THE WORLD AWAKENS AND CHANGES WITH YOUR LOVE; OR, QUEERING THE BADIOUAN SCENE OF TWO IN KUNIHIKO IKUHARA'S *YURIKUMA ARASHI*

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A truth is not something that is constructed in a garden of roses. Never!
– Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (2012), 61

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the anime TV series *Yurikuma Arashi*, directed by Kunihiko Ikuhara, through the framework of the philosophy of love of French philosopher Alain Badiou (b. 1937). Love, of course, has long been a central theme in philosophy, explored through metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and existentialism by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Irigaray—among many others—for whom it is more than mere attraction as it represents a transformative force encompassing desire, virtue, power, freedom, and the pursuit of truth. Given that Badiou's theory has been criticized by feminist and Queer Theory scholars for its "heteronormative, phallocentric, transphobic, or heterosexist"[1] tendencies, my argument is twofold: that 1) *Yurikuma* can be interpreted, at times quite literally, as an illustration of Badiou's concept of the Scene of Two (*la scène de deux*) within the medium of Japanese animation, while simultaneously bringing forth the queer potential already inherent in this notion; and that 2) for Ikuhara, unlike Badiou, love is itself an emancipatory political project, with *Yurikuma* being, among his works, the one that makes this theme most explicit. By presenting the Scene of Two not only as a personal revolution, but as a catalyst for societal change, *Yurikuma* frames love as a process that unites not just (opposite-gender) individuals in couples but amorous (collective) networks in "militant organized activity."[2]

At first glance, applying Badiou's concept of the Scene of Two to analyze *Yurikuma Arashi* may seem counterintuitive, given that the series, starting from its title which can be loosely translated as "Lesbian Bear Storm," appears to be, first and foremost, about femininity and lesbian sexuality. Indeed, unlike feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray—who critiques Western thought for its failure to recognize feminine subjectivity and emphasizes sexual difference as the primary structure that love must navigate and respect[3]—Badiouan love, rather than centering on sexuation, is presented as one of four universal "truth procedures" (even though, by the late 1990s, Badiou begins to reconsider his position on the non-sexuation of the universal[4]), along with politics, science, and art.[5] Thus, love, for

Badiou, is "not reduced to a mix of sentimentality and sexuality."[6] It is "the advent of the Two as such, the scene of Two," i.e., an *event* that compels those involved to reorient their perspective beyond individual ego, in relation to difference, rather than retreat into an identitarian sameness; or, as Badiou also puts it, love "is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two."[7] To clarify, in Badiouan terms, an event is a "rupture which opens up truths"[8] in a situation (i.e., the *status quo*), which "occurs unpredictably, has the potential to effect a momentous change in some given… state of affairs, and—above all—has consequences such as require unswerving fidelity or a fixed resolve to carry them through on the part of those who acknowledge its binding force."[9]

One of the aspects that, in the end, brings Ikuhara's perspective closer to Badiou's philosophy of love—rather than to feminist frameworks such as Irigaray's—is the emphasis on love as a truth procedure: a Scene of Two that unfolds over time and must be actively maintained to preserve the truth initiated by the first encounter.[10] While Irigaray's work might initially appear more suited to a reading of *Yurikuma Arashi*, Badiou's influence becomes more apparent through this understanding of love; that said, engaging with feminist thinkers would sill undoubtedly offer valuable insights in alternative interpretations of the show. Another aspect is that while Badiou asserts that love "is the only genuine scene in which a universal singularity pertaining to the Two of the sexes—and ultimately pertaining to difference as such—is proclaimed,"[11] the Scene of Two, as stated in Badiou's *In Praise of Love*, actually relates more to this "difference as such," that is, the disjuncture between two people and their infinite subjectivities, than specifically to sexual difference. I will later explore why "lesbian bears" (*yurikuma*) provide the ideal stage for Ikuhara to address this and how he does so by engaging with specific media histories of anime and manga, but I believe the queer potential of the Scene of Two is left already hinted here.

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Before proceeding further, it is important to contextualize the work of Kunihiko Ikuhara, the author of *Yurikuma Arashi*. Born in Tokushima, Japan, in 1964, Ikuhara is a highly influential figure in the anime industry, known for his multidisciplinary contributions across various media. In addition to his work as an animation director, he has composed and performed soundtracks,[12] written novels and manga, supervised video games and musicals,[13] and cultivated a distinct authorial style—one characterized by dense symbolism, surreal imagery, and recurring leitmotifs, whose narratives are often nonlinear in structure. It is no coincidence that David Lynch and Stanley Kubrick are among the directors Ikuhara openly admires.[14]

Ikuhara first rose to prominence in the early 1990s with his directorial work on Toei's anime adaptation of *Sailor Moon*. He later left Toei to pursue his artistic vision, cementing his legacy with the anime series *Shōjo Kakumei Utena* (1997) and its feature film, *Shōjo Kakumei Utena: Adolescence*

Mokushiroku (1999), both of which achieved critical acclaim and cult status. Following a lengthy hiatus from directing, he returned in 2011 with *Mawaru Penguindrum*, a series that reaffirmed his reputation for bold, avant-garde storytelling. In 2015, he released *Yurikuma Arashi*, the object of this paper, a lushly animated 12-episode series (each episode lasting approximately 25 minutes) in collaboration with studio Silver Link. More recently, in 2019, he released *Sarazanmai*, further solidifying his position as one of anime's most distinctive auteurs.[15]

From an academic perspective, while *Utena* and *Penguindrum* have garnered substantial scholarly attention, *Yurikuma Arashi* remains largely overlooked in terms of journal articles, despite having been actively discussed and analyzed by fans in more informal spaces such as blogs and forums at the time of its release. This article seeks to address that gap, making use of the timely opportunity presented by the series' ten-year anniversary.

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Figure 1. The Wall of Severance. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 4:15 (above) and 22:26 (below). *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

Narratively, *Yurikuma Arashi* revolves around Kureha Tsubaki, a student at the all-girls Arashigaoka Academy, set in a world where humans have erected the Wall of Severance (*Danzetsu no kabe*; *danzetsu*, in Japanese, is a richly polysemic word meaning "to become extinct" or "to cease to exist," as well as "to sever," "to break off," and "to divide" between two things) to protect themselves from bears, which prey on humans (Figure 1). Unlike other iconic anime walls, such as those in *Shingeki no Kyojin (Attack on Titan*), the Wall of Severance in *Yurikuma Arashi* is not a solid, impenetrable structure. Instead, it manifests as an omnipresent skyline of buildings, cranes, and scaffolding—an unfinished, ever-expanding construction that extends endlessly across the horizon, suggesting that division is not a fixed, preexisting boundary but a continuous process, maintained and reenacted over time.

Despite these efforts, the bears infiltrate the human world in disguise, shapeshifting into anthropomorphized forms—much like the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* impersonating the grandmother. In their "natural" bear form, they appear as cute, Sanrio-style mascots, a stark contrast to conventional depictions of monstrosity in Western media. Their design rather reflects the *gurokawa* ("grotesque cute") aesthetic in Japanese pop culture, which blends disturbing or macabre imagery with traditionally cute, childlike elements[16] to create a deliberate tonal whiplash (Figure 2). As the narrative unfolds, the conflict between humans and bears is increasingly framed as a war, using this "tonal whiplash" to unsettle viewers and heighten then sequences' emotional impact. For instance, in Episode 7 and subsequent episodes, a stylized depiction of war as shadow puppetry is abruptly interrupted by realistic imagery of weaponry, tanks, and the corpses of bears and humans on the battlefield (Figure 3).

