TOM GUNNING'S "CINEMA OF ATTRACTIONS" AS THE PROTO-PATTERN OF CONTEMPORARY INTERACTIVE CINEMATOGRAPHY

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V. Myslavskyi, Ye. Subota, V. Chaikovska, B. Farafonov. Tom Gunning's "Cinema of attractions" as the proto-pattern of contemporary interactive cinematography

The purpose of the article is to prove the continuity between the key principles of Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions" and the mechanics of contemporary interactive cinema, analyzing how the logic of spectacle, direct appeal, and affective impact is technologically reinterpreted in the era of digital media.

The research methodology is determined by its interdisciplinary nature and relies on a comprehensive set of tools, including: first, a media archaeological approach that allows us to abandon linear models of progress and analyze the cyclical repetition of media forms, revealing the connection between early cinema and contemporary digital media; second, a comparative analysis used to compare the aesthetic principles of "cinema of attractions" and the functional mechanics of interactive cinema; and, third, a conceptual analysis that involves the application of Tom Gunning's theoretical approach to interpret the evolution of the viewer/user experience.

The results. The article proves that the central mechanics of interactive cinema "the point of choice" functions as a modern attraction. It is determined that the principle of "exhibitionism" is implemented through an interface that destroys narrative immersion and demonstrates its own constructedness. The affective impact is created not so much by the visual spectacle as by the psychological tension of the act of decision-making itself. It is analyzed that the mechanism of "limited agency" is not a drawback, but a key aesthetic technique for creating an attraction effect. It is also stated that the transformation of a public, shared attraction into an individualized, private, and data-driven algorithmic choice.

The scientific novelty. For the first time in domestic film studies, an attempt has been made at a systemic analysis that establishes a direct connection between the theory of "cinema of attractions" and the specific mechanics of modern interactive cinema. The work fills the research gap between film studies, which studies attractions mainly in non-interactive media, and game studies, which analyze interactivity outside the context of film studies. A new theoretical approach to understanding interactive cinema as a cinematic, rather than a purely gaming phenomenon, is proposed.

The practical significance. The results obtained can be applied in the modernization of curricula for the professional training of multimedia directors, producers and scriptwriters of interactive projects. The materials of the work are of practical value for researchers of the theory and history of cinema, modern screen culture and can be used in the development of teaching aids and lecture courses dedicated to interactive audiovisual arts.

Keywords: *interactive cinema, cinema of attractions, Tom Gunning, mechanics of choice, media archaeology, agency, interface, database, algorithmic attraction.*

В. Н. Миславський, Є. В. Субота, В. Б. Чайков-ська, Б. Я. Фарафонов. «Кіноатракціон» Тома Ган-нінга як протопатерн сучасного інтерактивного кінематографу

Здійснена спроба довести спадковість між клю-човими принципами «кіна атракціонів» Т. Ганнінга та механіками сучасного інтерактивного кіно, про-аналізувавши, як логіка видовища, прямого звер-нення та афективного впливу технологічно пере-осмислюється в епоху цифрових медіа. Доведено,

що центральна механіка інтерактивного кіно «точка вибору» функціонує як сучасний атракціон. Визначено, що принцип «екзибіціонізму» реалізується через інтерфейс, який руйнує наративне занурення та демонструє власну сконструйованість. Зазначено, що афективний вплив створюється не стільки візуальним видовищем, скільки психологічним напруженням самого акту прийняття рішення. Проаналізовано, що механізм «обмеженої агентності» є не недоліком, а ключовим естетичним прийомом для створення атракціонного ефекту. Також констатовано трансформацію публічного, спільного атракціону на індивідуалізований, приватний та керований даними алгоритмічний вибір.

