

Silent Games: Influence of German Expressionism In Dystopian Video Games- Inside, Little Nightmares, Monochroma

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Abstract

As tools of game development become accessible to more people, video games come closer to being an art form, rather than mere entertainment, without losing their entertainment value. Albeit the artistic value of video games has been accepted in time, the word 'game' causes people to overlook its relationship with art. The aim of this paper is to focus on this problem by analyzing Little Nightmares, Inside and Monochroma, in the context of German Expressionism as well as other art movements and the silent movie era, and try to explain how these games use art as a means of artistic expression while creating psychological horror and dystopian worlds. Studied games are independent games that are similar both visually and thematically. These aspects determined the boundaries of the study. In this qualitative study, chosen games are analyzed through semiotic analysis. The study showed that expressionist techniques such as distorted images, and strong contrasts in lighting have been used to build the game world and create an uncanny, totalitarian atmosphere; developers took advantage of the silent movie era and cinematic techniques to convey the narrative visually, without using dialogs. Their interactivity and unique mechanics transform art into a medium that can be experienced rather than a spectacle.

Keywords: Video Games, Art, Expressionism, Dystopia, Horror

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Sessiz Oyunlar: Alman Dışavurumculuğun Distopik Oyunlardaki Etkisi-Inside, Little Nightmares, Monochroma

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Öz

Oyun geliştirme araçları gittikçe daha çok insanın ulaşabileceği duruma geldikçe, video oyunları da salt eğlence olmaktan çıkarak, ancak eğlence değerini de kaybetmeksizin, bir sanat formu olmaya yaklaşmıştır. Ancak her ne kadar video oyunlarının sanatsal değeri daha fazla kabul görse de, 'oyun' tanımlaması, sanatla olan ilişkisinin çoğu zaman gözden kaçırılması problemini doğurmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Little Nightmares, Inside ve Monochroma adlı oyunları merkezde Alman Dışavurumculuk olmak üzere oyunlarla bağlantılı diğer sanat akımları ve sessiz sinema çerçevesinde incelemek; bu oyunların psikolojik korku ve distopik dünyalar yaratırken sanatı nasıl bir dışa, vurum aracı olarak kullandığını açıklamaya çalışmaktır. İncelenen oyunlar, görsel ve tematik olarak benzer olmakla birlikte bağımsız oyunlardır. Bahsedilen noktalar, çalışmanın sınırlarını oluşturmuştur.

Bu nitel çalışma için seçilen oyunlar göstergebilimsel çözümleme yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Gerek oyun dünyasının inşası gerekse tekinsiz, baskıcı bir atmosfer oluşturmak için dışavurumculuğun imgeleri çarpıtma gibi tekniklerinden, ışık kontrastlarından; anlatılarını yalnızca görüntülerle, diyalog kullanmadan anlatabilmek için sessiz sinema döneminin yapısından ve sinematografik aygıtlardan faydalandıkları görülmüştür. Etkileşimli yapıları ve kendilerine has mekanikleri ise sanatı seyirlik olmaktan çıkarmakta, deneyimlenen bir mecraya dönüştürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Video Oyunları, Sanat, Dışavurumculuk, Distopya, Korku

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1. Introduction

Video games have proved themselves as a new art form with unique instruments. But no matter how unique they are, they are still influenced by other art forms and movements and used as a tool for expression. From AAA games to indie games, art becomes increasingly an integral part of the design more and more. Recent and one of the best examples is Bioshock by 2K where artistic design shines. From colors to architecture, music to lighting, Bioshock series is a cornerstone in video game history that proves video games are not just entertainment.

The immediate visual impact of Bioshock, depending on its employment of cutting-edge high-definition 3D computer graphics, is striking. The aesthetic qualities of the water, in particular, have drawn wide praise. The world of Rapture is also presented in an engaging and excellent style. To depict this decaying world, Bioshock draws on the architectural motifs and cultural themes of the 1930s and 1940s America. Portrayals of decaying art deco facades faded Hollywood socialites, and echoes of Hearst, Hughes, and Citizen Kane, are combined with period music and philosophical and literary references to produce a coherent artistic statement. (Tavinor, 2009, s. 92).