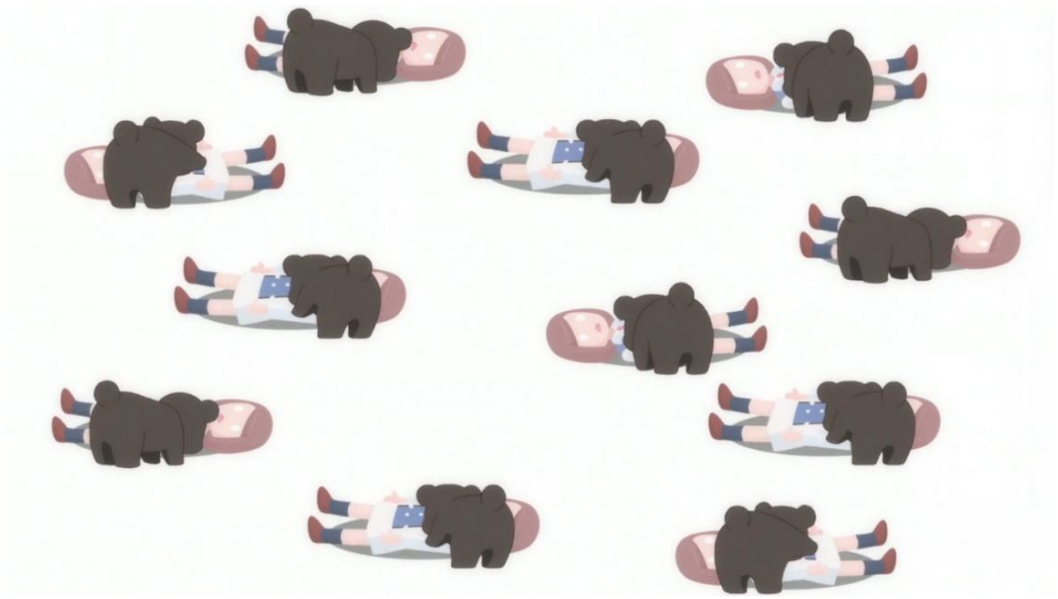

Figure 2. *Gurokawa* aesthetics in *Yurikuma*. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 4:10. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

Figure 3. Contrasting representations of war in *Yurikuma*. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 7 "Watashi ga wasureta ano musume," 13:13, 13:40, and 16:54 (below). *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The series opens, in the first episode (*Watashi wa suki o akiramena*, "Never Back Down on Love"), with Kureha in a blissful romantic relationship with her classmate Sumika, the two meeting in a secluded flowerbed of white lilies by the Door of Friendship (*Tomodachi no tobira*), a pastel pink and white summerhouse with an elegant, symmetrical design, surrounded by greenery (Figure 4). When Sumika expresses relief at being in a place free from prying eyes, Kureha reassures her that they have done nothing wrong. As they lock hands and gaze into each other's eyes, they affirm their shared vow to "not give up on love" (*suki wo akiramenai*). However, this moment of idyllic intimacy is short-lived. Soon after, the flowerbed is destroyed by a sinister entity known as the Invisible Storm, and Sumika falls victim to a bear attack, devoured by an infiltrator within the academy.

Determined to avenge Sumika's death, Kureha's path crosses with two bears, Ginko Yurishiro and Lulu Yurigasaki, who have crossed the Wall of Severance and disguised themselves to enroll in her class as transfer students. Though Kureha harbors a deep-seated hatred for bears—having lost both her mother and Sumika to their attacks—it is revealed that Ginko's goal is not hostile but rather to reunite with Kureha and fulfill the "promised kiss" (*yakusoku no kisu*), while Lulu, driven by her own love for Ginko, supports Ginko's quest. Their fates intertwine as Kureha grapples with her grief and embarks on a journey of self-discovery, learning to embrace love despite the risks.

Figure 4. Yumika and Kureha stand by the lily flowerbed in front of the Door of Friendship, a secret passage through the Wall of Severance. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 1:38. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The show's opening sequence, just before the credits roll, culminates in the blaring of a siren signaling that a bear has breached the school perimeter, followed by a voiceover declaring: "From the beginning, we hated you, and from the beginning, we loved you. That's why we wanted to become true friends. By crossing that wall."[17] With these words, *Yurikuma Arashi* immediately establishes itself as an exploration of the contradictions inherent in love.[18] An idyllic garden—not of roses, as in this article's epigraph, but of lilies in full bloom, symbolizing Kureha and Sumika's love—is violently torn apart, reflecting Badiou's assertion that love is "one of the most painful experiences in the subjective life of an individual."[19]

Besides this Introduction, my analysis of *Yurikuma Arashi* is structured into five sections. Section 2, "Of Lilies and Rifles," delves into intertextual connections with *yuri*, horror cinema, and the key entities of the Invisible Storm and the Court of Severance. Section 3, "I Will Tear Myself Up," explores the protagonists' rejection of possessiveness and their embrace of true love through self-transformation. Section 4, "The Scene of Two," applies Badiou's concept of love as a truth procedure to Kureha's acceptance of absolute difference, extending beyond both hetero- and homonormativity. Section 5, "*Fraternité*," shifts focus to community and solidarity, particularly through Lulu, challenging mononormativity and exploring the collectivist possibilities of love. Finally, Section 6, "Coda," argues that *Yurikuma* intertwines love and politics, framing fidelity to love as a revolutionary act with the power to dismantle oppressive structures.

Finally, *Yurikuma Arashi*, like any Ikuharian work, is an extremely rich and multilayered anime, filled with complexities that can be unraveled without end, like a yarn ball, in relation to philosophy and psychoanalysis. Beyond the already mentioned Irigaray, other authors such as Hegel,

Freud, Derrida, and Lacan could be fruitfully brought into conversation with the series. This paper does not seek to exhaust such possibilities but hopes to leave the reader with a better understanding of the series' themes and how they intersect with Alain Badiou's philosophy of love and the Scene of Two.

2. OF LILIES AND RIFLES

One of *Yurikuma Arashi*'s characteristics is its use of pastiche, parody, and homage, stemming from two major sources: Japanese manga and anime, particularly within the *yuri* genre, and cinematic horror. This intertextuality is not unique to *Yurikuma* but reflects Ikuhara's broader artistic approach, weaving media histories and the creative logic of various art forms into layered, onion-like metanarratives. This invites viewers to peel back and recognize established anime tropes, character archetypes, and narrative conventions; for instance, the magical girl *henshin* ("transformation") sequence is a recurring motif across *Utena*, *Penguindrum*, *Yurikuma*, and *Sarazanmai*. Moreover, a quintessentially Ikuharian technique is the use of a story-within-a-story or play-within-a-play structure, coupled with frequent nods to theater and theatrical performance, to explore storytelling as an artificial construct. Indeed, just as Joseph Litvak writes that "it would be difficult to overstate the importance of theatre for Badiou"[20]—who, in addition to being a philosopher, is also a playwright—the same could be said for Ikuhara, who is well known for his love of theater, particularly in its most self-reflexive forms, including shadow puppetry, traditional Japanese theater (*noh*, *kabuki*), musicals (e.g., Takarazuka Revue), and experimental theater (e.g., Japanese poet-playwright Shūji Terayama).[21]

Many of Ikuhara's settings are stage-like rather than realistic environments, with proscenium-style framing, and characters positioned as if they are actors performing for an unseen audience (as I will discuss shortly with regard to the Severance Court). In *Yurikuma Arashi*, the primary locations include citations from some of cinema's most iconic horror films, particularly those where architecture shapes a kind of psychic topography, using intertextual cues to evoke dread and foreshadow the show's central themes—an effective strategy given *Yurikuma*'s significantly shorter runtime compared to *Utena* (39 episodes) or *Penguindrum* (24 episodes). For instance, Kureha's house echoes Hitchcock's *Psycho*'s Bates Motel, while the Wall of Severance adopts *The Shining*'s hexagonal carpet motif, "bearified" into paw prints (Figure 3). This visual cue, linked to the biblical number six, suggests both the bears as predators and the more insidious, systemic evil represented by severance (*danzetsu*).

Figure 5. The Invisible Storm with the modified *Sky and Water I* pattern. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 10:44 (above); *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 'Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa,' 24:02 (below). *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The most extensive cinematic intertextual reference, however, comes from Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), a defining work of *giallo,*[22] the Italian horror genre known for its (critically divisive) stylistic excess and "colorful, oneiric, fairy-tale world[s],"[23] which aligns with Ikuhara's aesthetic preferences. *Yurikuma Arashi* mirrors *Suspiria* in its use of color, patterns, and set design, particularly in the architecture of Arashigaoka Academy and the stained-glass window of the Door of Friendship, as well as its framing and soundtrack choices.[24] Yet, perhaps more significantly, *Suspiria* takes place in a ballet academy controlled by a demonic coven of witches, who persecute and eliminate anyone that challenges their authority.[25] In *Yurikuma,* the role of authoritarian state control and surveillance is embodied by the Invisible Storm (*Tōmei na Arashi*, literally "transparent storm"), a political police-like

group made up of Kureha's classmates (Figure 5). Operating under the slogan "Let's search evil!", the Invisible Storm declares, "Those who can't read the room are evil" (*Sono kūki wo yomenai hito wa aku desu*)[26] and systematically hunts down and executes its targets, determining them through a majority vote conducted via cell phones. The phrase *kūki yomenai* ("unable to read the air," abbreviated as KY) carries particular weight in Japanese social dynamics as a pejorative term for individuals who fail to pick up on unspoken social cues or expectations of group harmony. In fact, Episode 3 (*Tōmei na arashi*, "Invisible Storm") reveals that it was the Invisible Storm that orchestrated the murder of Kureha's girlfriend, Sumika, in Episode 1, punishing her for refusing to comply with their plan to ostracize Kureha.

