In this case it is not the gestation of life, but its opposite, the tragedy that implies a double violence exercised against the daughter and the mother, understood in this way by the fact that both share the same tattoo.

It is a real journey that Julia begins 270 days after her daughter's disappearance. This narrative bubble can be understood as an analeptic strategy whose purpose is to increase the narrative tension from the beginning of the story: a sticky web woven by despair, frustration and grief that keeps the family members trapped. Another function of this narrative bubble is to present Julia with a freshness or immediacy necessary for the story, in front of the situations as much as in front of the searchers' collectives. A freshness that should have been overcome after the initial search actions that had even put her in contact with one of these women's collectives of grave hunters.

As for the nature of the story, it is a road-movie type narrative whose purpose is to reveal a cartography of danger for the inhabitants of this country, especially women and young men. Such a map covers the entire national territory. One is at risk of losing one's freedom and life in the most distant and uninhabited periphery, as happens to Gertrudis (Nicolasa Ortiz Monasterio), as well as in the very center of the country, in the penthouse of a skyscraper in México City, as happens to Julia even though she is accompanied by the same prosecutor. The traveling character that Julia has become travels through different scenarios, showing not only the risk of disappearance in México, but also the danger to which the same collectives of searching and tracing mothers expose themselves, to the point that some of them will share the same fate as the disappeared: an anonymous death, without record, footprints, or traces. Such is the fate of Julia and Abril. Each of these scenarios is characterized by very precise logics that show the ominous association between members of public security and drug cartels. Even the subordination of public security figures to criminals appears.

In this narrative strategy, the present constitutes a point of significant intensity. Although Gertrude's disappearance may be considered ominous from

any point of view, what will follow with the search for Julia in the various scenarios that articulate the tragic adventure, is unclear, as Jean Clair understands it (2004). The new scenarios in which Julia finds herself, leaving behind the offices of the Attorney General's Office (where she restarts her search) and the buildings where the women's collective carries out its support work, are covered with files on the disappearance of women and men, especially women. So far, these are only images printed on flyers, embroidered on patchwork, printed on T-shirts, and testified orally.

The highest point of the mixture of ominous and filthy that characterizes public security in México today, is the container trailer full of corpses of "beautiful" women, as the officer who helps them in the search says: there, Julia finds the unbearable stench of lifeless bodies, among which flies flutter. It is a reverse sublimation of the ominous and a total devaluation of the human. The *Unheimlich* does not correspond only to the destroyed bodies, it shares its catastrophic quality, via corruption, with authority figures and perverted judicial processes. As tragic as this scene, which corresponds to the visual dimension exhibited, are the stories told by the relatives of the disappeared, the searchers, some of whom have lost up to three loved ones. In order to solve the loss, semiotic medicine, they wear their faces and names printed on their T-shirts. Signs not only refer to something, they also serve to heal from absence.

The danger is not limited to the information obtained in the forensic field and in the oral testimonies shared by the searchers. Beyond being a sign, the risk that Julia and Abril experience firsthand is an empirical reality. In the scene of the bus trip, Julia goes to the bathroom, when the bus suddenly stops on the road, she realizes that it is a search. It is late at night. A policeman gets on to do a search. She remains hidden behind the door that separates the bathroom from the seating area. She is suddenly turned into a voyeur, forced by survival instinct. It is a pure look: she can neither move nor scream when she sees Abril being taken away, who protests in terror. Mourning, that ritual attempt of reconstruction that would allow to overcome the disappearance of the loved one,

