



Film Theory

What Films Do

Theory

: an idea or set of ideas that is intended to explain facts or events

: an idea that is suggested or presented as possibly true but that is not known or proven to be true

Theoretical

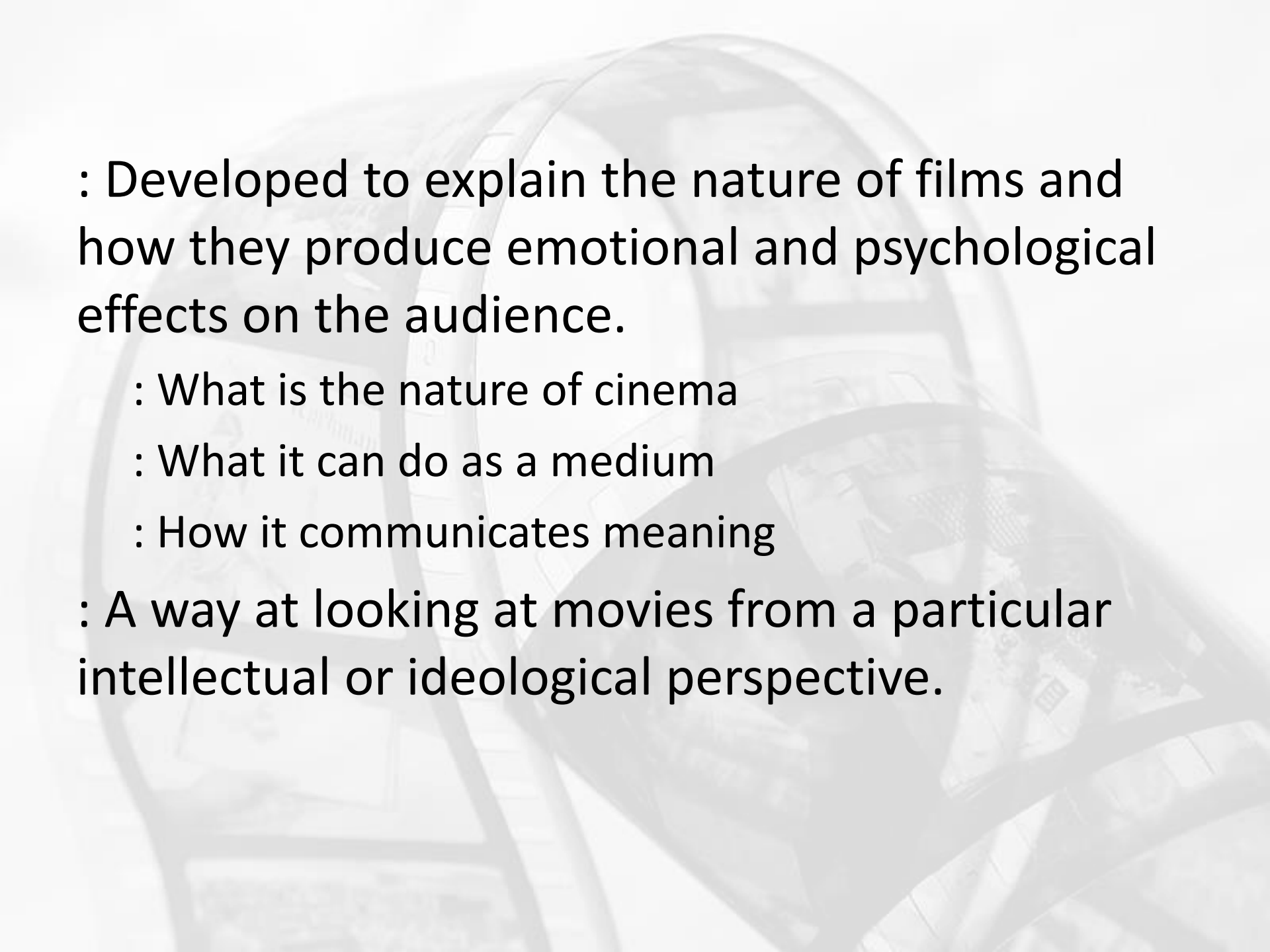
: relating to what is possible or imagined rather than to what is known to be true or real

: relating to the general principles or ideas of a subject rather than the practical uses of those ideas

Film Theory

: Frameworks developed over time in order to understand the way films are made and received/viewed.

- borrows from philosophy, art theory, social sciences, psychology, literary theory, linguistics, economics, and political science



: Developed to explain the nature of films and how they produce emotional and psychological effects on the audience.

- : What is the nature of cinema

- : What it can do as a medium

- : How it communicates meaning

: A way at looking at movies from a particular intellectual or ideological perspective.

(Some) Major Theories

- Auteur
- Genre*
- Gender (feminist, queer)
- Formalist*
- Realist
- Psychoanalytical
- Marxist

* *explanation slides to follow*

Genre Theory

- Concerned with identifying and analyzing the characteristics of particular genres
 - And the adhering or not adhering to the genre conventions (conservative / progressive)
- A generic approach looks at a film as a representative of a genre, comparing it with other films from the same genre and finding meaning by identifying shared symbolic motifs or variations from the expected formula

Formalist Theory

- Sees cinematic form as the most important source of a movie's meaning
- Attempts to explain how the filmmakers' techniques/style create the movie's layered meanings
- Looks at how the ingredients of a film affect the outcome
- Highlights film's ability to influence an audience emotionally and intellectually

- While other approaches often use some degree of external evidence to analyze a film, a formalist approach will focus primarily on internal evidence.
 - Analysis of specific formal technique might focus on a film's use of mise en scene, framing, camera movements, editing, sound in relation to the image, etc. - noting the effect of those techniques on how the viewer perceives the scenes and interprets what they mean
 - A narrative analysis would look at the way the plot presents the story – forcing the viewer to see things at certain times and have reactions that might be different if presented some other way

- A theory of film study that is focused on the formal, or technical, elements of a film: i.e., the style of the lighting, scoring, sound and set design, shot composition, editing, etc.
- For example, the single element of editing:
 - A formalist might study how standard Hollywood "continuity editing" creates a more comforting effect and noncontinuity or jump-cut editing might become more disconcerting or volatile
- The synthesis of several elements (like: editing, shot composition, and music) can also be analyzed