The pattern that symbolizes the Invisible Storm further ties it to *Suspiria*. It draws from M.C. Escher's woodcut *Sky and Water I* (1938),[27] where a stylized flock of birds and a school of fish interlock like pieces of a puzzle. *Yurikuma Arashi* replaces the fish with lilies, and whenever the Invisible Storm is activated, the lilies fade into the background while the birds visually takeover. Much like the witches infiltrate the academy in *Suspiria*, in Yurikuma, the Invisible Storm is infiltrated by two bears disguised as humans: Yurika, a teacher who killed Kureha's mother out of jealousy, and Mitsuko, who murders Sumika and later tempts Ginko to betray Kureha. In the end, control of the Invisible Storm is restored to humans, led by Choko Oki, who also heads the anti-bear paramilitary group KMTG, whose goal is to exterminate all bears.

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Beyond horror, *Yurikuma Arashi* heavily relies on intertextual elements from the *yuri* genre of Japanese manga, anime, and novels, which explores emotional and romantic bonds between female characters. Indeed, one of the first things that may stand out to viewers is that *Yurikuma* takes place in a world where men are conspicuously absent from the main setting. The few male characters that do appear are confined to brief moments outside the narrative's established "reality" or "present," appearing only in metaphysical planes or flashbacks.

The origins of *yuri* can be traced back to early 20th-century Class S fiction, which depicted intense but chaste "passionate friendships"[28] between schoolgirls. These stories, appearing in girls' magazines, borrowed from Christian-influenced notions of spiritual love, or *ren'ai*, and often used the white lily (*yuri*, in Japanese) as a symbolic motif—both for its association with the Virgin Mary and for representing refined modern femininity linked to Western culture.[29] Yasunari Kawabata's *Otome no Minato* ("Harbor of Maidens," partially ghostwritten by Tsuneko Nakazato[30]) was one such work, providing female readers with a space to imagine love outside of the societal pressures of heterosexual relationships and early marriage.[31]

In 1976, Itō Bungaku—editor of Japan's first gay magazine, *Barazoku*—coined the term *yurizoku* ("lily tribe") for Japanese lesbians. *Yuri* later became associated with 1980s *pink eiga* (male-

oriented softcore films[32]) and female manga pioneers like Ryōko Yamagishi, whose *Shiroi Heya no Futari* ("The Two of the White Room," 1971) is considered the first *yuri* manga.[33] The Class S genre saw a resurgence in the 1990s with *Maria-sama ga Miteru* ("The Virgin Mary is Watching," or *Marimite* as it is often shortened), a novel series about an all-girls school structured around a "big sister/little sister" mentorship system,[34] whose elegant, nostalgic tone established it as a landmark of *yuri* media. Kumaria, the goddess who watches over *Yurikuma Arashi*'s universe and plays a crucial role in the series' resolution, directly references *Marimite*, with her name combining *kuma* ("bear") and Maria.

Although *Marimite* was targeted at female audiences, its success led to a wave of male-oriented and parodic *yuri* works, including *Strawberry Panic!*, *Maria†Holic*, and erotic videogames like *Otome wa Boku ni Koishiteru*. In the 2000s, the rise of *moé*—a trend catering to male *otaku* that popularized CGDCT ("cute girls doing cute things") shows—further reinforced *yuri*'s appeal to men. These series, featuring rounder and cuter character designs (unlike those of *yuri* aimed at women, like *Marimite*),[35] explore affectionate and romantically suggestive interactions between girls, ranging from the subtle subtext of *Lucky Star* and *K-On!* to the open crushes in *YuruYuri* and the kissing, cuddling, and sexualized poses of *Sakura Trick*. Hence, compared to Boys' Love (BL)—largely written by and for women—or *geikomi*, which caters to gay men, *yuri* occupies a much more fluid, zigzagging demographic space within Japanese romantic/erotic genre fiction. *Yurikuma Arashi* acknowledges this versatility, and the choice of Akiko Morishima as the character designer for *Yurikuma* is significant, as she is a manga author who has published in both *yuri* magazines for girls, such as *Comic Yuri Hime*, and in its counterpart *Comic Yuri Hime S*, directed towards a more male and *moé*-loving crowd.[36]

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Even so, some critics remain skeptical about the soundness of Ikuhara's portrayal of lesbian relationships in *Yurikuma Arashi*. While works like *Utena* and *Mawaru Penguindrum* have been celebrated for their queer themes, others accuse him of exploiting taboo subjects—incest, sexual violence, and power imbalances—for shock value and of masking personal fetishes behind symbolic excess.[37] *Yurikuma*'s marketing, including suggestive promotional images of the protagonists showing off their underwear or presented in quasi-pornographic poses, invited similar scrutiny.

A particularly contentious element in *Yurikuma Arashi* is the Severance Court *(Danzetsu no Court*) (Figure 6), a surreal tribunal overseen by three anthropomorphic male bears, each stationed atop an elaborate, tower-like pulpit: Life Sexy, the judge; Life Cool, the prosecution; and Life Beauty, the defence. Together, they conduct *yuri* trials (*yuri saiban*), engaging in "bearified" legal exchanges that almost always conclude with Life Sexy declaring, "That's sexy, shaba-da-doo." In each trial, the defendants—or *hikokuguma*, a pun combining *hikoku* meaning "defendant" and *kuma* meaning "bear," roughly translating to "defendebear"—are presented with a choice to "become invisible" or "eat humans" (the phrasing varies, but the meaning is the same). Once the defendebear gives their answer,

the Severance Court grants *yuri* approval (*yuri shōnin*), triggering an erotically charged magical girl transformation sequence for Kureha, Ginko, and Lulu.

Figure 6. The Court of Severance with Life Sexy, Life Cool, Life Beauty and the "defendursants" Ginko and Lulu. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 2 "Kono mi ga tsukitemo yurusanai," 17:18 – 17:55. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The ideological implications of three male figures judging and approving the protagonists' lesbian relationships have not gone unnoticed by the fandom,[38] especially since *yuri* is always granted approval regardless of the characters' choices, suggesting that their agency is secondary to putting *yuri* on display. The Severance Court, then, is in no way an ethical or moral authority but rather an obscene arena, which is further emphasized by the fact that Kureha must either fall or descend a staircase to reach it, as if plunging into her subconscious. While the psychoanalytic undercurrents are numerous, in more Badiouan terms, one could say that the Severance Court operates as a fantasmatic space outside the situation—the existing order, the *status quo*—"for the sake of humans and bears" (*hito to kuma no tame ni*, as Life Sexy, Cool, and Beauty declare), where fidelity is tested and the conditions for an evental rupture may take shape.

During the *yuri* trials, the characters first appear spotlighted against a dark background and framed in symmetrical compositions. Once *yuri* is approved, title cards move away with sliding sound effects, mimicking a camera lens revealing the scene, and reinforcing the sense that we, as viewers, are watching a spectacle staged for our gaze. A curtain of red camellia petals (a reference to Kureha's last name, Tsubaki, "camellia"), parts to reveal her floating against a white screen, luminous like blank celluloid. As a lily stem emerges from Kureha's chest, Ginko and Lulu begin to lick honey from its petals, in close-ups and camera angles that, combined with their poses and expressions, blatantly evoke

the language of pornography (Figure 7). Additional elements—such as Lulu winking at the viewer and Ginko and Lulu's transformation into part-human, part-bear forms, complete with bear-ear headbands, paw gloves, and boot-like feet resembling stage costumes—highlight the theatricality of their bodily performance, exaggerated through tropological amplification, signaling *Yurikuma Arashi*'s self-reflexive engagement with *ecchi*, i.e., sexually suggestive (from "H," for *hentai*), content. This, again, is quintessential Ikuhara, as he frequently deploys *ecchi* in ways that feel disjointed from the scene or dialogue, forcing viewers to become aware of their spectatorship and confront their own scopophilic desires. Such is the case, for instance, in *Utena,* where (male) characters like Akio Ohtori and Touga Kiryuu indulge in scheming or philosophical discussions while striking seductive poses, caressing themselves, lounging languidly on sheets or car tops, sometimes holding cameras or accompanied by sudden, unexplained bursts of photographic flashes.