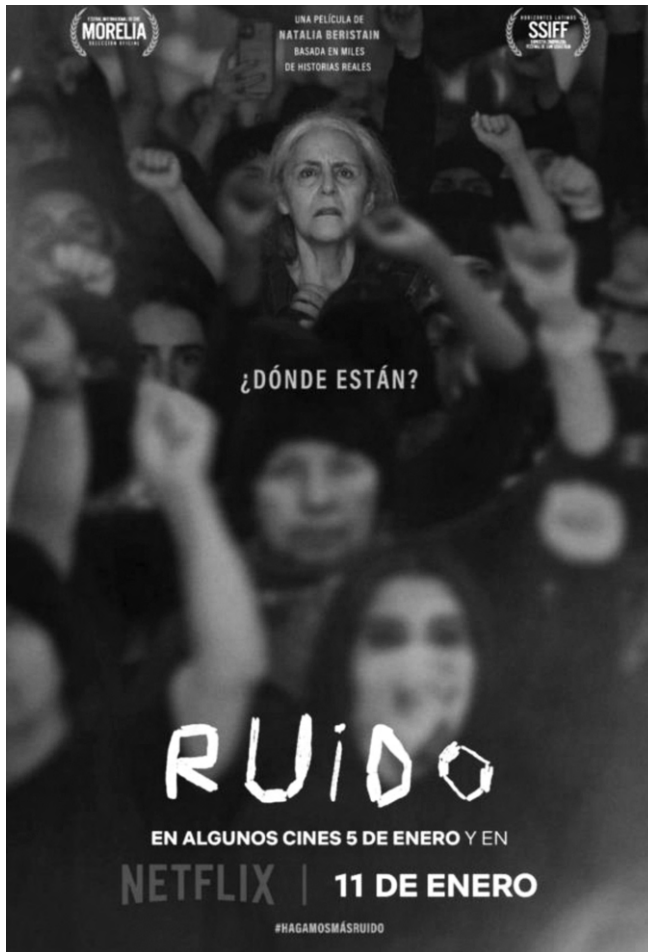
begins with the loss, with the fall of a body that vanishes, moves away, a fall to which the mourner attends, powerless. Then the survivor strives to gather the remains, the traces that the disappeared has left behind; he collects the archives, the relics, the photographs... (Mauron and Ribaupierre, 1999, p. 12)

We wonder if this is true in the case of searching mothers. The forced disappearance hinders the route of the journey, turning the once garden of existence into a minefield. As Julia's search progresses, she discovers that there are no remains of Gertrudis, no traces. The attempt to compile something as archives becomes impossible when the file itself disappears. The morgue disappears. Everything disappears, except the smell, the anguish, the frustration of Démeter at the loss of Persephone. Despair of the archetypal mother sprinkled in each of the trackers and searchers. There are no more relics, no leftovers, no shadows; no remains, no traces, no faces, only the terrible absence. Nothing remains to be gathered for Julia, the suffering mother. It is a mourning in suspense that can never, never, never be realized.

The visual dynamic of the story goes from open shots, such as the general shot, when it comes to representing contextual situations, such as the arrival at a specific place (Attorney General's Office, collective facilities, shelter, or places of street demonstrations), to the use of less wide, more confined shots, such as the whole and the entire shot, to represent different types of character interaction, such as encounters with different authority figures or members of the collectives and even with her husband. The reduced shots, ranging from medium, through medium-short, close-up, and very close-up, are used to represent the personal crisis of the characters, especially in the case of Julia and other women searching for their missing relatives and the women searching for their missing daughters. These characters, the victims, bear the greatest dramatic burden, so the type of shot allows the projection of the deepest emotions and feelings, using a rhetoric of gestures. This allows us to understand that each of the shots is associated with a type of aesthetic: The large shot has to do with a neoclassical aesthetic of informative character: geographical, institutional, historical, sociological aspects. On the other hand, the reduced shots, in terms of narrative intention, correspond to an expressionist aesthetic, whose dramatic nature allows the expression of a profound subjective quality.

A key to represent the anguish of loss: “the strident sequence”

In narratological terms, in *Ruido* we find a story whose articulation is possible thanks to a particular device of narrative flow. It is a hinge sequence, of a surrealist nature, which I will call “the strident sequence”. The term comes in handy, as it is related to the title of the film. Strident means something “that, because it is exaggerated or violent, produces an annoyingly striking sensation” (DRAE). That is exactly the function that “the strident sequence” fulfills.