Indeed, right from the first moment, Bioshock manages to fascinate players with its beautiful world. Its art-deco heavy retro-futuristic design is mesmerizing. Even though beauty itself is not enough to be considered art, and many artworks can not be considered as beautiful, Gombrich pointed out in his *The Story of Art*, beauty is a part of art that shouldn't be dismissed, and yet there are people "who become so proud of their knowledge that they pretend to like only those works which are neither beautiful nor correctly drawn." (Gombrich, 1989, s. 17).

Huizinga emphasizes that we assume the act of play is the opposite of seriousness but this is not strictly true.

We can say: play is non-seriousness. But apart from the fact that this proposition tells us nothing about the positive qualities of play, it is extraordinarily easy to refute. As soon as we proceed from "play is non-seriousness" to "play is not serious", the contrast leaves us in the lurch-for some plays can be very serious indeed. Moreover, we can immediately name several other fundamental categories that likewise come under the heading "non-seriousness" yet have no correspondence whatever with "play". Laughter, for instance, is in a sense the opposite of seriousness without being bound up with play. Children's games, football, and chess are played in profound seriousness; the players have the slightest inclination to laugh. (Huizinga, 1949, s. 5).

Video games have also been overlooked as products of entertainment. Video games are entertaining for sure, but they are also thought-provoking, engaging,

and most certainly beautiful, like cinema. Again, like cinema, independent games focus on art more than AAA games. They are influenced by many art forms, and movements and use them to convey a message, tell a story, or just make art for the sake of art. Whatever direction they choose, they benefit from a powerful tool: interactivity. Players don't sit back and watch video games –sure, there are games with minimum interaction, but still, interactivity is there-, they interact with it and change it, unlike any other art form. Players are what make video games tick.

Video games are visual constructs and they are similar to movies in that way. In the era of silent movies, directors had to tell their stories with images, rather than dialogues and other supportive elements. Alfred Hitchcock, a director who directed lots of successful movies from the 1920s to the 1970s, and most of his movies are considered masterpieces, frequently emphasized his love of silent movies, for him a director “should resort to dialogue only when it's impossible to do otherwise” (Truffaut, Interview with Hitchcock 2017, s. 61).

Due to technical restrictions, directors tried to express themselves through images. In this day and age though, making silent movies is just a matter of artistic choice. Some video game developers chose the same path and make their games silent. They design their world to not only tell their story but also to shape their players' movement and perception. “The level design of a game world can present a fictional world and determine what players can and cannot do at the same time.” (Juul, 2005, s. 163).

In this paper, I will try to analyze three recent video games and their influence of German Expressionism: Little Nightmares (Tarsier Studios, 2017), Inside (Playdead, 2016), and Monochroma (Nowhere, 2014). All of those games are visually and thematically similar, they are independent, puzzle-platform games and they don't contain any dialogue or text that explains the story. Those are the reasons why I chose them. In this context, I will make an introduction to German Expressionist Cinema, then, with the help of semiotics, I will try to analyze and show how those games were influenced by expressionism and use it to create a dystopian setup. Following Eco's approach to semiotics, I am going to use “a broader range of sign-phenomena” (Eco, 1976, s. 16). Eco, defines a sign as “everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else” (Eco, 1976, s. 16). So, in this context, everything we see is a sign, and we interpret these signs as “something standing for something else”. Furthermore, video games (especially those I am going to analyze) are generally visual products. So, they share a common visual language with

cinema, “rhetoric of the screen (montage figures, camera movements, splicings, etc.)” (Metz, 1974, s. 59). But their ludic structure, specific game mechanics also add another layer to the process. The purpose of this study is to analyze visual signs and game mechanics to understand their design and narrative structure.