Figure 7. The *yuri* approval sequence with Kureha, Ginko, and Lulu. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 20:09 – 20:21. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

In other words, as noted earlier, the Scene is the point—both in its theatrical sense and as the ultimate "action of thought,"[39] carrying this specific philosophical weight from Ancient Greece to Freud, Derrida, Rancière, and beyond. For Badiou, indeed, "every philosopher is an actor,"[40] as well as a seducer "on the behalf of something that, in the end, is a truth."[41] In *In Praise of Love*, Badiou even speaks of "the oral dimension of philosophy captured by the body,"[42] which resonates with the pronounced orality of the *yuri* approval sequences and Ginko and Lulu's repeated acts of licking and kissing Kureha. In this sense, Ikuhara is also Bataillean in how Yurikuma's *henshin* sequence and Kureha's rapture—reminiscent of the carnal intensity in Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*—merge

"uncontrolled obscenity and the holiest of ecstasies,"[43] not in a religious sense but as an evental experience. This is further amplified by the sequence being set to a remix of Bach-Gounod's *Ave Maria*, with a dance beat.

The *yuri* approval sequences are also where the cross-pollinated economy of desires within the *yuri* genre unfolds most explicitly in *Yurikuma Arashi*, mixing and matching the spiritual tone of female-oriented Class S *ren'ai* with the *ecchi*, sexually explicit inflection of male-oriented *yuri*, not to create a cohesive, "resolved" whole (as in fully parodic works like *Strawberry Panic!*), but to expose the problematic seams of our fantasies—as previously discussed, no genre in Japanese fiction embodies this tension more strongly than *yuri*. Significantly, the interplay of phallic and yonic double entendres in the *yuri* approval sequences is expressed through the dynamic between stamens and pistil, as lilies, despite being the symbol of the *yuri* genre, are hermaphroditic, containing both male and female reproductive structures. Likewise, Kureha, the protagonist, symbolically incorporates elements associated with both femininity and masculinity, a duality visually reinforced in the third episode, where a lily appears alongside a long rifle positioned vertically between her legs (Figure 8). Since the *yuri* approvals also serve as the stage for Ginko and Lulu's transformation from bears into (mostly human) magical girls, this suggests that *yuri*, in this context, stands for a broader transcendence of binary distinctions between human and bear, masculinity and femininity, and self and other.

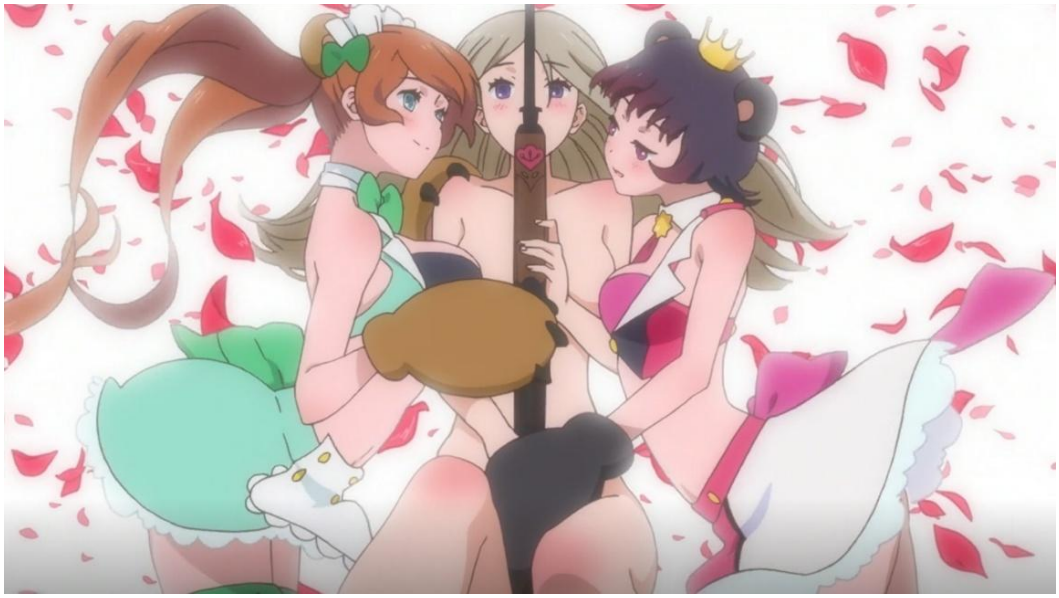

Figure 8. Kureha's riffle as phallic symbol. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 3 "Toumei na arashi," 20:43. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

Given all this, the Severance Court cannot be reduced to a case of "men approving of lesbianism" for voyeuristic gratification, and the series itself later subverts this reading. In the final episode, Goddess Kumaria materializes and absorbs Life Sexy, Cool, and Beauty into herself, symbolically reintegrating them into the feminine divine.

3. I WILL TEAR MYSELF UP

Selfishness, not any rival, is love's enemy. One could say, my love's main enemy, the one I must defeat, is not the other, it is myself, the 'myself' that prefers identity to difference, that prefers to impose its world against the world re-constructed through the filter of difference.
– Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (2012), 60

As discussed in the previous section, each *yuri* trial in the Court of Severance forces the "defendebears" to choose between "becoming invisible" or "eating humans," a decision that, in later episodes, evolves into whether they will give up on love. A relatively straightforward interpretation is that this dilemma mirrors the historical pressures placed on queer individuals, who have often been forced to either suppress their identity or accept the monstrous label imposed by society. The show establishes this reading early on, particularly in the opening sequence of the first episode, where Yumika and Kureha meet in secret, giving the impression that same-sex relationships make girls targets of the Invisible Storm—even as we later learn that its leaders hypocritically engage in such relationships themselves. While Ikuhara plays with this expectation—a assumption shaped by the viewer's own reality—he simultaneously pushes the concept of "queering" further. How?

Yurikuma Arashi is not simply set in an all-girls academy but unfolds in an all-girls world. Or, more precisely, in what one might call a "yuriverse," insofar as it exists almost entirely within the mediatic tradition, or traditions, of the *yuri* genre. This does not mean that phallocentric logic and symbolism are not present in the show, as was made clear in the above analysis of the Severance Court and its *henshin* sequences. However, to play on Lacan's famous formulation from *Seminar XX*,[44] in *Yurikuma Arashi*, "man does not exist," with even Sexy, Cool, and Beauty ultimately being absorbed into the figure of Goddess Kumaria. As such, the idea that the main characters are persecuted for engaging in lesbian relationships loses weight, since sexual difference is absent in this universe. Here, "woman"—which, as Badiou proposes in an unpublished conference paper,[45] consists of a "logic of the Two" or a "passage-between-Two" that traditionally 'undoes' the One of the masculine position"[46]—is the sole "gender." Consequently, femininity is not relegated to the role of the Other; instead, this position is transferred onto the bears, who have no direct gender equivalent. This is likely why, as the series progresses, the choice presented in the Severance Court shifts, not just between becoming invisible or monstrous, but between giving up on love or remaining faithful to it. In other words, love is dangerous and thus persecuted by the Invisible Storm, not because it is lesbian, though it is, but because it is *love*. What truly makes it a threat is that it represents *honmono no suki* (as the characters repeatedly verbalize throughout the show), "true love," because "true love" constitutes a Badiouan event.