Ruido/Noise (2022) Directed by Natalia Beristáin, Luxbox and Woofilms in coproduction with Chamaca films, México. Cast: Julieta Egurrola, Teresa Ruiz, Alo Valenzuela. Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11306932/mediaviewer/rm3640081409/>

This hinge-sequence model, as such, presents some slight variations and a certain degree of complexity as the story progresses. Its objective is to provide clues about Julia's subjectivity, a complex and destructive process. The formal characteristics of this type of sequence are the following: in the sound dimension, it is announced by a high-pitched, very loud sound, as if it were a buzzing or whistling sound; on the other hand, in the visual dimension, it is an anomalous framing, characterized by an abnormal dynamism, imbalance and turbulence, of a landscape alien to the scenarios of the story. Against this background, in the foreground, Julia's face appears as an indicator of her emotional state.

In the first strident sequence, as soon as the film begins, a sharp, piercing noise, like a buzzing sound, awakens the woman, who is lying on an armchair. Close-up of the ear, to which she brings the nano closer, apparently seeking relief. The film begins with this first shrill sequence. This is the reason why the spectator is unaware, at this moment, of the conceptual narrative function it will fulfill. From the second strident sequence onwards, and as they appear repeatedly, the viewer will understand that this is a narrative key, something that has nothing to do with the story, but has a function of regulating the narrative flow that passes through Julia's character. Because of this, it is necessary that we have the information of the preceding actions, for the analysis of each of these strident sequences. This leads us to understand that each of these sequences would present, using an accounting metaphor, the statement of Julia's subjectivity.

The second strident sequence appears after the miserable meeting that Julia and her husband, disappointed and sad, have had with the prosecutor in charge of the investigation into the disappearance of Gertrudis. It is an open field, an unknown landscape. In accordance with the aesthetic references related to the post-produced corpses by the drug cartels, we find here the influence of the artist Fernando Brito, photographer and photojournalist, to represent death.

In the third strident sequence we encounter, in an untimely manner, an imprecise camera movement and the manifestation of a buzzing sound. Julia covers her ear with the fingers of her right hand, just as she had done at home. In profile, we see her with her ears covered with her hands. Then, from the front, her eyes are covered with her hands. Before this sequence, three things have happened that are of utmost importance if we are to understand Julia's search. In the first place, the participation with a group of women searchers, where she meets a character who will be key in the search for Gertrudis – the journalist Abril. On the other hand, Julia has a very emotional conversation with her husband, in which he expresses the pain of being a father with a missing daughter, to the point that, with broken words, pushed by a choked cry, he ends up confessing something she thought improbable ("– I have been waking up every day for nine months

and everything hurts so much that I think I am going to die. But I'm not dying"). Finally, Julia has tattooed an image designed by her daughter Gertrudis. They already share the same tattoo, on the same part of the body, which, in semiotic terms, would speak of a process of duplication: two women who have shared the same body (mother and daughter) now share the same image designed by the daughter, the absent daughter in the body of the present mother. A tilting game of iconic and indexical signs in a turbulent system integrated by the two bodies that, having been one, now separated by the forced disappearance, become one by virtue of the icon itself. In this process of incarnation and alterity Julia becomes, in semiotic terms, Gertrude. In order for the other not to disappear completely, it is necessary for the mother to duplicate her, even at the risk of running the same danger. And indeed, she will run it. In this strident sequence Julia appears in the middle of a natural setting, as in the previous strident sequence, totally out of context, alone, in the open. Once again, we hear the sharp, penetrating, maddening buzzing, the noise of a steel blade whose edge tears the canvas of tranquility. Then, three suspension points. Then there is an erratic movement of the camera, as if the knife, showing a cubist faculty, were breaking the shot. Short, quick jerks of the shot and, finally, the blur.

