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Hello, happy Sunday! I hope you're having a beautiful day and I hope you're having a beautiful weekend. Today, I'm going to be continuing my new media analysis series on non monogamy in film and TV. What do they get right, what is messy and they get wrong, in my opinion, let's jump in.

2001's *Bandits* shows how a polyamorous triad can form organically. *Bandits* is sort of a surreal Love Story heist movie, where Terry and Joe are bank robbers and partners in crime, who separately each fall in love with Kate. And people at the time hated it, in 2001 when this came out, in the US with two major US action stars Bruce Willis, Billy Bob Thornton, at the peaks of their career. Two or three years prior, they had just been in *Armageddon*, which is this giant apocalyptic action movie. very "USA number one saves the day" kind of movie.

It's like, "oh, the two of them are coming back together", except now there's no violence, there's no sex, there's very little suspense. And in fact, it's a vehicle to discuss very sensitive, nuanced, romantic and sensual topics and non monogamy. And it premiered in America one month after 9/11... baby, there was no hope. People were not in a headspace to be able to engage with this. So I really want to, some 23 years later, give *Bandits* its flowers.

I think the best way to explore the polyamory in *bandits* is by going through each of the relationships within the triad. Let's start with Terry and Joe because that's what the movie starts with. Terry and Joe are partners in crime. Joe is the dreamer. He is impulsive. He has charisma and charm. And he's the reason that they broke out of prison. It was not this long planned *Prison Break*. He just saw an opportunity to hop in a cement roller. Terry was like, "Oh, I guess we're doing this now". And in a lot of ways, that is what their dynamic is. Terry is a bit more anxious and shy. And so Joe helps propel him forward into risks that he would not take on his own.

Terry: We don't even have a plan. You have to have some kind of plan to rob a bank.

Terry is more of a details guy. And so together, they're able to execute more successful bank robberies, because it's not all just impulse and reactivity. There's thoughtfulness, there's planning and that is one of Terry's strengths. And the way they support each other forward, can also be the ways that they challenge each

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other. Not unlike when we're drawn to someone because they're different, but then we're fighting with that person because they're different. You know what I mean?

Terry: I'm trying to figure out why my partner here managed to spend \$200,000.

Joe: I met a very lovely young lady from the Netherlands.

Terry: Oh, Color me surprised.

Joe will just waste hundreds of thousands of dollars. And Terry's like, "every dollar that we spend as a dollar that we have to steal, can you be a little bit more grounded and a little bit more thoughtful about this?" similarly, Terry's concerns – which can be an asset during periods of impulsivity – if Joe always listened to Terry then they would never take any risks.

Now the media villainizes these bandits, calls them ruthless and dangerous, when in reality, they're pretty wholesome and cute. these people befriend their hostages.

Terry: Ladies, gentlemen, thank you very much for your cooperation. Please have a seat with everybody else. It's not going to take long. Monica?

Monica (child): I need to use the bathroom.

Terry: Ok, no more juice boxes Chloe, ok?

It is adorable. If anything, people kind of feel safe with these robbers.

So this is not just a partnership of convenience or necessity. They want to plan to stay working and living together. they imagine going down to Mexico and creating a new life together down there.

Joe: We buy the hotel, turn into a nightclub and resort. wear a tuxedo, sell margaritas to the tourists.

Terry: You'd do that? I mean, you and me?

Joe: Yeah.

Terry: Partners?

Joe: Partners.

They are designing their happily ever after together. They long for a life of legitimacy. And they long for that together. Its a really beautiful way to expand the definition of Platonic partnership. It's something that I see everywhere in non monogamy. As we continue to question "why does my romantic partner need to be the only one I build a life with?"

So Cate Blanchett is introduced with all this vibrant color, this lively music. this is the most alive the movie has ever been and that is not an accident. Now we're seeing

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some romantic comedy tropes, because up until this it had been like a buddy duo partners in crime adventure, in a sense. now we are getting to a woman in a domestic setting, unappreciated by her husband.

Kate's husband: Kate, I have a dinner tonight. Clients.

Kate: Tonight?

It's an interesting merging of these two genres in a lot of ways. And as she is singing "I need a hero," we keep cutting back and forth to Terry driving. They are about to have these two people meet. and how that usually goes in a rom com, "Oh, I'm bumping into you. I didn't see you there. I dropped all of my papers" right? They turn the volume up a little bit on that here, where she storms out of her home because she hates her life, and she wants to die, and then hits him with her car. And then she hits him with her car again. I think my actual notes were "meet cute / crash / she wants to die".