For Ikuhara, much like for Badiou, the "egoistic unity of 'dominance of the One'… [is] that [which] love precisely fractures by opening onto an experience of the world that is taken on as an experience of 'Two.'"[47] Thus, the Scene of Two can only take shape once the main trio—Kureha, Ginko (whom I will discuss now), and Lulu (whom I will address later)—overcome their inner obstacles,

which are not imposed from the outside. There are two characters in *Yurikuma Arashi* who embody a false kind of love confined within the "narcissistic sphere,"[48] i.e., love tainted by possessiveness, jealousy, and selfishness, marking them as antagonists aligned with the Invisible Storm: Yurika Hakonaka and Mitsuko Yurizono, whom I mentioned earlier in the Introduction. The latter is a personification of Ginko's *yokubō* ("desire," "appetite," "lust"), which is inherently narcissistic and objectifies the Other, as per Lacan's concept of the sexual non-relationship.[49] This *yokubō* is a defining trait of the bears, evident in their repeated use of the term "eating," which carries literal and sexual connotations. Mitsuko explicitly tells Ginko—when she struggles to control her bear instincts—that she should surrender to them, declaring, "Love is a wild emotion. To love someone is to dominate them. It's wanting to become one with them in such a way that you consume them."[50]

Ginko's arc revolves around resisting these predatory drives, culminating in her defeat of Mitsuko in *Yurikuma*'s penultimate episode (Episode 11), where she rejects the temptation to eat Kureha by asserting that "True love won't leave me alone."[51] Despite Mitsuko's warning that a beast without appetite will die, Ginko continues ascending a staircase until she faces a mirror in the summerhouse of the Door of Friendship, where she appears both as a bear with the reflection of a girl and a girl with the reflection of a bear. Unfazed by this impasse, Ginko announces, "I will tear myself up" (*watashi wa watashi wo hikisaku*)[52] and breaks her reflection with her bear-shaped gloves, refusing to submit to the notion of "one-ness" and the myth that love means consuming or becoming "one" with the beloved.[53] This gesture is mirrored by Kureha in Episode 12, during the denouement of *Yurikuma*, when she smashes her reflection by firing her rifle, declaring, "I will smash myself" (*watashi wa watashi wo kudaku*).[54] In both instances, the mirrors shatter into pieces, as only through this rupture—this act of self-shattering—can one reinvent identity and bring forth the Scene of Two. After all, as Badiou writes, love is "an existential project: to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity."[55]

The other embodiment of false love, Yurika, is the headmistress of Arashigaoka Academy at the time of Kureha's enrolment. Symbolized by a black lily, she was once the best friend of Kureha's mother, Reia Tsubaki. Her surname, Hakonaka ("inside the box"), ties to her backstory in Episode 8: as a bear cub, Yurika was abandoned and later adopted by the academy's former headmaster, a genderqueer figure who wore red high heels, evoking *The Wizard of Oz* (perhaps referencing the Wicked Witch of the East, whose shoes Dorothy inherits). Yurika's adoptive father taught her to place white lilies—the symbols of love in *Yurikuma Arashi*—inside red drawers at the academy, convinced that by keeping them under his control, their purity would be preserved forever, preventing them from withering, escaping, or becoming tainted (Figure 9). When Yurika realizes her father is planning to leave the school and abandon her in his quest for purity, she kills him and adopts his ideology. This is, ultimately, what leads Yurika to devour Reia, driven by selfish jealousy and an inability to share Reia's love with her

newborn child, Kureha; later, Yurika attempts to turn Kureha into her own "bride-in-the-box" (*hako no hanayome*), as a proxy for the love she had already destroyed.

Figure 9. Yurika's grid of drawers at Arashigaoka Academy and a lily being placed inside a drawer. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 5 "Anata o hitorijime shitai," 6:44 (above); *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 8 "Hako no hanayome," 13:12 (below). *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

In *Yurikuma Arashi*, love is portrayed as an act of resistance against what, to borrow momentarily from Deleuze and Guattari, could be described as the striated spaces of severance—"rigid segmentarity, a macrosegmentarity… [that] produces or rather reproduces segments… laying out a divisible, homogeneous space striated in all directions."[56] Yurika's boxes and drawers serve as both literal and metaphorical representations of this segmentation, most notably in the headmistress's office, where the shots emphasize their arrangement into a rigid visual grid. The grid also prominently features in the façade of Arashigaoka Academy. Breaking free from possessive, "striated love" thus involves a physically violent rupture from self-imposed constraints, as illustrated by the emphasis on the

animation's materiality in the mirror-shattering sequences described earlier, where shards of glass burst outward in 3D against a black background. Contrasting with the striated structures of *danzetsu* is the smooth, boundless white expanse where Kureha's rapture unfolds during the *yuri* approvals.[57]

4. THE SCENE OF TWO

We could say that love is a tenacious adventure.
– Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (2012), 32

In *Yurikuma Arashi*, the Scene of Two, emerging from the individual event of "true love," opposes "becoming invisible," which represents conformity and assimilation into the flock. Since Deleuze and Guattari are referenced above, it is important to clarify that invisibility, here, should not be understood as becoming-invisible (*devenir-ímperceptible*) or "minor" in the Deleuzian-Guattarian sense, which would involve challenging or subverting dominant norms and structures. Rather, it refers to the opposite: the act of ceasing to assert one's presence in a way that challenges or disrupts the *status quo*. What is more, true love, as a truth procedure, requires the same level of enduring commitment—fidelity—as a political revolution, a scientific breakthrough, or an artistic discovery.[58] Indeed, from the very first scene, the phrase "I won't give up on love" (*suki wo akiramenai*) echoes repeatedly throughout *Yurikuma*, functioning almost like a refrain within and outside the *yuri* trials. The fact that Badiou puts a clear emphasis on the "duration of love,"[59] i.e., its persistence beyond the encounter that initiates it, precisely coincides with another Ikuharian trope, one that could be summarized as "they have met before."[60] This means that, contrary to initial appearances, the central couple or main characters have already encountered each other before the diegetic present, and Kureha and Ginko are no exception.

As Ginko's past is revealed in flashbacks primarily concentrated in Episode 7 (*Watashi ga wasureta ano musume*, "The Girl That I Forgot") and subsequent episodes, we learn that on the bears' side of the Wall of Severance, the equivalent of the Invisible Storm is the Church of Kumaria—each representing, respectively, organized religion and state authoritarianism as forces of *danzetsu*, coercing individuals to conform to mob mentality. As a cub, Ginko was abandoned and bullied by other bears, eventually falling into the hands of the Church, which, despite claiming to eliminate humans in the name of the Goddess Kumaria, actually exploited the outcasts of bear society to further its own power. Flashbacks depict a brutal war from the past between humans and bears, where Ginko, manipulated by the Church, was led to fight and kill humans, believing this was the only way to earn the Goddess's love and approval, and to avoid being left alone. As noted in the Introduction, *Yurikuma Arashi* depicts the horrors of war through a contrast between comedic black-on-red shadow puppetry and realistic imagery of snow-covered battlefields. In the end, after Ginko nearly dies fighting for Kumaria, the other bears leave her behind to succumb to her wounds.

We then learn that as a child, Kureha discovered Ginko dying on that battlefield, saved her, and professed her love for her. Ginko was taken in by Kureha and her mother, Reia, as family, only for Kureha to be labeled a species traitor and beaten for befriending a bear. In response, Ginko asked the Court of Severance to turn her into a human so she could protect Kureha, agreeing to the Court's condition that Kureha would forget her and come to hate her (Episode 11). Later, in Episode 12, it is revealed that Kureha, as a child, made the exact same request, believing Ginko would be happier living as a human, and accepting the cost of forgetting and rejecting Ginko to fulfil that wish. Life Sexy, Cool, and Beauty explain that if Kureha and Ginko can find love for each other again and share the "promised kiss," they will regain their memories and be able to be together. Thus, by making Kureha's childhood wish—albeit well-intentioned—both about transforming Ginko into a human, thereby erasing her difference as a bear, and accepting to give up on love, *Yurikuma Arashi* implies that Kureha's love was still immature, as it stemmed from narcissism and self-conceit, and, as such, not yet true love. In fact, the prosecutor, Life Cool, accuses Kureha of committing the "sin of arrogance/pride" (*gōman no tsumi*).[61] While external forces of severance (*danzetsu*) must be challenged, true revolution comes from conquering "the 'myself' that prefers identity to difference."[62]

Moreover, in *Yurikuma Arashi*'s climactic final episode (Episode 12), it is emphasized that Kureha and Ginko's love becomes true only when its fidelity is tested, and affirmed, through time. In addition to the parallel between Kureha's mirror-shattering sequence and Ginko's, Kureha also echoes Ginko's declaration from the first episode, when Ginko and Lulu appear as transfer students in Kureha's class and Ginko lets slip, "I've finally found you" (*tsuini mitsuketa*).[63] In the last episode, Kureha stands before Ginko, who is now in her bear form and about to be executed by the Invisible Storm after being captured, and tells her, "I've found you at last" (*yatto mitsuketa*).[64] The use of the Japanese words "*tsuini*" and "*yatto*," which both emphasize "process, a duration,"[65] aligns with Badiou's view that love is what endures beyond its initial stages and which "triumphs lastingly, sometimes painfully, over the hurdles erected by time, space and the world."[66] This aspect becomes clear in the series' denouement, which I will now elaborate on.