The events leading up to the fourth shocking sequence have marked an *Unheimlich* spiral: that sticky and horrifying mixture of the ominous, the monstrous and the inconceivable has taken hold of reality. This journey with no turning back confronts Julia with increasingly daunting and terrifying scenarios, unthinkable in a modern civilization. Only then is she able to understand the dimension of the problem: it is not only the disappearance of her daughter. The problem goes much deeper than that: it is a crime industry that works in complicity with public security institutions. Her daughter, Gertrudis, is but one of countless missing persons in México. In an earlier scene, Julia and Abril are taken to a container trailer full of decomposing corpses of young women. And the scene prior to this jarring sequence is a visit to a facility where Julia learns that most members of the police force, at all levels, are either sold out or beholden to the cartels. In this strident sequence the buzzing sound seems to cause a narrative short circuit. It is a noise, in communicology terms, that indicates an interference. It would be Julia's inability to remain attuned to the atrocious reality that she has to live with in the search for Gertrudis. Because of this, she is always out of place, as if in permanent shock, as if she too had already disappeared or was in the process of doing so. The blur and the anomalous, irregular camera movements are repeated. The shaking of the image, the catastrophe of the shot, indicates the turbulence of the story, as well as the rupture of the narrative: it is Julia's existential catastrophe. Her face shows a strange gesture, not the product of emotion but, rather, as if she

were in a wind tunnel. Her face deforms as the whirring sound is heard, and then she screams. Her body, her hands, her hair. Her whole being becomes a scream. Then, from the foreground, she walks away into the background. Only her back is visible. A black cloud covering everything coincides with the scream. The scream and the darkness have swallowed her body.

The main event that precedes the fifth strident sequence provokes an unexpected and tragic climax. After participating with a collective of mothers in the search for clandestine graves and unexpectedly meeting the prosecutor in charge of the search for Gertrudis, Julia and Abril head for the city from which they originally departed. It is supposed to be México City. It is early morning. A roadblock on the highway orders them to stop. It is a checkpoint. A policeman checks the passengers' IDs one by one, and, when he sees Abril's, he pulls her and takes her away, to put her down. Julia witnesses the tugging between the policeman and the journalist from the bathroom door, where she had gone before the encounter with the checkpoint. Abril screams ("— You can't take me away, I'm from a journalists' network, you can't take me away!"), she screams in desperation, disconsolate, anguished ("— You can't take me away, help me!"). Julia watches all this from the other side of the glass door of the restroom area, motionless, silent. When the policeman gets off the bus with Abril, from the window Julia watches her being loaded into a black van. Julia covers her mouth. Close-up. She stifles her scream with her hand, to keep it from coming out, like a pressure cooker, as she starts the black van to disappear into the darkness of the night. In this strident sequence Julia's face appears in the foreground. Behind is the usual landscape. In the image there is a mute and prolonged scream that recalls the works of Bill Viola, that inseparable mixture of silence, pain, and silence. An abyss of silence and an abyss of pain that, superimposed, constitute the black hole of misfortune, of misfortunes.

Although the previous strident sequence, together with the circumstances that sustain it, seems of an insurmountable terror and rawness, the following one is like a blow to the protagonist's head. It hits her even harder than the loss of Abril, which happened in front of her own eyes, knowing she was helpless to prevent it. The sequence takes place after the conversation with a very young boy that the prosecutor has detained in the penthouse of what seems to be a skyscraper located on Reforma Avenue. Julia shows the young man the cell phone photograph of her daughter. The delinquent is very young and has an attractive face, a sweet and tender gesture. He seems empathetic. He picks up the cell phone to look at the photo carefully. He analyzes it. There almost seems to be a gesture of camaraderie and affection in that face. It is the face of someone so young that he has barely stopped being a child. He tells her, with great aplomb, not to look

for her anymore, because he is not going to find her. To Julia's question about what they did to him, the boy answers that it happened because he was carrying a bag of perico, but it wasn't his.

“—Just because of that?”

— It was also good.”

And he addresses the prosecutor with a determination and fierceness that seems impossible for a boy of that age, with that face (“— That's it, get me out or you're going to get into a fart”). The youth and innocence, the tenderness present in the first moments of the conversation with Julia, clashes with the harshness and cruelty with which he concludes the conversation with her, as well as the authority with which he addresses the prosecutor, treating him like a servant. Driven by the buzzing, Julia goes down to the lobby of the building, and everything seems normal. There are elegant and quiet people there, with the peace and luxury that money in abundance provides as if it were a hotel. In front of these people, Julia, who has lost everything with the death of her daughter, clashes dramatically. She looks like an apparition. She goes out into the street. There is a feminist march. The atmosphere is carnival-like. We hear “We want them free”, “You are not alone”. Chorus repeated. You are not alone, but Abril seemed to be alone when Julia saw her from the window the night she was lifted up and was unable to demonstrate. Surrounded by people, on the bus, Abril was alone.