Ключові слова: *інтерактивне кіно, кіно атракціонів, Том Ганнінг, механіка вибору, медіаархеологія, агентство, інтерфейс, база даних, алгоритмічна атракція.*

The relevance of the study is linked to the rapid spread of interactive media forms and, as a result, the acute academic need for their theoretical understanding. At the same time, the question of applying the analytical tools of classical film theory to the analysis of contemporary digital narratives remains underdeveloped. The very emergence of interactive cinema poses a significant challenge to established historiographical models, in particular to those linear and teleological narratives that view the history of cinema as a movement from primitive spectacle to complex narrative. This, in turn, requires a correction of the research perspective and a search for alternative, non-linear genealogies that take into account the cyclical nature of media forms. It is worth noting that there is already a tradition in film studies of rethinking the concept of "cinema of attractions" for the analysis of new media (e.g., Strauven, 2006), which confirms its theoretical stability and adaptability. Therefore, the relevance of this study lies in the need to expand this existing tradition. To this end, the article sets out to prove the continuity between Tom Gunning's principles of "cinema of attractions" and the mechanics of contemporary interactive cinema by applying Gunning's theory to a systematic analysis of the mechanics of "choice mechanics" in particular.

The statement of the problem. Despite the significant development of the theory of "cinema of attractions" in film studies, its application to the analysis of contemporary interactive cinema remains fragmentary. In contemporary scientific discourse, there is disciplinary fragmentation in approaches to studying this phenomenon. On the one hand, traditional film studies analyse the origins of spectacular forms and their evolution in post-classical cinema. In contrast, contemporary interactive narratives are studied mainly within the framework of new media theory and game studies, where the focus is on the concepts of agency and immersion. This disciplinary fragmentation leads to the phenomenon of interactive cinema being analyzed using theoretical tools that do not fully take into account its hybrid nature. Thus, approaches based on game theory often ignore cinematic heritage and the aesthetics of spectacle. At the same time, traditional film studies face the limitations of their tools when analyzing the specifics of user interaction. Although there are a significant number of works at the intersection of film studies and game studies, there is a lack of systematic research focused specifically on analyzing the mechanics of "choice mechanics" as a modern embodiment of the principles of attractions.

Analysis of current research and publications. Systemic analysis establishing a direct link between the theory of "cinema of attractions" and the specific mechanics of contemporary interactive cinema are currently underrepresented in scientific discourse. At the same time, there is a significant number of related works that confirm the efficacy of Gunning's concept in analyzing contemporary media. The most relevant area is works that develop the idea of a "rebooted" attraction. A striking example is the collection edited by Wanda Strauwen, *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded (2006)*. In the same collection, Frank Kessler proposes to consider the attraction as a specific "dispositif" — a configuration of technology and viewer position oriented towards direct display rather than narrative immersion (Kessler, 2006, p. 59). Other researchers directly compare early and modern entertainment technologies. Je Hyung Ryu draws parallels between early film tricks (e.g., Méliès) and contemporary digital effects, arguing that both types of spectacle function as attractions, demonstrating the capabilities of technology (Ryu, n.d., pp. 2, 5, 8). At the same time, there are alternative approaches to the analysis of interactive narratives that allow us to highlight the specificity of

the research proposed in this article. For example, Clara Fernández-Vara's (2019) work offers an analysis through the prism of rhythm and tempo. She examines how the alternation of different types of tasks creates a rhythmic structure that influences the player's experience (Fernández-Vara, 2019, pp. 115–116). This approach is productive for understanding game aesthetics, but it focuses on the overall structure of the experience rather than on the affective function of the moment of choice itself as an attraction-spectacle with intrinsic value, which is the focus of this work. Thus, a review of current publications confirms that although scholars actively apply Gunning's theory to the analysis of contemporary media, a systematic study of how specific principles of attraction are realized through the mechanics of the "point of choice" in interactive cinema remains an open scientific task.

The purpose of the study is to prove the functional and aesthetic continuity between the key principles of Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions" and the mechanics of "choice mechanics" in contemporary interactive cinema. To achieve this goal, the study will reveal the content of the key principles of the theory of "cinema of attractions", analyze their implementation in non-narrative cinema, and establish a direct connection with the mechanics of contemporary interactive cinema.