So the way that Kate was introduced I'm like, "is she gonna be this manic pixie dream girl?" If you're not familiar with the Manic pixie dream partner trope, its a very erratic and unpredictable, outgoing, vibrant, charismatic person. the function of them, as a character, is not to have their own internal world. it is to show up in the protagonists life, change that person's life, bring them out of their shell or make them have a realization. And then the Manic pixie dream partner fucks off. and I was really worried that's what they were going to do with the entirety of the genius of acting that is Cate Blanchett. I was like, "Are you really gonna waste her?" Luckily, I was pleasantly surprised.

Terry is panicked, he doesn't know what to do. So he takes her back to their hideout. in an unlikely turn of their norm, He's the one to impulsively do something that then radically changes their trajectory. But the first duo, the first person to fall for Kate and vice versa, that is Joe. their first interaction, he sees her in a way that her husband has not seen her in years. But I didn't take this so deeply at first because I'm like, "Well, Joe, throughout the movie thus far has been a lady's man", right?

But pretty immediately when she is saying that night that she's angry at her life, that she feels hopeless and has nothing left to look forward to, He inspires her. He gives her hope, he makes her feel alive again. And it's mutual. It's kind of corny. They're saying song lyrics to each other. And he starts quoting some poetry that he admittedly doesn't really understand. And then they start making out and, instantly fireworks.

But what they don't do well together is slowness, or thoughtfulness or planning. You know what I mean? they aren't really *that* when they get together. its just off to the races with heat, passion and fire. And Terry's Not a fan.

Terry: Don't think I didn't see the look in your eye over there, moving her hair and all that kind of stuff. I'm implementing a 24 hour rule from now on. Okay, it's in effect. 24 hours and not a minute longer, missy.

Like, "do not threaten what he and I have planned together, you gotta be gone after 24 hours, I'm making an executive decision here". Ideally, what would happen here is they would talk about different ways to ease Terry's concerns. That's also a more vulnerable way to go about it, "I'm not in charge of you, I obviously don't have the power to control who you are and what you're doing and what you're building together. And I'm scared." I try to go more the request for care route, rather than the exertion of control. I usually see that play out in a lot more amicable and collaborative, and sustainable way.

Terry: We're kind of at a crossroads here. And I want you to be very clear about my meaning.

Joe: I'm changing the 24 hour rule.

When I tell you this is not sustainable, the minute that Joe and Kate have this fiery, sexual experience, then Joe says "I want to go do away with a 24 hour rule". Right? So we don't want to ignore the valid reasons and fears and whatever that resulted in such a request. And we do want to push back on the request itself. If that feels like it's not the right answer either.

You might think from here, how the hell did Terry and Kate fall in love? Is that completely out of left field? Yes and no. On one of these robberies, it goes a little south, the cops are on their tail, and they wind up just going off in different directions. To keep a low profile, Kate and Terry go to a motel for the evening. And we see them start to really surprisingly, emotionally connect. This part does not necessarily come out of nowhere, because in the beginning when Joe saw Kate's Beauty and her desirability, Terry also saw her emotional reality.

Terry: I think you're bored. I think you're bored with your life. And you're expecting that some miracle is gonna drop out of the sky and suddenly make everything better, or at least hopeful because you lost hope a long time ago.

Before he ever has any desire for her, he challenges her and calls her out, and sees her pretty clearly on an emotional level. And we see Kate in three versions of herself. a common device used in visual storytelling, if someone is of multiple minds about something, or if someone has several versions of themselves in conflict at once. We

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see several versions of them on screen, using mirrors. She is confronting who she's representing herself to be, who she thinks she is, and who she actually is. And he sees who she actually is.

So I think that initially set the tone for what Terry and Kate do as a dyad without Joe. they are sensitive and soft and cozy, right? She even tries to bring some of her intensity. He's very nervous and he's shy, and she's like, "let me scare the sneezes out of you!"

Kate: Hey, you want me to scare you?

Terry: No, that's gonna you know, that's –

Kate: Blah!

He's like "I hated that, please don't do that." when she's with Joe he feeds her fire, it's fire and fire, and then they explode. Which is its own kind of beauty. But with Terry it's almost like calming, creamy, soothing of the heat and fire that she is so prone to. Her softer side comes out and then this very sweet, very gentle connection forms.

So I would suspect a non insignificant amount of viewers watching this film would emasculate Terry in this situation, would see the framing of two people wearing face masks, painting each other's nails pink, as like "they are girlfriends" under the cis/het framing of you know, "this is what women do together". This is a very gentle, soft man, his masculinity is not harmed at all by wearing pink nails, and he's very emotionally open. And as far as the movie has told us, they are both cis and straight. They are breaking the rules of how a man and a woman on screen are "supposed" to fall for each other. And I love that.