The actions leading up to the last raucous sequence are truly ecstatic. They are carnivalesque scenes reminiscent of the feminist performances of the 1970s, such as those of Carolee Schneemann. Inflamed by the speeches of expressionist speakers, the crowd shouts “Justice!” in unison. It is a definitive and total action, as a result of indomitable desperation in the face of the forced disappearance of their relatives and the incapacity and inaction of the Attorney General's Office. Gunshots are heard here and there; riot guards approach. Behind large transparent fiberglass shields, the uniformed men run over the defenseless demonstrators. You can hear the blows, the hard clash of shield against flesh, and you see uneven confrontations between the demonstrators and the guards, while Julia escapes among other women. She seems out of place by her appearance as much as by her gestures. The rest of the women are of indigenous appearance, shorter in stature than Julia, and brown-skinned. Julia is white-skinned and light-eyed, tall, and thin. Her gesture is one of total surprise, as if she had suddenly appeared there, transported from the gallery where she exhibits her paintings. An attitude that does not change from the first sequences of the film when it is found in the judicial, forensic, and feminist collective spheres. Some women are feeding

a bonfire with papers and other objects. The cry of a baby is heard and a girl of about four years old appears asleep on a bed, while female voices of warning and care are heard. The police burst into the houses where the demonstrators had been hiding, sweeping everything with their shields, viciously beating anyone who got in their way. They hit Julia, who falls to the ground. From the ground, she can only catch a blurry glimpse of the legs of those moving around. Someone offers her a hand. It is the hand of a woman wearing a red mask, who is lost in the crowd. Julia goes after her, through the crowd. The strident sequence, this time incorporates a new body. Again, the anomalous landscape. This time it looks out of focus. The woman in the red mask, in the foreground, sharp image, enters the frame followed by Julia and they stand in profile, looking at each other. The perspective of the frame changes and now, smaller, they stand out against the blue sky. The more distant the shot, the closer they appear. Saturation in black. End of the story.

What could this scene mean? As it was said at the beginning of this section, it is a surrealistic model, that is, with a dreamlike content. A dream can be interpreted in many ways. Perhaps it represents the definitive disappearance of Julia, a woman who, with the absence of her daughter had entered a process of disappearance, not provoked by the crime industry, as in the case of the daughter, but of a kind of existential contagion provoked by the disappearance of the daughter. The pain of loss. The girl in the red mask could well represent the daughter. For the first time, there is no anguish in Julia. A psychoanalytic interpretation of the film would give rise to another kind of analysis.

Child in danger. The lonely and maddening search for the missing daughter in Pororo

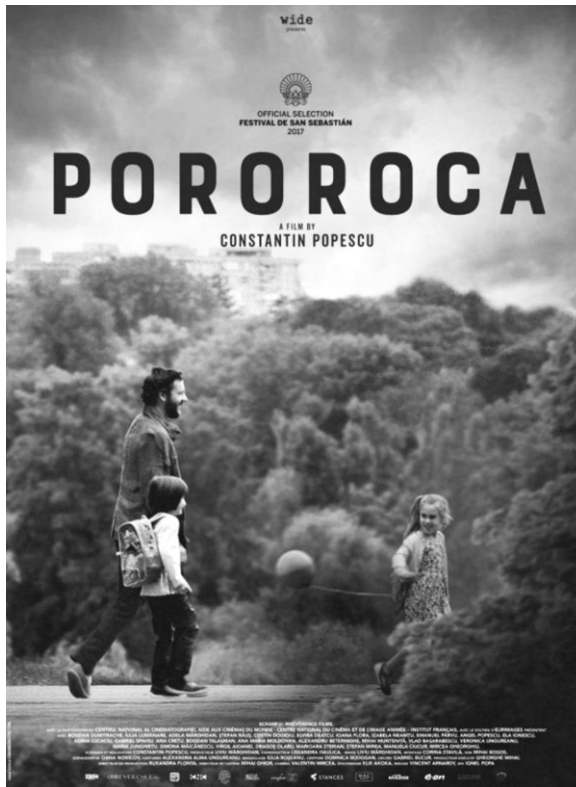
Pororo (Constantin Popescu, 2017), like *Ruido*, is a disturbing story. It is so both for the subject it addresses, the mysterious disappearance of a young girl, and for the exhibition of the fragility of the victim's family world. In the blink of an eye, the fine line that separates two worlds is blurred: that of security and the reality of an unexpected and atrocious reality. Both films show the fragility, brokenness, and disintegration of the family system once a member of the family, in both cases daughters, is kidnapped.