2. Distorted Dreams: German Expressionism

The Expressionist movement was born in Germany in the early 20th century and reach its peak after World War I. It arose from poetry and spread to other art forms like painting, theatre, music, and so on. Expressionism was a reaction to impressionism “which reflects the iridescent ambiguities, disquieting diversity, and ephemeral hues of nature. At the same time, Expressionism sets itself against Naturalism with its mania for recording mere facts and its paltry aim of photographing nature of daily life.” (Eisner, 1969, s. 10). They aim to bring to the surface the dark side of city life and its effects on its inhabitants; a noisy machine that never stops consuming. Berlin was the main inspiration for expressionists. “The sense of separation, rootlessness, and alienation in the city was at the root of many Expressionist visions of modern life.” (Bassie, 2008, s. 77).

Expressionists were not interested in the obvious. They turned their eyes to the unseen. In that regard, expressionism was a fantastic journey to the self, a journey full of dangers and unpleasant sights.

Sigmund Freud’s research into the unconscious and the processes of repression – whereby painful memories or unacceptable impulses are consigned to the unconscious – only appeared to confirm the existence of a powerful and conflict-ridden ‘inner life. In attempting to give expression to repressed aspects of the psyche, Expressionist art, literature, theatre, dance, and music, therefore, tended to emphasize what was unruly, violent, chaotic, ecstatic, or even demonic. (Bassie, 2008, s. 51).

In order to achieve their goals on reflecting the essence of things, expressionists heavily used metaphors that viewers had to interpret. Expressionists “invent mystical allegories which amount to little once we attempt to translate them. This language of symbols and metaphors is intentionally obscure, designed to be intelligible only to the initiated.” (Eisner, 1969, s. 10).

Its reflection on cinema became very influential. Especially for film noir and horror movies. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Robert Wiene, 1920) is considered one of the most important movies of German Expressionist Cinema and it defined the aesthetic look which I will go into detail in the next chapter.

3. The Kids Aren't Alright

The first game that I will discuss is Little Nightmares. It begins with a blurry, black and white image of a woman who looks like an Asian. Then protagonist, a child named Six, with a yellow raincoat awakes upon an open suitcase in a place that looks like a basement with lots of pipes lying around. The first thing we notice is the size of the child. She is too little, or her surroundings are too big, and sometimes everything is in her size. This weirdness in size becomes more obvious as the game progresses. The second thing that strikes our attention is the color palette. Except for the raincoat, colors are mostly faded, sometimes nearly black and white, albeit there are some places where the colors are brighter.

Little Nightmares is a 2.5 D platformer, which provides extra depth as well as more creative puzzles. The game also benefits from cinematography very creatively. Camera angles and focal lengths change not only depending on the situation but also to create horror, and anxiety and emphasize how the child- thus, the player- is indeed very little.



Figure 1. An Extreme Long Shot Where The Protagonist is Almost Invisible

Surroundings are full of curved and distorted objects which are conventions of German Expressionism. "It is through the curved walls, oblique windows, slanting doors, and strange radial patterns on the floor that the film establishes its nightmarish atmosphere," says Scheunemann, when he talks about Dr. Caligari (2003, s. 136). Eisner points out that the aesthetics of Expressionism creates "states of anxiety and terror" and "provoke emotions" through "unexpected curves and sudden and downs" (1969, s. 21).

Like Caligari, Little Nightmares aims to disturb players through its art design and cinematography.



Figure 2. Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari



Figure 3. Distorted Environment- Little Nightmares

One of the characteristics of the game is the camera movement. It is rolling, sometimes slightly, sometimes stronger, through the entire game. It creates an unstable, unsettling atmosphere.

Now I will take a break and mention the other two games that I chose and from now on, I will analyze them simultaneously after introducing them, rather than give each of their chapters. By doing so, I believe their similarities, as well as differences, come to light more clearly.

Inside begins in a dark forest. The protagonist is a kid. Like Little Nightmares, even more so, the game is almost black and white, except for the kid's red shirt and even it is not bright unless a light source hits. We soon discover, he is on the run, escaping from some dangerous people who kill him if he gets caught.