They do wind up sleeping together. And I think what's interesting is that the movie doesn't show a sex scene for either duo. These are the only two sexual relationships among the three people. And we don't see sex. we barely see kissing. the fact that they will touch on non monogamy, and explore these non traditional configurations. The fact that sex is not an element of that is refreshing to me.

The reunion is kind of interesting, because Joe says "I missed you". And it's unclear who he's looking at or who he's talking to, which I'm sure was a deliberate choice.

Terry: Yeah, we missed you.

Kate: We missed you too.

Setting the tone for actually how they all feel about each other. And yet, because this is a kind of configuration that nobody has been in before, there is still that reliance on old social scripts, that only one person should win.

Terry: Let me keep her, okay?

Joe: I can't do that.

Terry: Why, Joe?

Kate: You boys sure you don't wanna kick my tires first? Unless you think these are incredibly shallow solutions to a complicated problem that may require a little delicacy and understanding.

What do? you know? it becomes this choice of, "Do I break my own heart in one respect so that I can preserve another part of my heart? Or can we imagine something different, that actually we can do what we want to do?"

In a moment, I'll get into how this trio does imagine something different. But first, I have to talk to you about how the film uses color. because it is not subtle, I'll tell you what. they even have establishing shots of this word "color" on the side of a building. The word "color" is front and center several times. And I was wondering, why are they being so heavy handed? I think it's because they changed so many expectations in this movie. They're not doing a heist movie the way you're supposed to, they're not doing a romance movie the way you're supposed to, all the dialogue is strange, All the people act weird. So if they use really exaggerated or surreal color schemes, that doesn't really register as being all that strange in the universe of the film, because a lot of things are strange.

There are four main colors that come up over and over again: red, green, blue, and pink. Red, green, and blue are primary colors. They are the basis for most of our contemporary color theory. Pink is a little bit of a wild card, and that's not by accident.

So, red. Usually you'll see films use red as danger or passionate intensity. But that's not how this movie uses it, true to form. In fact, I think there's a good case to say that Bandits uses red to signify false danger, that is actually a safe situation. The first car that they steal is red – if you don't count the cement truck that they use to escape the prison – and they stop a woman who smiles and is charmed by Joe, and just happily gets out of the car and gives it to him. It is not violent. It is not antagonistic. In fact, it seems like a nice experience for her, even though they drive away in her car.

One of their first hostages is a redhead named Cherry, who's pretty chill about it, doesn't call the cops, and even helps them escape. Some of their next hostages are an entire family that they're eating dinner with. it kind of gives off an awkward vibe of two people that you don't know that well, but not of two dangerous violent people holding you hostage. and one of the kids – who is actually Bruce Willis' real kid by the way, both of these kids are – one of the kids says "the sauce is too red."

Scout (child): The sauce is too red. Yes it is, it's too red.

What a weird – what does that mean? Like there's no reason to have that line of dialogue, to call attention to the color in the text, unless you're trying to make us connect some dots here. And of course Kate is a vibrant redhead. she seems dangerous to their dynamic, and yet at the end of the day, helps them do a better job at robbing banks and brings them ultimately closer together.

In fact, it's notable there's only two times in this film that Kate is wearing a wig, that she is covering up her red hair. And those are two times of actual danger. One is on a robbery that winds up going wrong, they almost get caught. and the second time, she wears a brunette wig when she separates from the two of them, she thinks she has to break it off. That's when they say “we want you back, we miss you.” the next time we see her with them, she's a redhead again.

But no conversation about Kate would be complete without talking about the color blue. At first I thought this was “Kate's color”. She's introduced with it, she's wearing blue, when she and Joe take off to the beach, it is a very blue beach. But upon rewatch I saw there are plenty of scenes where Kate is nowhere to be found and there is still this blue. It only ever comes up when there is passion, when there is heat, which is also using the color differently than other films use. Blue is often a calming soothing color, but no, here there's fiery passion, they're falling in love. or intense anger, it's a fist fight. Some of the only violence that we see in the movie is under this blue light.

Now I'm locked in, now I'm like “what do these other two colors mean?” So if blue is passion and emotion, we tend to see green contrasting that as rationality or logic. All over the frame, when they are robbing a bank, when they are going according to plan. We see green dominating the frame in their hideout spot, when they are safe and hidden from the cops. And then Kate with her prominent blue and red enters to interrupt that color. And towards the end, when Terry and Joe are having a conflict about both loving Kate, we see blue and green fighting in the frame. or cutting back and forth between just blue and just green, logic and emotion. And notably, Kate interrupts this as well, descending down cloaked in green, to give an appeal to reason.

So that's the primary colors, but what the hell does pink have to do with anything? Why throw in a curveball that doesn't fit with the others. Unless they wanted pink to represent the unexpected. Pink pops up when things don't go according to plan. It's even arguably the *reason* that things don't go according to plan.