The methodology of the study. The methodological basis of the study consists of general scientific and specialized methods. General scientific methods include comparative and conceptual analyzis. The key specialised method is the media-archaeological approach, which enables a non-linear analyzis of media history, revealing the cyclicality and continuity between cultural phenomena that are, at first glance, distant from each other.

The primary thesis. The key principles of "cinema of attractions" formulated by Tom Gunning remain relevant in the age of digital media. Central to our analysis are the principles of exhibitionism, affective impact ("aesthetics of wonder") and the priority of the moment over the plot. It is important to clarify the meaning of the term "exhibitionism" in the context of Gunning's theory. It has nothing to do with the psychoanalytic concept of scopophilia or voyeurism. Instead, Gunning uses this term to describe cinema that "demonstrates its visibility" by

openly addressing the viewer and acknowledging their presence (for example, through an actor looking at the camera). This is cinema that is oriented towards spectacle rather than immersion in a fictional world (Gunning, 1990, pp. 381–382). Important for this study is Gunning's own position that "cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground" (ibid., p. 61). This thesis about the "underground" became the basis for further research. In particular, researcher Erkki Huhtamo points to the central role of the interface in new media, which in itself becomes a form of attraction — a "self-conscious, exhibitionist gesture" (Huhtamo, 2006). Such a "reboot" of the concept creates a solid theoretical basis for analyzing the continuity between early cinema and interactive media forms. The methodology of media archaeology, which is the basis of this study, is not monolithic. As Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka point out, there are different traditions within the discipline (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011, p. 3). On the one hand, there is the "cultural" wing (Thomas Elsaesser), which focuses on human experience and the cultural meanings generated by media (Elsaesser, 2016, p. 30). On the other hand, there is the "techno-materialist" school (Wolfgang Ernst, Jussi Parikka). Ernst insists that media archaeology should analyze the "agency of the machine itself" and its internal, operational logic — signal, code and time (Ernst, 2013, p. 56). Parikka expands on this line of thought by exploring the material layers of technology (Parikka, 2012, pp. 68–71). In our opinion, the analysis of such a hybrid phenomenon as interactive cinema requires a purposeful synthesis of both approaches. To consider it only through a "cultural" prism means ignoring the fact that the "mechanics of choice" is a specific technological mechanism (interface, algorithm). At the same time, analyzing it purely as a set of algorithmic operations means losing sight of the main purpose of this apparatus: the creation of a specific affective, human experience. Therefore, within the proposed synthesis, the technological apparatus of the "point of choice" is considered as a direct producer of affect. We analyze how the technological implementation of interaction (video pause, interface appearance, timer start) directly and inevitably generates a "human" experience

(tension, surprise, sense of responsibility). Thus, it can be argued that in interactive cinema, the technological operation is a cultural experience. Analyzing the cinema of the period 1895–1906, it can be argued that it was in this cinema that the principles of "cinema of attractions" were most clearly manifested. As Tom Gunning notes, a classic example of affective influence is the reaction to the film "The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station", where the physiological shock of the approaching object was important (Gunning, 2004, p. 118). The principle of prioritizing the moment over the plot is embodied in Georges Méliès' trick films, which were a "series of views" or magical "acts" (ibid., p. 60). Méliès himself noted that the script was for him only "a pretext for stage effects", which is direct evidence of the dominance of spectacle over narrative logic (Gunning, 1990, p. 386). The priority of spectacle for its own sake over narrative integration is inherently exhibitionist, since the goal of such spectacle is to directly appeal to the viewer, to surprise and shock, rather than to immerse them in a story. The exhibitionist nature of such cinema, in our opinion, was reinforced by the context in which it was shown. As film historian Charles Musser points out, films were shown in vaudeville theatres or at fairs as one of many acts, which normalized this mode of reception and accustomed the viewer to perceive cinema precisely as a technological wonder (Musser, 1990). As has been emphasized, the logic of the attraction did not disappear, but evolved. Tom Gunning noted that this phenomenon reappeared in the "effects cinema of Spielberg, Lucas and Coppola" (Gunning, 1990, p. 387). This idea is developed by Angela Ndalianis (Ndalianis, 2000, pp. 2–5), who argues that films with a large amount of computer graphics function as "cinema of attractions" because of their emphasis on the very act of demonstrating visual effects. In our opinion, the key concept for understanding the appeal of such spectacles is "operational aesthetics," which Tom Gunning defines as "a fascination with how things work, especially innovative or incredible technologies" (Gunning, 2004, p. 126). While early audiences were fascinated by the cinematographic apparatus, modern audiences are fascinated by the digital one. A striking example of a modern attraction is the "bullet time" effect in The Matrix (Ndalianis,