Figure 4. A Long Shot from Inside

Unlike Little Nightmares which the player understands Six is in a different universe right away, in Inside, at first everything seems like our world. There is no weird architecture, no monsters, just a kid escaping from bad guys despite the vast background that provides a great depth. Inside differs from Little Nightmares with its use of camera, environment design, and movements of the protagonist but it feels similar for the reasons I will attempt to explain.

The first thing we notice is the protagonist moves in a way that it feels like he is alive. He runs or sneaks automatically when he needs to do so, much like the game's camera. Even though the camera in Little Nightmares also moves according to the situation, generally it gets closer or moves away from the subject. In Inside, the camera moves more fluidly and organic. Combining it with the protagonist's movements and background, Inside feels more cinematic whereas Little Nightmares feels like a theater, almost everything looks jammed together and even though Little Nightmares is 2.5 D, it feels flat. Of course, it is on purpose, like Dr. Caligari. Dr. Caligari looks flat too, everything is a decor. But "the depth comes from deliberately distorted perspectives and from narrow, slanting streets which cut across each other at unexpected angles." (Eisner, 1969, s. 21). In a visual sense, Little Nightmares is akin to Dr. Caligari.

At one point, the player comes across a strange technology, a helmet that allows the protagonist to control some puppet-like people. That's also one of Inside's game mechanics to solve puzzles as well as a narrative device.



Figure 5. Mind Control Device- Inside

Technology, industrialization, surveillance, and tyranny are focus points of the game; however, they are subjects of all three games. Fear of technology is also one of the themes that Expressionism dealt with. As Eisner points out, German Expressionism fused technology, mysticism, and magic to create horror. This "apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism" is the result of "the face of death on the battlefields" (1969, s. 9).

Kracauer says that "Caligari is a very specific premonition in the sense that he uses hypnotic power to force his will upon his tool-a technique foreshadowing, in content and purpose, that manipulation of the soul which Hitler was the first to practice on a gigantic scale." (2004, s. 72,73). Movies like Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927) and The Golem (Guido Sieber, 1915) are great examples of fear of technology fused with dark magic.

All three games manifest elements like technology, mysticism, and dark forces to some degree and they focus on tyranny like German films between 1920 and 1924, as Kracauer stated, “the soul being faced with the seemingly unavoidable alternative of tyranny or chaos exerted extraordinary fascination” (2004, s. 77).

Monochroma begins in the outskirts. The protagonist is, again, a kid. This time though, he –even though it is not possible to be certain, it is safe to assume the protagonist is a male- is not alone but with his little brother. He is both a game mechanic and a narrative device.

Monochroma is monochrome as the name suggests. Except for the red muffler of the kid, and occasional red color and red lights in the background –and except for the very colorful scene through the end, it is black and white.



Figure 6. The Beginning - Monochroma

This monochrome look of the game reminds silent movies and film noir more than *Little Nightmares* and *Inside*. But this resemblance is not limited to look. Like silent movies, music is very dominant in *Monochroma* whereas *Little Nightmares* and *Inside* use music very rarely and in the background as an ambient.

Its stylistic use of color and strong contrast between black and white also bears a striking resemblance to a neo-noir film: *Sin City* (Robert Rodriguez, 2005). The use of color in *Sin City* is not just stylistic, but also delivers a meaning, and codes that feeling with a particular color, like a leitmotif. *Monochroma* similarly uses red, implying danger, but at the same time, it gives life to a monochrome world, like the muffler of the kid or his brother’s kite.

At the beginning of the game, the little brother injures himself while flying his kite, thus he needs his brother’s help to move. This plot device also becomes a clever game mechanic. The protagonist can’t jump high enough with him on his shoulders when he needs to do so. Little brother fears the dark, so he can only put him to the ground if there is a light source. For a game that is almost only black and white, fear of the dark is a suitable theme.

