

THE RED THREAD

The red thread is the element found in every layer, section and cycle of a project that draws the whole together with unity and harmony. The red thread is the connection between parts of and within the project. Unity comes from the uninterrupted presence of the red thread. Harmony is achieved when the red thread is woven into multiple layers of a project from the birth of the concept throughout the planning, execution and all the parts between.

I met the red thread in a class on directing for film. The list of responsibilities for a film director is endless beginning long before the cameras are rolling and lasting long after the crew has packed up and gone on to other films. The director's challenge is to keep track of the details concerning every department of the production and understand how it will affect the final film always keeping in mind the chief responsibility of telling the story in the most effective way possible.

It's up to the director to hold to one end of the thread while weaving it into every decision, every conversation, every scene, every take, every relationship and moment. To add a bit of complexity, the scenes that make up a film are rarely photographed in the order that you see them in the theater. The logistics of locations, actor's schedules or the seasons may force the director to capture the film's climactic ending in the middle of the shooting schedule. The director must recreate from the script the setting and emotion of the final scene knowing that it may be days or weeks before the scenes just preceding the finale are captured on film. The presence of the red thread is essential if the film is to make sense once all the pieces are put together in sequential order. A well directed film will not seem directed. This is a sign of an unbroken red thread that the audience never sees.

The red thread may take on a physical form or exist as an idea or emotional state. In front of the movie camera the red thread may be something physical like a single light which is present in every scene and always filtered to appear blue. In one scene it may be a street light. In another scene it may be a neon sign blinking in the window of a bar. In another scene it may be the nightlight beside a child's bed. It wouldn't be something that the audience is forced to notice, but it lives on the peripheral and gives unity to the film without being named. Behind the camera the red thread may be the attitude of the director when dealing with the crew and situations.

A single red thread may appear in different forms to different people. The attitude of the director may prompt a crewmember to perform their task with an enthusiasm that promotes the spirit of the red thread and weaves it into another yet layer of the team's consciousness.

Whatever form the red thread takes, the key is that it is continuous and consistent though it may be invisible. The red thread is not present by accident, but neither does it have to be broadcast. People on your crew/team will feel it, see it, and react to it, without it being named.

I would like to think that the red thread at the beginning and the red thread at the end could be placed side by side or even tied together with every aspect of the project present within the circle. If you don't see a red thread in your project, check to see if each component of the project, no matter its significance, is being given equal attention, enthusiasm, energy, commitment...The red thread never runs out but it's up to you to pick it up and carry it with you, and pass it on to others.

A tapestry made of every other color may make a single strand of red thread hard to see or find yet it is there throughout from beginning to end.

A gift and story from Alicia Bramlett, film maker and artist
During an MG Taylor workshop, 1999