

*Streams of
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According to ancient lore, the Lima River – whose misty landscapes we see in the opening shot of *The Movement of Things* – is the river of forgetfulness. In his *Geography*, the ancient Greek thinker Strabo refers to it as Lethe, after the mythical river of oblivion that ran through the Underworld and from which the dead were obliged to drink in order to forget the lives they once lived. As is explained in history books, it took a Roman general to dare cross it and push the Empire's ever-expanding boundaries into the remote lands of what was then called Gallaecia.

Nestled in the basin of the Lima valley, in the far north of Portugal, the small village of Lanheses stands at the limits of this peculiar geography. As a threshold, it designates a passage, a transitional space that is also an opening towards the inexorable movement of things. Sheltered by the serene waters of the river of forgetfulness, Lanheses hovered in a singular liminality when Manuela Serra shot her first and only film there during the winters of 1979 and 1980: it sat between rural tradition and industrial modernity, between layers of time, between remembrance and oblivion. The Carnation Revolution of 1974, which drove the Belgian-exiled Serra back to Portugal, had put the country on the path to progress: agrarian reform, industrialization, timid attempts at gender equality, the promise of a European destiny (Portugal was accepted into the European Economy Community in 1985, the year Serra finished her film). The Lima River – from *limes*, the Latin word for limit – seemed again to be a frontier to another world. As Serra shows, if those who inhabited its waters still punted their boats like Charon must have punted his skiff, a concrete bridge was being built in the background as they did so. No state is ever permanent: the world is as fluctuating as a river and, however quietly, all rivers run to the sea.

In many ways, Serra's film can be seen as an attempt to capture a disappearing world – a world in which the ancestral (ferries and ox-carts, the sound of church bells) coexists with the modern (automobiles and motorcycles, the wail of the factory siren). Yet *The Movement of Things* is not about millennial traditions on the verge of disappearance, nor is it a one-dimensional paean for an idealized rural community. The ancestral gestures that make it into Serra's filmic study of bodies are less about concrete actions (punting, carrying a bundle on one's head, washing laundry in the river, serving soup from a tureen) than tempo. Serra's depiction of the life of her main character, Isabel, is a good example. Rhythmed by the sound of ticking clocks, her daily routines – putting pins in her hair, dunking bread into coffee – are all about composure, if not tenderness. So are Serra's distended shots, her carefully crafted images of enamel coffee pots, braids of onions, and shimmering stubble. Objects and faces are not photogenic in themselves: their affective qualities are brought forth by cinematic devices. Serra masters the art of orchestrating their sensed temporality.

Portuguese cinema's affection for the "real" is well known, as is its fondness for the rural and the ethnographic. Serra's film can be placed in a larger constellation: the lyrical films of António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro, in particular *Trás-os-Montes* (1976); the inventive documentary works of António Campos; or the equally remarkable and solitary *Masks* (1976), by Noémia Delgado. Within this admirable community, *The Movement of Things* stands out for its sensibility towards women and their

ordinary labours and non-labours. Cooking, sowing seeds, washing, tending; but also combing one's hair or swallowing a well-deserved cup of sustaining wine after a hard day's work. As Serra herself has recalled, her first intention was to shoot a film on the condition of Portuguese women. But eventually, she became more interested in the country's leap into a new, different world in which, presumably, the role of women and men would change. Many of them, like Isabel, now faced work at home, in the fields, and in the factory. As hinted at by Serra's film, the weariness of industrial work is not the tiredness of ancient labours. New rhythms and efforts loomed on the horizon.

Finished in 1985, after countless vicissitudes, *The Movement of Things* was never commercially released. After being shown in international festivals, where it won a number of prizes, it quickly became an invisible film. It was to remain the single work of a woman director whose filmic career, optimistically started in the revolutionary film co-operative Virver (co-founded by Serra in 1975), came to a halt, never to restart again. It is a sadly familiar tale for those interested in the many histories of women's participation in and around the cinema. (The aforementioned Delgado, for instance, worked exclusively for television after shooting *Masks*, despite several feature-length feminist projects for which she never managed to secure funding.) Shaped by all sorts of parameters – the status quo, motherhood, the intersections of race, social class, education, sexual orientation, etc. – women's creative and non-creative trajectories do seem to always face more obstacles, to be more exposed to hazards and stagnation, to wounds. As evinced in recent interviews, Serra's story is a painful one. It is a tale of disremembering, if not deliberate obliteration by a male-dominated industry, opportunely counterbalanced by the film's restoration by the Cinemateca Portuguesa in 2021. The restoration has repaired a sorrowful regret: excluded from its earlier version because it was considered "too pessimistic," the film's suggestive and unruly closing shot has now been reinstated. Moreover, the restoration has given *The Movement of Things* a more-than-deserved second life: the occasion to be screened, discussed, and finally included in histories full of gaps, histories suffering badly from the rip currents of forgetfulness. It now falls to us to take up this challenge: how do we tell such tales, which are as much about sorrow as they are about joy? Tales that demand new words, new metaphors, new narratives, and which ask for new ideas, beyond the pitfalls of individualistic models and the conservatism of concepts such as "achievement", "re-discovery," and "uniqueness"?