2000). However, modern attractions function in a more complex way. They do not simply interrupt the narrative, but integrate into it. This complex interaction is analyzed in detail by Jeff King (King, 2000, pp. 3–4). He suggests considering the synergy between spectacle and narrative, whereby spectacle can provide its own "narrative satisfaction." Thus, the modern attraction can be characterized as "tamed" by narrative logic: it must simultaneously impress the audience with its technological sophistication (Gunning, 2004, p. 116) and serve the emotional needs of the story (Prince, 1996, p. 34). This duality is a key feature of its evolution and provides the basis for moving on to the analysis of interactive forms. Thus, the historical trajectory of the logic of the attraction can be represented schematically (Fig. 1).

The transition from passive observation to active interaction can be understood through the theoretical framework proposed by Lev Manovich, who contrasts the logic of narrative with the "logic of the database". He argues: "As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory... Thus, database and narrative are natural enemies" (Manovich, 2001, p. 225). It is important to understand that Manovich is talking about the opposition of basic logics of data organization. However, in new media objects, particularly in interactive cinema, these two logics are forced to coexist in dynamic tension. This opposition allows us to draw an analogy: the user of an interactive film plays a role similar to that of avant-garde director Dzyha Vertov in the editing room. Like Vertov, who operated a database of filmed footage, the user of an interactive film interacts with a database of video fragments. The narrative here emerges as an emergent property of the very process of navigating this database, charting its own unique path through it. Thus, the logic of the "database" becomes one of the elements that connects these different eras. A complete picture of this functional and aesthetic continuity is presented in a comparative diagram (Fig. 2).

