Chapter 4: Cinematography

Learning Objectives: After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the differences among a *shot*, a *setup*, and a *take*;
- Understand the role that the *director of photography* plays in film production;
- Describe the basic characteristics of the cinematographic properties of the shot: *film stock, lighting, and lenses*;
- Understand the basic elements of composition within the frame, including implied proximity to the camera, depth, camera angle and height, scale, and camera movement;
- Define the *rule of thirds*;
- Describe any shot in a movie by identifying:
  - Its proximity to its subject,
  - The angle of the camera,
  - The nature of camera movement, if any, within the shot, and,
  - The speed and length of the shot.
- Understand the ways in which *special effects* are created, and the various roles that special effects play in movies.

What is Cinematography?

*Cinematography* is the process of capturing moving images on film or some other medium. The word comes to us from three Greek roots: *kinesis*—meaning “movement,” *photo*—meaning “light,” and *graphia*—meaning “writing.” But, the word itself was only coined after motion pictures themselves were invented. Cinematography is closely related to still photography, but its methods and technologies clearly distinguish it from its static predecessor.

Although cinematography might seem to exist solely to please our eyes with beautiful images, it is in fact an intricate language that can [and in the most complex and meaningful films does] contribute to a movie’s overall meaning as much as the story, mise-en-scène, and acting do.

Vocabulary

- *Cinematography*