As soon as the film begins, the viewer is plunged into a nightmarish atmosphere. It is paradoxical and highly effective in narrative terms that the tragedy manifests itself as soon as the story begins. In broad sunlight in a busy city park, in the company of her seven-year-old brother, under the care of her

father, surrounded by other children and adults, Maria disappears. She is five and a half years old. A minute or two before the tragic event, she was still in the company of her friend Ada, a few meters from the bench where her father was talking on the phone. As in *Ruido*, the explosion of the fragmentation grenade that is the criminal act, the Unheimlich phenomenon, explodes as soon as the film begins. Both stories make use of a futuristic aesthetic with fragmented narratives. Because of the subject matter, there are no concessions in either of these films. The difference is that, while in the Mexican film the disappearance occurs in a remote place (a bar in a lost town: those undefined spaces controlled by drug cartels), in *Pororooca* the girl's disappearance takes place in a totally normalized place; it is a park where children go to play, under the care of their parents.

The little girl in danger is the central theme of the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" (Charles Perrault, late 17th century) (VV.AA., 2012). There, the lonely forest takes on a mysterious and threatening dimension, into which the little girl must enter to visit her grandmother. It is precisely in that space, symbol of the unconscious, where the fierce and intelligent wolf takes on a terrifying dimension, since it is a beast that, in a scenic and performative display, can very well impersonate the old woman, to the point that the girl is prey to doubt: is that beast in her grandmother's clothes really her? The girl runs the risk of becoming prey to the wolf performer. The danger lies not so much in the animal's ferocity as in its ability to act as if it were a human being, precisely like the grandmother. Its histrionic ability is more dangerous than its bestial nature, that is, its ferocity. The danger lies in the fact that it is a humanized animal.

Almost three hundred years after Perrault, Giorgio de Chirico approached the same theme, a girl in danger in a risky space, using another artistic discipline. There is a shift from literature, whose narrative support is the word, to painting, which makes use of images. The painter dramatically exposes the danger that a girl runs in the very center of a town, in broad daylight, under the bright rays of the sun. Unlike the previous story, in this painting the space undergoes a sharp change, as it has gone from the uninhabited and gloomy forest, symbol of the unconscious, to the center of a town, whose main feature is the architectural display, symbol of the super-ego.



Pororooca (2017) Directed by Constantin Popescu, Scharf Advertising Irreverence Films, Romania. Cast: Nogdan Dumitrache, Iulia Lumânare.

Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5242548/mediaviewer/rm1214739712/>

In *Mystery and Melancholy in a Street* (1914) we witness an ominous scene, the announcement of what seems to be a tragedy, already revealed in the title. It is an unquestionable urban setting, the street of an Italian town whose origins could very well date back to the Renaissance. In front of us, restless spectators, a girl runs wildly and frantically. Questions immediately arise: Why is she running, is she running away, who is she running away from? If realism supports the representation of the surrounding space, it is up to abstraction to take charge of the child's body: it is a body in the process of becoming a shadow. The girl seems to be in the middle of a random and precarious process dominated by the powers of that mysterious street that aims at annihilation. The street becomes dangerous precisely because of the scenographic, i.e. theatrical elements arranged by the artist. Thus represented, the girl appears as a victim of powers that have already

begun to act upon her, advancing in a transformation whose main effect is to turn her volumetric and carnal body into a shadow. The architectural space, symbol of security, control, and habitability, has become an ominous space, characterized by lack of control, insecurity and uninhabitability. What we see is already the nightmare which this girl's life is becoming.