Throughout the game, we see billboards that show people and machines with a big red M letter on them or just red M letters. Those billboards remind us of Soviet propaganda posters of the 1930s and 40s' which use "certain aspects of the Constructivist style, such as photomontage and diagonal composition." (Moore, 2010, s. 127). Constructivism was a result of "taking the art into the factories" (Moore, 2010, s. 125) desires of artists who wanted to bring together art, life, and production: the art of the machine age. "This 'production art' became the basis of the Russian design method known as Constructivism, which was explored in painting but found its true expression in architecture and graphic design." (Moore, 2010, s. 125).



Figure 7. A Soviet Propaganda Poster from the 1930s
Kaynak: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CuUlwqfUIAAYkIG.jpg>

Figure 8. A Billboard from Monochroma

The city is highly industrialized. There are factories, smoke, and machinery –which seem out of place from time to time- everywhere. We understand that industrialization and technology come with poverty. If we compare some billboards from the game to propaganda posters of the Soviets, we can see the similarities, both ideally, a father figure that praises the technology and advancement- and visually simple, geometrical shapes, order-. Monochroma successfully manages to blend the chaos of Expressionism with the order of constructivism to create a totalitarian dystopia.

All the games have a sense of timelessness and placelessness. This is especially true for Little Nightmares, which doesn't look like belongs to our world at all. There are weird monsters in a very huge, industrialized vessel called The Maw. Little Nightmares feels like a psychological journey rather than a dystopian future, but after all, this is what expressionism is all about: inner demons.

When Six is on her way to escape, she passes a playroom, cafeteria, and nur-

sery. The doors of the playroom have bars with electricity, the cafeteria has iron bars too, much like a prison. In the nursery, we see sleeping children, and our first monster: Blind Janitor. Even though he is blind, he has a quite strong sense of smell. When the janitor makes his appearance first time, the scene reminds Nosferatu (F.W. Murnau, 1922) a lot: a misshaped, uncanny silhouette in front of strong light.



Figure 9. Nosferatu



Figure 10. The Janitor

All of the games have a sense of fear of the unknown, outworld horror, and an uncanny feeling. According to Freud, even though “we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is not known or familiar” (2004, s. 418), it is “nothing new or foreign but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (2004, s. 429). So, what we define as uncanny and fear is just the return of the repressed.

The uncanny atmosphere is one of the definitive aspects of Expressionism. While Little Nightmares create it with distorted space, creepy human-like beings –we can also say that they are distorted reflections of their real-life equivalents- the way Inside and Monochroma chose is slightly different. Nearly deserted and destroyed city, zombies, mind control and anti-gravity devices, entities that are probably results of experiments, and weird phenomena in Inside help to create the uncanny.

In Monochroma, the chase and uncanny feeling begin when the brothers enter a strange facility where some children are kept in tubes. A man with a red sweater sees and chases them throughout the game.



Figure 11. Children in Tubes

At this point, the similarities between the games become clear. Even though Little Nightmares looks a little bit different than the others, it is essentially the same. All games build their narratives around kids, dangerous and advanced technologies, and/or supernatural. Both Little Nightmares and Monochroma revolve around kidnapped children. In the case of Little Nightmares, what happened to children is gruesome and graphic. Janitor captures them –at one point, he captures Six with a food trap when she suffers from hunger too-, and sends them to the Twin Chefs, they cook them and probably serve them to grotesque-looking guests.

In the case of Monochroma, what they do with the children is unknown, some experiments for sure, but we don't know what those experiments are nor their purposes. But putting together the clues, we can make some educated guesses at the end.

Monochroma highly resembles a silent movie. Even though there is no indication when the events of the game(s) take place, cars, dominant art deco style, and jazz music that sometimes plays feel like it's the 1920s or 30s, though the game is anachronistic. We see some machinery and drones –which looks out of place and supports the anachronistic feeling of the game- here and there.

After the little brother has been kidnapped, the protagonist heads toward to factory to rescue him in the chapter called Factory. Then we witness alien technology and understand where all the kids go.



Figure 12. Factory

This place is full of children in huge tubes and to save his brother, the player has to pass this section without being seen by the huge red eye. This brings me one of the most striking similarities between the games: being watched.

All the games have at least one section that the player should avoid being seen by a machine/s.