Looking at the "choice point" interface, it can be argued that it functions as a modern form of exhibitionism. Recall that exhibitionism, as defined by Gunning, is the direct address of the media to the viewer, the destruction of the "fourth wall" and
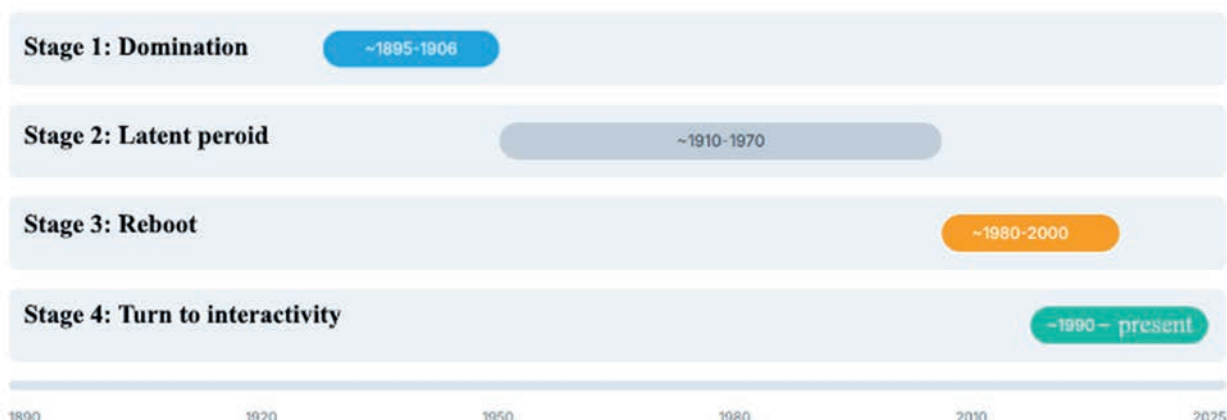
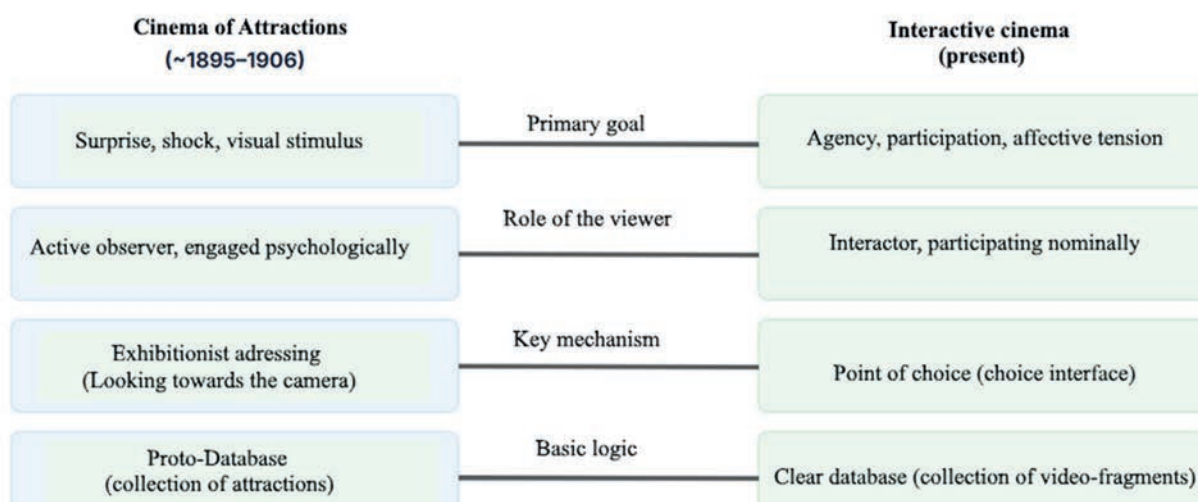Fig. 1. Map of the evolution of attraction logic

Fig. 2. Comparative analysis of the characteristics of classic and interactive attractions.

the exposure of its own technological nature. When the viewer is asked to make a choice, the film stops and a graphic overlay (buttons, timer) appears on the screen, directly addressing the user. This act disrupts the narrative immersion much more aggressively than an actor looking into the camera in early cinema. This argument is directly based on the research of Erkki Huhtamo, who analyses the interface as a "self-conscious, exhibitionist gesture" and a form of attraction in new media (Huhtamo, 2006). It is at this moment that the basic structure of the film as a database becomes visible, transforming itself into a spectacle. Thus, the viewer gains access not only to an organized archive of plot developments, but also to the very operational logic of the system — the "anarchive," as defined by V. Ernst (Ernst, 2013, p. 96). The scholar contrasts the traditional archive as a stable repository with the "anarchive" — a dynamic, procedural, and non-human collection of media traces. Thus, the viewer is confronted not only with narrative options, but also with the logic of the code itself. This brings to the fore the very act of interaction, which is a direct realization of Gunning's description of cinema as "ready to break the self-sufficient fictional world in order to get the viewer's attention" (Gunning, 1990, p. 381). In our opinion, the main spectacle in interactive cinema is not so much visual as it is related to decision-making. The moment of choice itself becomes the affective core of the experience. The tension created by the countdown timer, the burden of responsibility for the character's fate, and curiosity about the consequences of branching paths are the modern attraction. This tension functionally corresponds to what Tom Gunning called "the aesthetics of surprise" (Gunning, 2004, p. 116).