Kureha calls upon Goddess Kumaria, who (after absorbing Sexy, Cool, and Beauty) manifests as a winged, angelic version of Sumika. Following Kureha's shattering of her own reflection, she requests to become a bear—a wish symmetrically opposed to her childhood wish, that Kumaria fulfils with a final *yuri* approval. Kureha, now a human-bear hybrid in her magical girl form, delivers the promised kiss to Ginko and, surrounded by a whirlwind of lily petals and the *Ave Maria* soundtrack, transforms into a bear, embracing her choice to become Other and decentering herself to see from her beloved's perspective (Figure 10). At first, this resolution may seem to contradict my argument, as the ending presents two bears that appear superficially the "same." However, given that the Scene of Two is the "subjective experience of absolute difference"[67] (see Introduction), it comes into full effect only when Kureha decides not to transform Ginko into the same as Kureha (a human girl), but for Kureha to

become, herself, "absolute difference." This resolution can only take place within the series' "yuriverse," where the gender binary (man/woman) no longer applies and symbolic sexuation is radically refigured—gender is, one might say, deterritorialized—as the bear comes to symbolize "absolute difference," that is, the disjunction of the Other, irreducible to our own subjectivity.[68]

Figure 10. Excerpts from the climax of *Yurikuma Arashi*. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 "Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa," 15:11 – 17:38. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

Meanwhile, after Kureha's transformation into a bear, the Wall of Severance is repatterned, shifting from the "bearified" hexagons to the stained glass from *Suspiria* at the Door of Friendship, symbolically transforming *danzetsu* into love (Figure 10, bottom right). Surrounding them, the Invisible Storm watches as their leader, Choko Oki, recoils in horror, exclaiming that a human becoming a bear

is “dreadful” (*osoroshii)*. Choko orders them to fire, and though the Invisible Storm hesitates, they comply. Shortly after, the outcome is revealed: the Scene of Two is completed as Ginko and Kureha ascend to the radiant, celestial space of Goddess Kumaria. While some viewers interpret this as their escape, the implication, in my view, is that Kureha and Ginko have been executed, with death leading them to a realm of “happily ever after.”

What is shown is just as important as *how* it is shown. Following the dazzling animation of Kureha’s *henshin* transformation into a bear, the Scene of Two appears as a dreamlike yet static picture-book illustration. It depicts Kureha and Ginko from behind in their hybrid (costume-y) magical girl-bear forms, walking hand-in-hand up a pink ladder extending towards the mystical winged figure hovering above them, rendered in deep purple and crowned with a halo (Kumaria). The background is filled with soft clouds, swirling pink and blue hues, and glowing golden stars scattered around them. This fairytale-like aesthetic alludes to the picture book *The Moon Girl and the Forest Girl*, a story-within-a-story that appears throughout the series and was likely written by Kureha’s mother, Reia. However, the staging and composition, make this image equally theatrical: the flat, layered arrangement of elements (clouds, stars, and characters in distinct planes) resembles a stage set with painted backdrops. I previously mentioned (see “Of Love and Rifles”) that a shared love of theater is one of the striking commonalities between Ikuhara and Badiou, attesting to a philosophical affinity between them. The fact that Ikuhara chooses to envision and represent the Scene of Two in *Yurikuma Arashi* as a theatrical tableau—a literal “scene” akin to what one might find in a *kamishibai* (Japanese paper theater) performance—is not merely a play on words but underscores the extent to which the series can be seen as an illustration in the most profound sense, a visual rendering of the Badiouan Scene of Two (Figure 11).

Figure 11. The Scene of Two with Ginko and Kureha as human-bear hybrids and Goddess Kumaria watching over the “yuriverse.” *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 “Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa,” 20:27. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The painful triumph of *Yurikuma Arashi*'s protagonists—not just Kureha and Ginko, but also Lulu and Sumika—over the Invisible Storm and other forces of *danzetsu*, as enacted in the Scene of Two, should be understood not only as the allegorical culmination of the narrative but also as a literal affirmation of the fidelity required for love to become a "truth procedure." Given *Yurikuma'*s decidedly Francophile sensibilities, it echoes the original motto of the French Revolution: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la Mort* (which was later adopted as the official motto of the French Republic in 1848, though its final clause—"or death"—was removed due to its association with the Reign of Terror). It is no coincidence that Delacroix's *La Liberté Guidant le Peuple* is on display in Kureha's living room, alongside Rousseau's *Le Rêve*. In this sense, even if we assume that Kureha and Ginko died in "reality," the show does not present their deaths as a tragedy, but instead suggests that it is either fidelity to love, or nothing at all.

A notable detail is how, in *Yurikuma Arashi*, the theme of difference is reinforced cinematically through the plasticity of Japanese animation and its media histories, particularly in the *yuri* approval transformation sequences, where Ginko and Lulu become human-bear hybrids, and Kureha adopts androgynous elements (see "Of Lilies and Rifles"). Beyond these moments, Ikuhara also frequently shifts character portrayals within the same sequence. A good example appears in Episode 11,[69] in the aforementioned sequence of Ginko's ascent up the stairs to the mirror at the Door of Friendship (see "I will tear myself up"). As Ginko ascends, she transforms from girl to bear and back to girl with each step, and upon reaching the mirror at the top, her reflection alternates between bear-human and human-bear hybrids, until finally she shatters the mirror in her magical girl-bear form. This editing strategy is less about (in this case, species) fluidity than a more fundamental queering of the animation medium itself—as if the anime is testing "what the world is like when experienced, developed, and lived from the perspective of difference rather than identity."[70] In other words, the "yuriverse" is not a mere stage for depicting or representing the Scene of Two, but constructs an aesthetic and perceptual experience that allows viewers to "feel" its logic in action. In doing so, it arguably untangles the Scene of Two from more normative representations—heteronormative, homonormative, or simply normative in the broadest sense.

5. *FRATERNITÉ*

Fulfill your love. You can have the promised kiss—if it's you, Ginko, you can do it.[71]
— Lulu, *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 11 (2015)

Yurikuma Arashi not only challenges heteronormativity and homonormativity but also questions mononormativity (i.e., the societal privileging of monogamous relationships while stigmatizing non-

monogamous ones), offering a different interpretation of the Scene of the Two than is typically understood, through the depiction of the relationship between Kureha, Ginko, and Lulu. Again, this is not achieved by the simple substitution of a couple with a throuple or polyamorous arrangement, but through the character of Lulu and her narrative arc. To draw another parallel between *Yurikuma* and the French Revolutionary motto *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternit*é, if Kureha stands for *liberté* (breaking free from societal constraints by rejecting the Invisible Storm and "striated love") and Ginko for *égalité* (overcoming the bear-human divide imposed by the Wall of Severance and her desire for control), then Lulu is *fraternité*—i.e., brotherhood, "the most opaque of the three terms in the Republican motto,"[72] as Badiou himself puts it—as Ginko's partner in Ginko's quest for the "promised kiss."

Lulu plays a crucial role in *Yurikuma Arashi* by helping to bring Ginko and Kureha together, while also developing her own bond of friendship and love, first with Ginko, and later with Kureha. Significantly, Lulu's individual subplot, explored in Episode 4 (*Watashi wa kisu ga moraenai*, "I Can't Get a Kiss"), revolves around sibling relationships, as we learn that she was once the princess of the Bear Kingdom and resented her baby brother, Milne, for inheriting the crown by virtue of being born a boy. Consumed by jealousy, she repeatedly sends him on futile quests for the "promised kiss," symbolized by a pot of honey, only to discard it again and again each time Milne brings it back to her (Figure 12). Frustrated by the boy's seemingly unconditional forgiveness and his persistent return despite her abuse, she grows increasingly exasperated. Tragically, one day, while searching for honey for Lulu, Milne is accidentally stung by a bee, which leads to his death. Although this restores Lulu's status as the center of attention in the Bear Kingdom, she finds herself haunted by regret, realizing that her lust for power was an empty pursuit that brought her no real happiness. This guilt fuels Lulu's devotion to Ginko as a form of atonement, even as she develops romantic feelings for Ginko, eagerly pursuing and flirting with her.