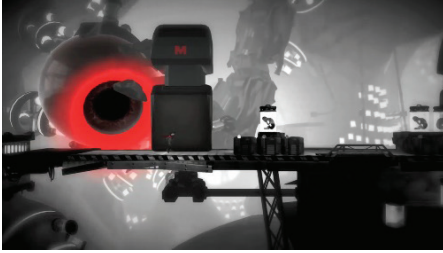


Figure 13. Mechanical Eye- Monochroma



Figure 14. Mechanical Eye Little Nightmares



Figure 15. Mechanical Eye-Little Nightmares

This emphasis on surveillance reminds us of totalitarian regimes. The games present totalitarian imagery heavily: In Monochroma, we see the red letter M everywhere and understand that M –whoever he is- owns and controls everything. The man chasing the protagonist and his brother also work for M. One of the most striking images in the game is a flag, again, with the letter M on it. It is easy to see that it resembles a Nazi flag.



Figure 16. M Flag

In Inside, mind control and lots of experiments are going on. They control the minds of the beings they created and they are searching the ways to control nature as they already manage to control gravity to some extent. Later in the game, some people flow in the water, connected with cables to somewhere we can't see. As the player proceeds, we notice that the water is levitated, and the people in the water are connected to devices on the floor.

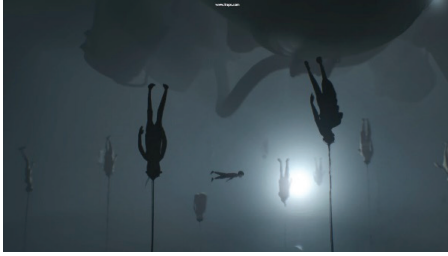


Figure 17. Experiment Subject on the Water



Figure 18. Control Boxes

If we compare fig 12 to fig 17, even though devices in Monochroma look like alien technology rather than human-made like in Inside, the feeling is quite similar: a horrifying control mechanism.

One of the biggest differences between Inside and Monochroma is that Inside looks deserted while Monochroma looks like a populated city with lots of houses in it. That's why it is so strange that there is no one in the streets, even the mall is empty. This way, the player can sense a fear that prevents citizens to go out, or leaving their homes, since we see abandoned houses along the game, maybe the population slowly decreases because children are kidnapped. Inside does the opposite, its city is deserted, but there are lots of people in it. Some of them are just zombies, others are workers, failed test subjects, or 'evil' scientists. While Monochroma sets its dystopian and totalitarian atmosphere with colors, and machinery and combines nostalgia with advanced technology, Inside chooses to set a dystopian future. So, while Monochroma feels anachronistic, Inside does not. But like Monochroma, its use of technology and overall visual design is enough to assume that the regime is totalitarian. Though, unlike Monochroma, it looks like there is a group of people in charge rather than one man.

Now let's turn our eyes to Little Nightmares again. It is more of a psychological horror story and less of a dystopian future. Everything in Little Nightmares looks unearthly and grotesque. There are monsters and little gnomes which we know nothing about. The game creates an atmosphere that has familiar yet alien. Like distorted space, humanoid creatures, Japanese architecture, and the antagonist called Geisha. The game feels like it is about the inner nightmares of Six. Throughout the game Six suffers from hunger from time to time. Every time she eats, she changes. First, he eats bread, then a rat, a gnome, and lastly, she bites the neck of the Geisha. Then she takes her powers and leaves the Maw. She lives but loses her humanity. It is a distorted reflection not only of Six psyches but our world's as well. It is an expressionist art at its best.

Monochroma, resembling a silent movie classic, uses art deco –much like 1920s movies- and decor-like flat backgrounds, similar to Caligari. By doing so, it sets its silent German expressionism style, and also, because art deco was a style that presents wealth, it emphasizes the gap between rich and poor. It is very similar to Metropolis which consists of a lower and an upper city. While the art deco style upper city is “the abode of big-business owners, high-ranking employees and pleasure-hunting gilded youth. In the lower city, shut off from daylight, the workers tend monstrous machines” (Kreucer, 2004, s. 149).