However, unlike early cinema, the shock here comes not from a physical object approaching, but from the psychological impulse caused by the need to make a decision. The affective stakes of such a choice are often deliberately raised by involving the viewer in emotionally and ethically complex decisions, which significantly increases the psychological weight of the interaction. Central to the interactive experience is the concept of agency, which Janet Murray defines as "the satisfying ability to perform meaningful actions whose results are visible and significant" (Murray, 1997, p. 126). At the same time, much of her analysis is devoted to the reasons why interactive narratives often fail, creating "limited agency" or "the illusion of free will". Murray describes the frustration of poorly designed systems in which the user constantly "hits a wall" (ibid., 1997, p. 132). In our opinion, this "flaw" from the point of view of game theory is a central aesthetic mechanism from the point of view of attraction theory. The affective result of this "failure" of agency is disappointment, surprise, a sense of manipulation, and shock from a sudden "wrong" ending. These non-narrative shocks are precisely what characterises attraction. The affect arises from the conflict between the user's desire for full agency and the awareness of the limitations of a pre-created system (database). Thus, "bad" agency is "good" attraction. Interactive film uses the lure of agency to create a series of affective spectacles. It is worth noting that such a complex game with the viewer's position has deep roots. As Alison McMahan argues, even in early cinema there was a genre of "homunculus films" where a triangular model of gaze was created between the character-observer in the frame, the event, and the real viewer. This model, according to the researcher, is a direct predecessor of the modern interaction between the player and the avatar (McMahan, 2006, p. 292). This proves that manipulating viewer agency for the sake of creating spectacle is not a new invention, but a technological reinterpretation of early cinematic practices. In summary, the analysis shows that the "mechanics of choice" function as a complex mechanism that interrupts narrative immersion to create an affective result. The logic of this mechanism is visualized in a conceptual diagram (Fig. 3).

It can be argued that the study of continuity is one possible approach to studying media history. An alternative yet complementary perspective is offered by Siegfried Zeliński's concept of "variantology." This approach focuses not on linear traditions or cycles, but on unique, anarchic "variants" of media practices in different eras, emphasizing their uniqueness (Zielinski, 2006).

Applying this approach allows us to answer the key question: if interactive cinema is a continuation of the attraction, what is its uniqueness as a "variant" in the digital age?

In our opinion, the uniqueness of contemporary interactive cinema as a "variant" of the attraction lies in the change in the nature of the spectacle, which is now mediated by algorithmic systems. The defining feature of this new "algorithmic attraction" is a specific combination of spectacular logic with the logic of algorithmic control and data collection.

While early attractions were based on public demonstrations of the capabilities of cinematographic equipment (Gunning, 1990), modern attractions demonstrate the capabilities of computing equipment — its ability to simulate choice, adapt narrative, and respond to user actions. However, this process is not neutral. The mechanics of choice function not only as a moment of affective tension for the viewer, but also as a point of data collection for the platform. Each choice becomes a unit of information used to optimize future content and predict user behavior.

This aspect places interactive cinema in the broader context of the modern digital economy, where human experience becomes raw material for data extraction. Thus, the attraction of the XXI century is two-way: the viewer watches the spectacle of choice, and the algorithm watches the viewer who chooses. Exhibitionism also takes on a new dimension here: the system not only reveals its structure through the interface, but also requires the user to reveal their preferences and decision-making patterns. Thus, the uniqueness of interactive cinema lies in the fact that it is not only an individualized spectacle, but also an instrument of soft control and commercialization of experience, which is its key difference from its historical predecessors.