Figure 12. Lulu and her younger brother Milne in the Bear Kingdom, where Milne offers Lulu a jar of honey, symbolizing love. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 4 "Watashi wa kisu ga moraenai," 9:07 (above) and 16:30 (below). *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

In the latter half of the show, Lulu does threaten to congeal into the role of a love rival. In Episode 8, she tries to convince Ginko to abandon her love for Kureha and return with her to the bears' side of the Wall, where they could live together. Later, in a dramatic confrontation amid a storm, she reveals Ginko's sin to Kureha—that Ginko had the chance to save Sumika but didn't, allowing Mitsuko to eat her because Ginko's jealousy over Sumika's relationship with Kureha held her back from intervening. In the end, however, Lulu chooses selflessness over personal desire, sacrificing herself, in Episode 11, to protect Ginko from being shot by the Invisible Storm's leader and encourages Ginko to fulfil the "promised kiss" with Kureha. The obstacles along the enemy-rival spectrum are, thus, resolved when the "held-in-common prevail[s] over selfishness, the collective achievement over private self-interest."[73] After all, as Badiou puts it, love is a form of "minimal communism,"[74] and the Scene of Two

is “the smallest possible kernel of universality… that… attests to there being a common humanity… valid for all.”[75] Through her sacrifice, Lulu becomes the embodiment of such solidarity and genuine comradeship.

The Kureha/Ginko/Lulu triangle is distinct from the more “classic” love triangles in *Utena* and *Penguindrum* and defies straightforward categorization. Its evident carnality exceeds the boundaries of friendship, which typically lacks “resonances with bodily pleasure,”[76] yet it cannot be strictly classified as a *ménage à trois* or as love rivals, though both dynamics are explored (and overcome) throughout the show. It is also Lulu’s narration in the post-credit epilogue that closes *Yurikuma Arashi*’s final episode, overlaying the moment when Kureha and Ginko once again share the “promised kiss” (more on this in the following section), further affirming her inseparability from the Scene of Two. In this last sequence, Lulu sits under a tree in the Bear Kingdom, reading aloud from *The Moon Girl and the Forest Girl* picture book to Milne, in what is likely their reunion in the afterlife. Milne kisses his sister on the cheek, and Lulu smiles and promises that they will always be together, mirroring the fate of Ginko and Kureha.

This moment reinforces one of *Yurikuma*’s central themes: forgiveness—including self-forgiveness) of the unforgivable, particularly the sins committed by Ginko (*yokubō,* lust/dominance), Lulu (jealously), and Kureha (*gōman*, arrogance/pride)—and fidelity to the truth procedure of love, with the sacrifices it entails, as a form of atonement. In this context, fraternity, beyond its basic sense of brotherly or collective bond, becomes a force of reconciliation and mutual support which enables healing, overcoming divisions, and restoring the trust essential for bringing the Scene of Two into being, i.e., for love to persist and endure “violent argument, genuine anguish and separations.”[77] It is thus meaningful that in the final episode, Goddess Kumaria appears personified as Sumika, who, more than any other character in *Yurikuma Arashi*, is explicitly linked to (Class S) *ren’ai* and redemptive spiritual love, as opposed to sexual or erotic love.

Then, if the saying goes that “two is company, three is a crowd,” what do we make of this scenario, where the supposed “third wheel,” Lulu, fully integrates and becomes inseparable from the Scene of Two? The underlying message—that love has the power to bind not just a pair, but a whole amorous team or network—is a dynamic rarely explored in depth in fiction, with The Wachowskis’ *Sense8* (2015–2018) being one of the few notable exceptions. This theme is visually reinforced throughout *Yurikuma Arashi*, starting from the opening credits, set to Bonjour Suzuki’s soft, lullaby-like “Ano Mori de Matteru” (“I’ve Been Waiting in That Forest”). Unlike the openings of *Utena* and *Penguindrum*, where separation and missed connections are central motifs (such as hands reaching for each other only to slip away), *Yurikuma* centers on the haptic pleasures (rather than solely optic, scopophilic ones) of touch and bodily contact, though distinct from the sexual domination exercised by the show’s antagonists (e.g., Yurika, Mitsuko).

Scenes of Kureha, Ginko, and Lulu intertwined—naked, cuddling, kissing, and giving love bites—culminate in them lying together on a red curtain, holding hands as Bonjour Suzuki dreamily sings in French "*j'ai besoin de toi*" ("I need you") (Figure 13). Once again, Ikuhara plays with coexisting double meanings that, while distinct, do not necessarily contradict each other. In this case, the recurring imagery of honey carries associations with physical pleasure in Greek mythology (ambrosia, the sensory indulgent food of the gods) and biblical traditions (e.g., *Song of Songs* 4:11: "Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue"[78]). Yet, simultaneously, within Lulu and Milne's *fraternité* arc, honey takes on a different interpretation. Milne asks Lulu whether "true love" transforms into a star (which she confirms), comparing honey's golden hue, visible inside his spherical glass container (Figure 12), to the glow of a celestial orb,[79] and, in doing so, linking it to *ren'ai*, the (non-carnal) love between siblings, understood not only in the literal sense of blood relations but also as a broader concept of human kinship.

It is also interesting to note that *Yurikuma Arashi* carries the subtitle *Love Bullet*, another paradoxical juxtaposition. Just as honey's viscous sweetness can symbolize both erotic desires and spiritual connection, so "love can also be war."[80] Ginko had already conveyed this in Episode 8 when, as Kureha aims her rifle at her, she tells her, "the promised kiss was actually Kureha's bullet,"[81] declaring her willingness to embrace (potentially, fatal) violence as yet another form through which love binds, much like a bullet or projectile that connects the shooter and the one who is shot (considering, as well, that in the end the bullet is what shatters Kureha's reflection, ushering in the Scene of Two). As Badiou himself reminds us, love has the power to "cut diagonally through the most powerful oppositions and radical separations,"[82] the most extreme contradictions, because "conviction in love and politics [is] something one must never renounce."[83] In light of this, what conclusion does Ikuhara invite us to draw about the possible convergence between individual truth and a truth that concerns the collective—specifically, the relationship between love and politics?

Figure 13. The symbolism of honey and scenes of bodily contact between Ginko, Lulu, and Kureha in *Yurikuma Arashi*'s opening theme. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki wo akiramenai," 2:36-3:40. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

6. CODA: THE WORLD AWAKENS AND CHANGES WITH YOUR LOVE

Throughout this article, I have argued that, on the one hand, *Yurikuma Arashi* provides a textbook illustration of Badiou's philosophy of love as an event and a truth procedure, culminating in the staging of the Scene of Two as a theatrical tableau in Episode 12; and, on the other hand, that *Yurikuma* brings forth the latent queer potential of the Badiouan Scene of Two. If, as Louise Burchill puts it, for Badiou, "love is 'hetero' in its very principle insofar as it brings into play two strictly heterogenous sexuate positions, whatever the biological sex [or gender] of the parties involved,"[84] paradoxically, in order to make this "hetero" nature of love fully apparent, Ikuhara sets the story in a "yuriverse" where traditional notions of sexual difference do not apply. The focus shifts to the most universal "difference as such" in the human condition: the two radically distinct, binary positions of the self and the Other, which the bear comes to symbolize. Additionally, by integrating "third wheel" Lulu as an essential part of the Scene of Two, the series reaffirms the concept's flexibility and the significance of framing it beyond hetero-, homo-, and mononormative frameworks.

Speaking of expanding the Scene of Two, one final aspect remains—perhaps the very point where Ikuhara and Badiou appear to diverge the most. Badiou rejects the idea of a "politics of love," as, for him, they deal with fundamentally different truths: the collective, the masses, on one hand, and the individual, the Two, on the other.[85] In Badiou's words, "I call it [love] 'individual' because it interests no-one apart from the individuals in question,"[86] even if the truth love produces is universal, enduring,

and persistent.[87] On the contrary, in revolutionary politics, it is the collective itself that becomes engaged in a procedure of fidelity.[88] Yet Ikuhara appears to challenge this notion, or at the very least, has spent a significant part of his career crafting scenarios that depict a "politics of love," or a politics *because of* love, and *Yurikuma Arashi* is his most direct articulation of this theme to date. The fact that characters like Lulu explicitly tell Kureha, whispering adoringly in her ear, that "only love can change the world" *(suki dake ga kono sekai wo kaerareru)*[89] indicates that, in *Yurikuma*'s worldview, these two realms are not separate. Neither are such statements merely naive or inanimate; they are militant, reflecting how the Scene of Two and the fidelity entailed by the truth procedure of love feed into an anti-oppressive and anti-authoritarian political resistance.