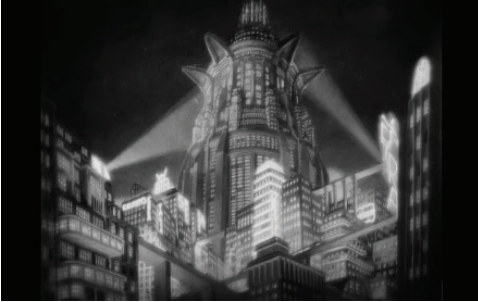


Figure 19. Tower in Art Deco Style



Figure 20. Lower City and Workers

Monochroma also has steampunk influences, which involve wealth, and machinery and are heavily influenced by art deco. Zeppelin is one of the conventions of the steampunk genre and Monochroma’s last chapter takes place on a huge Zeppelin. Because art deco has an anachronistic design, it helps the anachronistic style of Monochroma further.

[...]the art deco designers sought to blend ancient imagery-from classicism to the symbolic repertoire of ancient Egyptian and Aztec art-with the futurist imagery of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. [...] The impulse to synthesize, to bridge antagonistic realms –past and the future, conservative and radical-was a defining quality of art deco and its role in the world of design (Striner, 1990, s. 22,24).

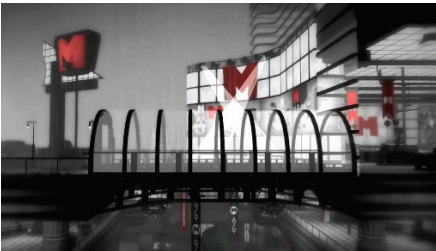


Figure 21. Mall in Art Deco Style



Figure 22. Ghetto in Expressionist Style

Albeit steampunk generally glorifies technology and the Victorian Era which “witnessed the advent of amazing new devices and machines in the area of

communication technology (the electric telegraph, cinema, and telephones) and transportation modes (aircraft, automobiles, railroads, and steamships)” (Hall and Gunn, 2014, s. 5), Monochroma takes the dark side, similar to movies like *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998) and *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985). In this kind of approach, machines “tend to be worrisome things, found and repurposed objects that need to be controlled and contained—they are not part of a utopian future but are more often remnants of a dystopian, weaponized (and capitalist/fascist) past.” (Birmigham, 2014, s. 64).

Towards the end, we see the only colorful area in the game, a waterfall, and trees. In this dystopian and dark world of Monochroma, M kidnaps the children, plugs them into his machines, and sucks their energy, and their dreams. It has similarities with *The City of the Lost Children* (Marc Caro, Jean Pierret Jeunet, 1995), which is a steampunk movie. In an interview, one of the developers stated that one of their influences is *The City of the Lost Children*, and he also stated that he admires film noir and German Expressionism (Kökçeoğlu, Interview with Tezateşer, 2013).



Figure 23. The Garden

At the end of the game, it is revealed that M is a half-octopus half human alien. After a fight, Zeppelin crashes, M dies, and along with Zeppelin, the protagonist falls. The game never shows his fate and his brother when the game concludes.

Zeppelin, designed in the late 19th century and became popular in the early 20th century, “made one of the strongest impressions on European collective memory of any machine” (de Syon, 2002, s. 3) and “as they became fascinated with dirigibles, Europeans [...] projected a future where airships would act as trains or buses do, while airplanes would be like private cars.” (de Syon, 2008, s. 80) So, it is not a surprise that Zeppelin, a strong symbol of advancement also became a powerful theme for steampunk. Monochroma’s ending with a destroyed zeppelin is meaningful then. It symbolizes technology, tyranny, and power; to destroy it is to destroy all the things it symbolizes.

