

### In the frame

*Mise en scène* is a French term derived from the theatre. Pronounced 'meez ahn sen', it literally means 'putting in the frame'. Everything we see within the camera's frame comes under the auspices of *mise en scène*: actors and their performances; lighting; costume; setting; coloured lens effects; theatrical blocking (the organisation of actors in space) and props. This all combines to give the viewer an image of cinematic space.

### Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important elements of producing realistic or non-realistic images. The most common lighting set-up is known as three-point lighting. It uses three lights to simulate a three-dimensional image.

- **The key light:** the brightest of the three, this highlights details on the face by casting shadow on the unlit portion.
- **The fill light:** usually positioned on the other side from the key, this light is softer and less bright, which lessens the effect of shadowing on the face.
- **The back light:** located behind the subject, the back light gives the subject the appearance of depth by creating a haloing effect around the subject. This means that the figure won't appear as a flat part of the background.

This is an important lighting technique that helps to create the illusion of a three-dimensional image. Remember that the film image is only a flat image projected onto a flat screen. Lighting is used to give the image the appearance of depth. Without this the viewer wouldn't perceive it as a 'real' image.

Lighting can be either high key or low key, depending on the emotional effect that the director and cinematographer are looking for. High-key (or high-contrast) lighting uses harsh light and black shadows to show a dark, dangerous and corrupt world. This is particularly popular in film noir. Low-key lighting is often used to manipulate mood. Horror films often use low-key lighting to hide monsters in shadows. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir: Robert Wise 1951) low-key lighting is used to suggest on-screen violence as our heroine is menaced just by the shadow of the massive robot Gort.

### Tip

Keep in mind that once filmed, the actor is an object on-screen. They are surfaces composed of signs and symbols, and the viewer will tend to read them as such.