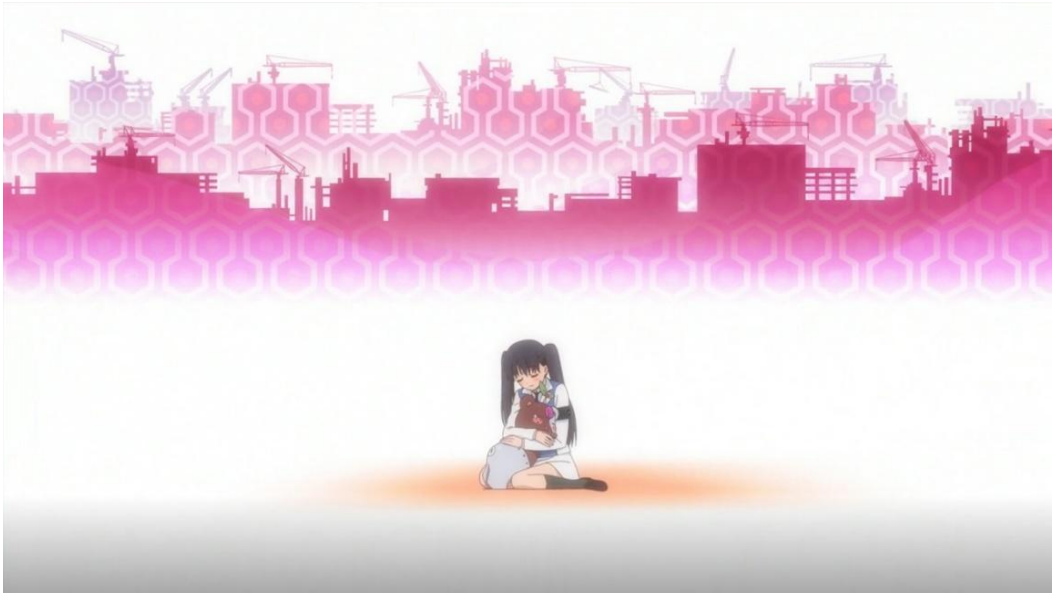

Figure 14. A depiction of love's power to politically transform the world at the end of *Yurikuma Arashi*. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 "Yuri kuma arashi," 21:33. *Yurikuma Arashi* © 2015 Kunihiko Ikuhara, Silver Link, Pony Canyon, and the Yurikuma Arashi Production Committee.

The final five minutes of the last episode of *Yurikuma Arashi* are all about love as a catalyst for revolutionary political transformation, which holds the potential to influence not only interpersonal relationships but also broader societal and political structures. After Kureha and Ginko's execution by the Invisible Storm, which occurs off-screen (we hear the gunfire and see the rifles firing, but their bodies are never shown), the scene cuts to an Invisible Storm rally. Among the crowd is Uchiko Ai, a tertiary character throughout the series and a member of the Invisible Storm, who operates a lily-shaped beam cannon used to shoot bears. After witnessing Kureha's transformation into a bear, Uchiko had refused to fire, seemingly affected by what she witnessed, showing pity and compassion for the couple. Actually, the way we, as viewers, see the Scene of Two—depicted as a picture book illustration (see "The Scene of Two")—is a flashback Uchiko has at that moment, while standing in the rally, rather than something happening in real time. This hints that not everyone perceived reality as Uchiko did, i.e., that the Scene of Two tableau might represent the story of Kureha and Ginko imprinting itself onto her. In

any case, the Scene of Two compels Uchiko to leave the Invisible Storm rally and rescue Konomi Yurikawa, a cyborg bear discarded in a box labeled "defective" near the Door of Friendship—an altruistic act of rebellion that will undoubtedly make her the next target of the forces of *danzetsu* (Figure 14).

In the epilogue, we see Kureha and Ginko, as human-bear hybrid magical girls, sharing a kiss in a metaphysical plane above the Wall of Severance, as a continuation of the Scene of Two, and Lulu and Milne in the Bear Kingdom (see "*Fraternité*"). Rather than seeing this as the afterlife, I interpret it in line with Badiou's assertion that "love invents a different way of lasting in life"[90]—they are lasting (enduring, persisting) elsewhere or elsewhen, beyond the strictly diegetic framework of the story. The final spoken line of the show comes from Lulu, whose voice is heard declaring: "No one knows where the girls' path leads. But that's okay. The world awakens and changes with your love."[91] This confirms that, for both Kunihiko Ikuhara and Alain Badiou, love is a leap into the eye of the storm, with the certainty that, no matter how much is lost or taken along the way, we will never become invisible—for while truth may not be constructed in a garden of roses, it might instead blossom in a flowerbed of lilies.

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[3] As explored in works ranging from *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984) to later works *I Love To You* (1996) and *To Be Two* (1998) and more recent writings such as *The Way of Love* (2004) or *Sharing the World* (2008).
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[5] Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Continuum, 2008), 184, http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy0904/2008017483.html.
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[8] Badiou, *Being And Event*, xii.
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[18] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 61.

[19] Badiou, 61.

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[42] Badiou, 92.

[43] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (Penguin Books, 2001), 245.

[44] Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Encore 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W W Norton & Co Inc, 1998), 7. Lacan is, of course, not denying the existence of women as people, but making a psychoanalytic point: "Woman" as a universal, symbolic

category—The Woman—does not exist; there are women, plural, but no singular, totalizing concept of Woman in the symbolic. This relates to his theory of sexual difference and the limits of representation in psychoanalysis.
[45] Alain Badiou, "Figures de la féminité dans le monde contemporain" (unpublished paper presented at a conference in Athens, Greece, 2011).
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[47] Louise Burchill, "Love," in *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. Steven Corcoran (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 186.
[48] Burchill, 186.
[49] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 17–21.
[50] *Yurikuma Arashi,* Episode 9 "Ano musume-tachi no mirai" (Silver Link, March 9, 2015), 11:44.
[51] In Japanese: *Honmono no suki wa watashi wo hitoribocchi ni shinai*. *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 11 "Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa" (Silver Link, March 23, 2015), 16:56.
[52] *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 11 "Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa" (Silver Link, March 23, 2015), 18:12.
[53] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 24–25.
[54] *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 "Yuri kuma arashi" (Silver Link, March 30, 2015), 15:13.
[55] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 25.
[56] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 223.
[57] In Deleuzian-Guattarian terms, smooth space embodies deterritorialization, which—as elaborated on in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980)—refers to the process by which structures, meanings, or identities are uprooted from their established contexts, fracturing and freeing them from repressive fixations and despotic arrangements whether conceptual, social, affective, or linguistic. Thus, the smooth space of *yuri shōnin* represents freedom, flux, and the lack of fixed limits; a space of potential, where movement and creativity are not confined by pre-established structures. In turn, the striation of *danzetsu* can be seen as a reterritorialization of *yuri*, re-establishing or reconfiguring those elements within a restrictive system by creating divisions or structures that impose order and control.
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[63] *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 1 "Watashi wa suki o akiramenai" (Silver Link, January 5, 2015), 5:58.
[64] *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 12 "Yuri kuma arashi" (Silver Link, March 30, 2015), 13:28.
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[66] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 32.
[67] Burchill, "Love," 186.
[68] While I have chosen to remain within the scope of Badiou's philosophy in this paper, I would nonetheless point to a possible post-Lacanian reading, as *Yurikuma Arashi* may contribute to psychoanalytic studies by proposing the "yuriverse" as this aforementioned deterritorialization of gender, thereby engaging Lacan's notion that "there's no such thing as a sexual relationship" (*On Feminine Sexuality*, 12).
[69] *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 11 "Watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa" (Silver Link, March 23, 2015), 16:39 – 18:23.
[70] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 22.
[71] In Japanese: *Suki kanaete ne. Yakusoku no kisu dekiru yo. Giko nara*. In *Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 11 "Watashi wa suki o akiramenai watashi-tachi no nozomu koto wa" (Silver Link, March 23, 2015), 21:33.
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[73] Badiou, 90.
[74] Badiou, 90.
[75] Burchill, "Love," 186.
[76] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 36.
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[80] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 60.
[81] In Japanese: *yakusoku no kisu wa, Kureha no sono jūdan no koto dattan da. Yurikuma Arashi*, Episode 8 "Hako no hanayome" (Silver Link, February 23, 2015), 19:37.
[82] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 29.
[83] Badiou, 76.

[84] Burchill, "Woman, the Feminine, Sexual Difference," 393.
[85] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 56–58.
[86] Badiou, *Being And Event*, 340.
[87] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 41.
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