The protagonist of Inside makes his way through a factory too, where the experiments take place. In one of the failed experiments in the water, a naked child drowns him. Then he gains the ability to breathe underwater and control the zombies without a helmet. In this facility, we see a giant blob, imprisoned in an aquarium with lots of helmets connected to it. It is a mind control organism, a hive mind that contains test subjects in it. The protagonist joins the hive mind and it escapes in the end. It looks like a happy ending but some fan theories beg to differ. Max Derrat points out in a video, the whole game is an experiment, the actions of the kid are controlled and he meant to free the hive mind. He backs this theory up by showing a diorama from the game. Diorama is a replica of the last section of the game. So, everything is planned, and there is no escape. They just want to make perfect their hive mind (2016). There is an alternate ending of Inside that the protagonist finds a secret entrance underground and unplugs a cable, probably the main control mechanism, because after he unplugs it, he becomes idle in a posture that resembles zombies. That means he is controlled too, probably by the hive mind.



Figure 24. Hive Mind and Diorama

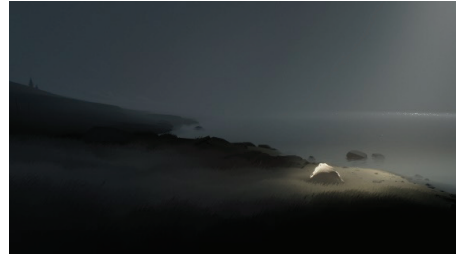


Figure 25. Final Scene of Inside

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Video games are still considered as sole entertainment, even a time-consuming activity by many. But more and more people began to understand that they are also works of art. They provoke thoughts, criticize society, and make people think. They use other art forms to achieve their goal and their closest kin, cinema. Even though video games have their aesthetics, they often use cinematic techniques to tell their stories.

Little Nighmares, Monochroma, and Inside are highly cinematic games in that context. Their approach is similar to silent movies, especially German Expressionism. They use strong shadows, distorted environments, pale or black and white colors, themes like fear of technology, modernism, totalitarian regimes, mysticism and dark forces, and symbolism.

For a better understanding, it will be helpful to see the findings above with a chart:

	Inside	Little Nightmares	Monochroma
Color Palette	Pale colors (except the main character with a bright red sweater)	Pale and generally earth colors (except the main character with a bright yellow raincoat)	Almost entirely black and white (except the main character with a red scarf and occasional red colors)
Camera Angle	Generally, side-view camera. It gets closer- further away from the subject, according to the scene	Side-view camera. Generally fixed angle.	Generally, side-view camera. It gets closer- further away from the subject, according to the scene.
Genre	Side Scroll Puzzle-Platform	Side Scroll Puzzle-Platform	Side Scroll Puzzle-Platform
Themes	Technology, mind control, dystopian future, mystery,	Mystery, horror, fantastic and grotesque elements, dystopian atmosphere	Technology, mind control, dystopian future, mystery
Visual Style	German expressionist art style	German expressionist art style	German expressionist art style

Those silent games don't bother to explain themselves but leave it to the imagination and force players to think. Their vague narratives and heavy symbolisms cause lots of fan theories. Using the benefits of interactivity, they offer a more immersive experience than cinema. Players have to solve the puzzles, escape, and try to live. As the protagonists of the games, their journey becomes the players' journey.

They all have words to say and they express themselves through their visuals. Their dark worlds become ours, and those worlds are reflections of ours. No matter where to go, there is no escape, no salvation in these worlds of machines. We are doomed to be controlled and sacrifice ourselves to an uncertain end, or become one of them to escape.

Expressionism, the art of despair, is one of the most suitable art movements for

these kinds of narratives and the games use it masterfully, along with other art movements like art deco and constructivism, combining them with cinematic techniques and their interactive structures. All things considered; they manage to create powerful artworks.

More and more indie games are developed day by day and some of them are genuinely unique. I believe indie developers will be the ones who make people understand video games are just another art form.

Future studies that focus on relations between art and video games will help to reveal video games' potential and give them their well-deserved place as a new art form, like cinema. With the help of available technology, the language of video games is influenced by their closest kin: cinema, as well as other art forms, constantly. Analyzing these interactions may provide a new understanding of this new medium, and a guide to developers as well as consumers.

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Makale yazarı herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

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