In *Pororoca* we find the conjunction of both risky spaces for a girl, the forest and the city. The Round park, located in the middle of the city, a ten-minute walk from Tudor and Cristina's apartment, appears from the beginning to have the qualities of a forest: dense and numerous trees surround a lake. What place could be safer for the children of the young couple, if the rest of the parents drive their children there to play and enjoy themselves? As in the case of Gertrudis in *Ruido*, who disappears in a bar when she goes to the bathroom without her friends noticing, the unexpected is also an essential variable in the case of María. In the blink of an eye, a sinister and disturbing atmosphere is established in the space that, until then, had been for play and recreation. Such a blink of an eye, which separates the familiar from the ominous and establishes the vortex of the nightmare, turns the everyday normality of Round Park disturbing with the disappearance of the girl.

A major accident. As spectators, in *Pororoca* we violently and vertiginously collide with the story of an urban and familiar everyday life that is rather tedious, that is to say, insignificant and unproductive in narrative terms, which is suddenly disrupted by the abduction of the young daughter of a young married couple, in a public park in Bucharest, Romania. Then the story makes sense, i.e. meaning. In his semiotic theory Iuri Lotman explains the main mode of construction of meaning: he refers to the semiotic shock, which causes the fragmentation of the space where the production of meaning takes place. The destruction of the family reality, in the films analyzed here, is a clear example of this. Maria's disappearance cannot be thought of as a kidnapping, since at no time is there anyone who contacts the parents to demand a reward, nor is there any indication of the existence of a criminal gang dedicated to the abduction of minors. Perhaps that is the most terrifying thing, that it occurs outside of all criminal logic. The disappearance of the fiveyearold girl happens just because. This disappearance is not solved in the park, with the frantic search carried out by Tudor, alone at first and later helped by the other parents and the guards of the place, nor in the course of the police investigation, which took about 50 days, the time covered by the story. The detective work, carried out by the police as well as by the little girl's father, who becomes a peculiar detective throughout the story, does not provide satisfactory results at the end of this nightmarish calendar. The disappearance is irrefutable and insoluble.

In conclusion, despite being two similar stories about the disappearance of a daughter, the cases are very different. Firstly, while in *Ruido* the object of the disappearance is a young girl, in *Pororoca* it is a five-year-old girl; secondly, the family member who assumes the total burden of the search, in the Mexican film, is the mother, while in *Pororoca* it is the father; thirdly, there is a clear sociological contrast between the two films, because, while in *Ruido* the mother receives the support of women's groups dedicated to the search for her relatives, in *Pororoca* the father assumes the search for his daughter alone; finally, the Mexican film shows a clear criminal association between the public security forces and the criminals, while in Romania there is a total willingness of the police to help Tudor. Despite the obvious differences explained here, as a product of the analysis, there is a common point shown in the two different stories whose theme is the same: it is about the decomposition of the family system and the inability to preserve sanity in the case of the family member who becomes totally involved in the search for the missing relative. Both Gertrudis' mother, in *Ruido*, and Maria's father, in *Pororoca*, lose their sanity, which is shown in the films in a realistic or metaphorical way. *Ruido* is a provocative and experimental film that portrays the extremely dangerous condition of México's youth.

In this article we have only pointed out some characteristics of the story as such and, above all, we have wanted to analyze what constitutes its greatest contribution in terms of cinematographic storytelling: a type of hinge sequence whose purpose is to articulate, as if it were a screen, the story. We have called this type of sequence a "strident sequence". As noted at the time, such a sequence serves to express the subjective state of a character going through very strong existential, affective, or sentimental stages, incapable of being recorded in any other way.

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Filmography:

1. *Ruido* (2022) Directed by Natalia Beristáin, Luxbox and Woofilms in coproduction with Chamaca films, Pasto & Pucará y Bengala, México.
2. *Pororoca* (2017) Directed by Constantin Popescu, Scharf Advertising Irreverence Films, Romania.

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