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On the robbery where they almost get caught. The reason is because their getaway driver Harvey gets distracted by a woman wearing pink boots.

Harvey: Pink...

Kate: The girl?

Harvey: Pink boots...

Similar to the pasta sauce comment, the only reason that dialog would exist is for the viewer to take note of the color. then we see pink all over the hotel that Terry and Kate go to when they fall in love, another curveball, another unexpected plot twist.

Hotel manager: I've never seen so much pink in my goddamn life.

There are plenty of films where the creators are not very intentional, right? Where they do things that, actually it is a coincidence. But every time I see something like this, which is such a specific choice, and they go hard, why did they choose it? What is the frame trying to tell us about cinematic elements or emotional tone? I think it can be very fun and nerdy and sometimes more of a satisfying viewing experience to really think critically, when we notice that sort of thing.

Okay, that's enough film nerd stuff. Let's explore this three person relationship.

Kate: What if I don't want to choose? I don't think I can. And maybe that's scary or against the laws of, you know, man or whatever. I mean, you're outlaws, right? I guess I'm an outlaw, too.

Why can't we, all three of us together, find some sort of situation that works? why does there have to be some possessiveness or competition in our connection? we're doing everything else different than we're supposed to, why not do this differently too?

What they don't do together, as far as we know, is sex or romance. because the two men in their partnership don't have that. So the triad doesn't really have that either. And the movie reinforces here that each connection is its own thing. Because when Kate is alone, with either of the men, she's a very different Kate. What Kate and Joe have is very passionate and intense. What Kate and Terry have is very sweet and nurturing. And what Terry and Joe have is a combination of those two things, albeit not in a romantic way.

Now, the big conflict between them is one of, "what is this? and what are we doing?" She's really sad that their dynamic seems to be at odds, to the point that she wants to remove herself.

Kate: I can't watch you do this to each other. I just, I, I can't. And yes, I'm aware that this is entirely my own fault. It's just, I can't choose between you. It's over.

She would rather end her two relationships with them, than have this friendship fall apart. It's very common that in a triad, if two people were in a relationship first, there can be this sort of "last one in, first one out" mentality as a default. so anytime we're just assuming, "oh, well, I must matter less because I'm newer". Or, "we would not be having this fight if it weren't for this newer person", when in reality most of the time the fight comes from some pre existing conditions, that this dynamic is shining a spotlight on. you know what I mean? Can there just be some thoughtfulness and some slowness in final decision making around breakups like that? that can minimize regret in a lot of ways. And in this case, all three of them regret that. it was a knee jerk response that she thought would heal. And in fact, nobody liked it.

Terry: What I'm trying to say, is we both miss you.

Joe: Equally.

Terry: Equally, we both miss you equally.

Joe: We take full responsibility. Really.

The two men come back together, reaffirm their friendship, and realize "we miss you Kate." And just in case we weren't sure that all three are committed to being a trio, now we see Kate's estranged, sort of comically awful husband on screen.

Kate's husband: Kate, if you're listening, I want you to know that the house is waiting for you. right here, where you belong.

You belong at home, the house is waiting for you, not even "I'm waiting for you"...

Kate's husband: And the house misses you, I miss you.

Kate: You have no idea where I belong.

Joe: You belong here.

Terry: Yeah. with us.

They say "you belong with us". There is a peace, there is an acceptance, to the fact that "we both love you. And we both want you to be here with us, while we continue doing what we're doing too."

She was so unhappy doing what you're supposed to do, to get married, to get a house, she was following the role that was pre written for her. and was miserable, and wanted to die in that. But now she's in this triad, that is so confusing and new, and somewhat volatile for that reason. And also, there's so much love and warmth. There is collaboration and teamwork and no prescriptive roles that anybody has to play.

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And in the triad is when we see the biggest contrast between the outside perspective, and the reality. people think she's a victim and a hostage, that she's in danger from these two very "violent" men, right? And, that clearly ain't the case.

But what's also cool, is they use that misconception to their advantage. she ultimately decides to "turn them in" and get the \$1 million reward. and then Joe and Terry fake their own death in a fake shootout. So the cops are no longer looking for them. With this extra million dollars funding their lifestyle, they get to go down to Mexico and have their happily ever after together.

This film is not for everyone, right? Like I said, it's an odd one. It can be a challenging, even confusing viewing experience, because it is so different in so many ways. And it's also an overtly polyamorous story with a happy ending. It is the formation of a triad without agenda or unicorn hunting. It just sort of happens. and they negotiate it as they go.

So whether you're polyamorous or not, I'd be interested to know your thoughts on this film. especially though, if you're in a non monogamous triad. I'd be curious if you see yourself on screen. Thanks so much for being here, and I'll see you next time.

xxx