

Not By Lynch is a screening series exploring the "Lynchian": an often-used but rarely examined term whose lineage stretches before, around and after David Lynch's own cinema. While Lynch's films offers the clearest expression of this sensibility, the roots and afterlives of what we call the "Lynchian" extend across film history. From haunted noir and ghostly Americana to experimental digital worlds and paranoid Los Angeles labyrinths, nine films — spanning the nine decades of Lynch's life — trace different faces of the Lynchian: dream-logic beneath everyday life, the uncanny invading domestic space, identities slipping or doubling, worlds that bend at the edges, and dread that mingles uneasily with play, humour and desire.

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026



THE CINEMA MUSEUM
LONDON
www.cinemamuseum.org.uk

NOT BY LYNCH

THE LYNCHIAN BEFORE
AND AFTER DAVID LYNCH

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026

Curated by **Arta Barzanji**
Presented in collaboration
with **Cinema Year Zero**

Coming soon...

THE HIDDEN

+ Introduction

Friday 8 May at 7.30pm

Follow us

@CinemaYearZero
@TheCinemaMuseum



CÉLINE & JULIE GO BOATING

+ Programme note by Maria J. Pérez Cuervo



The Triumph of Whimsy

Words by **Maria J Pérez Cuervo**

Céline & Julie Go Boating (1974)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

With Juliet Berto, Dominique Labourier

Written by Jacques Rivette, Eduardo de Gregorio and the cast

Cinematography by Jacques Renard | Edited by Nicole Lubtchansky | 192 minutes

On the 4th of July 1862, Lewis Carroll first told the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on a boat trip that departed from near the aptly named Folly Bridge in Oxford. Over a century later, the heroines of Jacques Rivette's ***Céline and Julie Go Boating*** (1974) embark on a journey that culminates with another boat trip. Their journey started with another nod to Alice, with magic-seeking Julie (Dominique Labourier) following Céline (Juliette Berto), who embodies the chaotic energy of the white rabbit, down the rabbit hole of the streets of Montmartre, the Bohemian heart of Paris. Thus unravels one of the most interesting female friendships seen on screen, amusingly recognisable yet imbued with something ineffable and almost mystical. As they explore an unsolved mystery from the past, both women become ultimately interchangeable, mirror images of each other.

David Lynch's love of dreamlike narratives and his thematic use of doubles (notably in *Lost Highway* (1997), *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and *Inland Empire* (2006)) place him in a line of Surrealist storytellers who have Carroll's work, with its dream logic and fragmented narratives, as their predecessor. In *Céline and Julie*, Rivette slips in further references to Alice: to access the events from the past, the heroines must suck on hard candy, just as Alice consumed the "Eat me" cake and the "Drink me" potion to access other worlds (Madlyn, the little girl in *Céline and Julie*, retells the "Drink Me" scene in the second half of the film; her name might also be a reference to Proust's madeleine, which triggers the sensory experience that allows the narrator to retrieve forgotten memories of his childhood in *Swann's Way*).

The film's original title, *Céline et Julie Vont En Bateau*, works as a play on words: the figurative meaning of the French expression "mener quelqu'un en bateau", to lead someone on a boat, is to deceive someone with tall tales, to spin a yarn to lead them astray. The expression recalls both the "batelier", the person who steers a boat, and the "bateleur", a magician or a conjurer. Indeed, magic is an undercurrent from the very first scene. When we meet Julie, she's reading the *Elementary Treatise on Practical Magic* by Papus, the pseudonym of the French occultist Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), who studied Kabbalah, Tarot, alchemy and magic before founding his own society, the Martinist Order, based on an earlier esoteric Christian tradition. Julie, learning from Papus's popular treatise, reads Tarot, draws magic squares on her blackboard, and traces magic symbols on the soil with the tip of her shoe.

With her more grounded demeanour and more respectable occupation—a librarian—Julie appears to be a student of magick, to use Crowley's spelling, whereas the whimsical Céline introduces herself as a "magicienne", in its second meaning of illusionist, rather than sorceress (curiously, Céline's on-stage persona is La Mandragora, the Latin name of the mandrake, a plant with a human-shaped root used in magic since Antiquity).

The mystery they must solve is replayed in a grand mansion whose address is 7-bis, Rue de Nadir-aux-Pommes. Its very name is fanciful, with its reference to the forbidden fruit and 7, the magic number, followed by "bis" in a return to the double motif: the house itself is a reflection, an anomaly. The core of the mystery is a melodrama with a mysterious death and a comparatively stale love triangle, based on two stories by Henry James, *The Other House* (1896) and "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (1868). And yet, this replaying is never static; it requires both women to be part of it. Theirs is a shared vision, an accessing of the unconscious, a projection in which they both have stakes, seemingly patched from different elements of their lives. This is particularly noticeable when Julie knocks on the door of the house next door (a reflection of 7-bis) and meets her old nanny, a scene that implies that Julie knew the family, and that the nurse used to scare her. Yet, to find her answers, Julie must take on the nurse's identity.

Both Céline and Julie take turns to become Angèle Terre, the nurse, perhaps an oblique reference to Angleterre, the land of Lewis Carroll, or Miss Terre, Mystère, mystery. This isn't the only time in which Céline and Julie become interchangeable, we see it elsewhere: with Guilou, who is unable to fathom that it's not Julie he's speaking to; on stage, where Julie stands for Céline in front of an audience; in the final scene, which inevitably circles back to the beginning.

The two women's connection is instantaneous. They are soul sisters, constantly rescuing each other, exchanging hard candy from their mouths. Berto and Labourier's real-life friendship was key to building this connection. Their on-screen dynamic is unabashedly playful, whimsical and fun, firmly anti-patriarchal: on stage, Julie calls "cosmic twilight pimps" to her audience before running away to meet her friend. Céline and Julie are two sides of the same coin, magic and illusion fizzing together, revealing hidden truths and making life meaningful via playful curiosity, exploration, and the very act of creation.

Carroll's story has been praised as a proto-feminist tale, with Alice challenging authoritarian figures and finding a small degree of agency in Wonderland. In *Céline and Julie*, the heroines go further still: their aim is to save the little girl; together, they go boating, a triumph of rescuing the inner child, done through the power of friendship, curiosity and whimsy; self-realisation without any paternal figures.

Maria J. Pérez Cuervo is the founder and editor of Hellebore magazine. She's written about film and myth for Severin, Radiance Films and Indicator.