Conclusions. The study proves that the mechanics of modern interactive cinema — the mechanics of
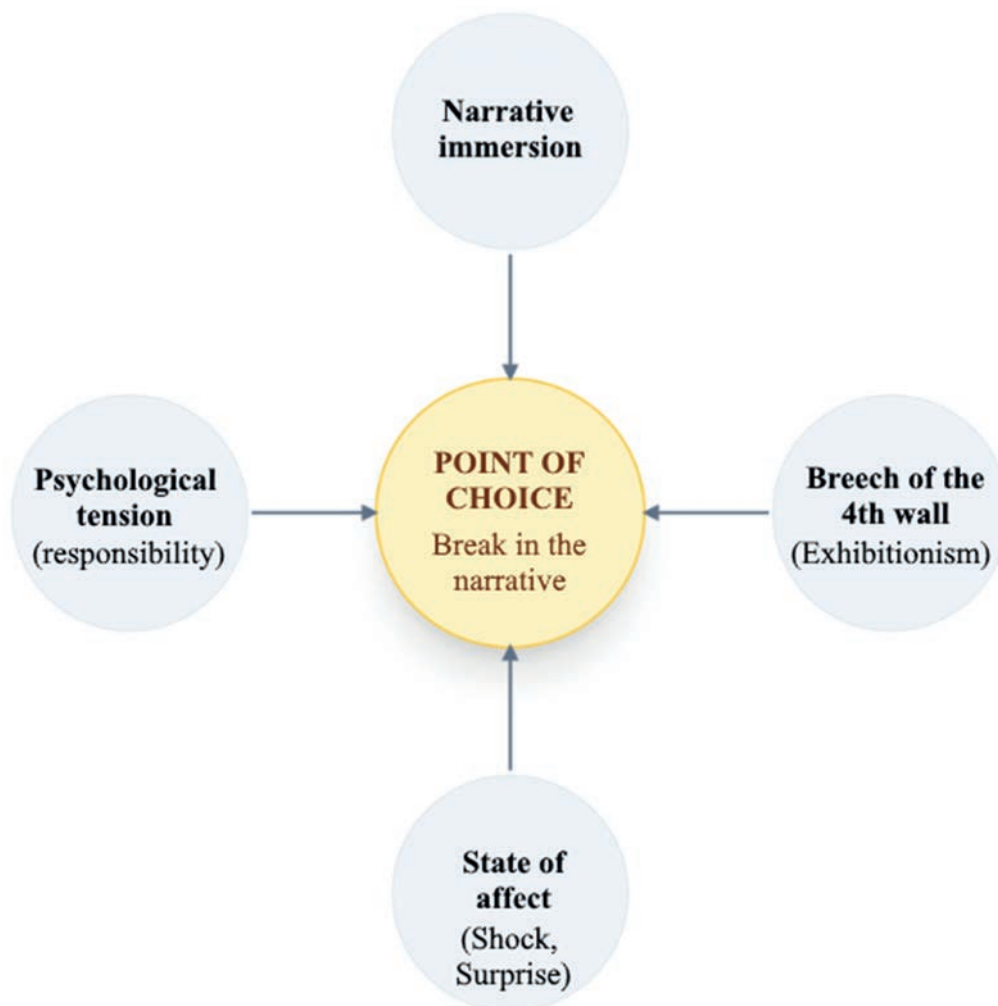
Fig. 3. The mechanism of the "point of choice" as a modern attraction.

choice — functionally and aesthetically reinterprets the key principles of Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions", acting as their direct successor in the digital age. It has been established that exhibitionism finds its embodiment in the interface of choice, which interrupts narrative immersion and exposes the structure of the film as a database. The affective impact is transformed from visual shock to psychological tension associated with responsibility and the need to make a decision. Ultimately, the priority of the moment over the plot is realized through a mechanism of undermining agency, where disappointment or shock at the limited choice becomes an affective spectacle in its own right.

The scientific novelty of the results obtained lies in the systematic analysis of the mechanics of choice as a functional equivalent of a classic attraction and in the substantiation of the concept of an "algorithmic attraction". This allows us to change the dominant perspective on interactive cinema, analyzing it as an evolution of cinematic spectacle rather than a purely gaming phenomenon. The established continuity also reveals a significant transformation: the public, shared experience of fairground entertainment has been transformed into an individualized, private and algorithm-driven attraction, integrated with data collection mechanisms. The figure of the mediator has also changed: while in early cinema, as Charles Musser notes, the key role was played by the lecturer-showman who controlled the audience's attention (Musser, 1990), today this function is performed by an algorithmic system. The spectacular "shock" of the early XX century has been "rebooted" as the algorithmic "choice" of the XXI century. The prospects for further research include the study of the ethical and aesthetic consequences of integrating data collection logic into media forms of the spectacle.

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