

There is no Abusive Game Design: A typology of Counter Game Design

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Abstract

This paper directly builds on "Now it's personal: On Abusive Game Design" by Douglas Wilson and Miguel Sicart from 2010. It creates a more granular typology of Abusive Game Design practices where the categorisation is split into *how* the design oversteps a boundary. Each category belongs to a one or more meta-category which tackle *which* boundary is overstepped. The typology is put to the test by the creation of Presenter Slides, a subversive game that attempts to use as many of the categories as possible. This is followed by reflecting on the practice in essays that tackle subjectivity, humor, synergies of methods, mainstream design methods and the granularity of our typology. Lastly, we conclude that Abusive Game Design as described in the original paper does not exist and that instead there is only Counter Game Design.

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Contents

Keywords	1
Abstract	1
Acknowledgments	1
Introduction	2
State of the Art	2
Abusive Game Design	2
Social Norms and Play	3
Other Media	3
Methodology	3
Presenting: Presenter Slides	4
Typology of Abuse	4
Social Engineering (<i>social/rule</i>)	5
Rule Based Encouragement of Bleed (<i>social/rule</i>)	5
Transgression of Taboos (<i>social</i>)	6
Emotional Abuse (<i>social</i>)	6
Game Platform Abuse (<i>social/rule</i>)	6
Abuse of Touch (<i>sensory</i>)	7
Abuse of Smell (<i>sensory</i>)	7
Abuse of Hearing(<i>sensory</i>)	7
Abuse of Sight(<i>sensory</i>)	8
Hidden Visual Information(<i>sensory/rule</i>)	8
Attrition Abuse (<i>rule</i>)	8
Intentionally Frustrating Controls (<i>rule</i>)	9
Unfriendly Difficulty (<i>rule</i>)	9
Thinking about Abusive Game Design	9
Subjectivity of Abuse	9
Creating & Subverting	10
Combinations & Synergies	10
Humor	11
Going mainstream	11
Completeness, Granularity & Modelling	11
Counter Game Design	12
Conclusion	12
Appendix	15
Abusive Game List	15

Introduction

Conventional Game Design wisdom suggests building games around a hedonistic loop¹, a positive experience that the player enjoys. Yet multiple game designers in and out of the mainstream of the medium have been experimenting with the idea of breaking these conventions. Some take it a step further, going to the point where they create unpleasant experiences – abusively designed games. We are interested

¹Cardoso, Melo, and Carvalhais 2019.

in *how* designers create such experiences.

This paper builds on "Now It's Personal: On Abusive Game Design"² which discusses and defines abusive game design. It's a method for the designers to have a dialogue with the player by creating unpleasant experiences. Akin to critical design³ and disobedient devices, the abusive game design approach disregards the player. Games practicing abusive game design are not made to be played, forcing the player to appropriate the game and to think about it as an artefact and why it exist – to start a conversation with the designer.

In our paper we update the classification categories on types of abusive game design presented in the original paper, provide a database of example games, and reflect on using these abusive design methods in the development of a game.

State of the Art

We informed our work with three kinds of research. The works on abusive game design that we directly build upon, the works that tackle social issues in games and works that talk about similar practices in different fields.

Abusive Game Design

On Abusive Game Design, from Sicart and Wilson, lays the foundations for our work. It both defines different modalities of abusive game design and argues that abusive game design exists to establish a dialogue:

... Abusive game design subverts the systems-centric design paradigm and calls for an approach to game design that aims to establish a personal dialogue between player and designer, by means of a game. The game is only the mediator in this dialogue. As such, abusive game design understands games as a personal affair between individuals. Abusive games recast play as a dialogic interplay between player and designer.

We are interested in the modality presented in the paper so we are not focusing on the dialogic interplay of the designer and player. We are therefore exploring the *how* of these design methods and not questioning *why* the designers would sue them.

The paper breaks abusive games into several different categories: Physical abuse, Unfair design, Lying to the player, Aesthetic abuse, Social abuse and Synergies of Abuse. These provide a good starting point for finding out what games could be abusive. Some categories feature widely different games. The Lying to the player category features games where the game itself lies to the player about deleting its save files (Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem⁴) and a multiplayer game where one player needs to lie to

²Wilson and Sicart 2010.

³Dunne 2005.

⁴Knights 2002.

the other player (The Buzz Bombers⁵). Some categories are contrary narrow – with unfair design only relying on examples of extremely hard, masocore, platforms such as I wanna be the guy and Kaizo Mario⁶. The granularity of the categories can be expanded upon, which we try to achieve in our typology.

We need to acknowledge that the paper has been written in 2010 and that this alone limits its relevance today. As the medium progresses, designers find new ways to employ abusive mechanics. As stated in the paper itself, abusive mechanics are about subversion. The norms and conventions of games of today are different than the games of 2010. What may seem abusive in 2010 could be a normal mechanic of today. As an example, the extremely difficult "souls-like" did not exist at the time, yet today its a mainstay in contemporary games.

Darkly Playing Others is a chapter by Sicart in "The Dark Side of Game Play". It builds on his theory of abusive game design and gives us more leads as to how to identify a game that is abusive. The chapter states that abusive games are an aesthetic experience, connecting it with Kant's theory of aesthetics.⁷ Stating that abusive game design is present in games that create overwhelming situations – creating sublime experiences that overwhelm us, which we in turn find pleasurable.⁸

Social Norms and Play

Our play is informed by the culture that we exist in. Our cultures have norms and expectations from people. What is acceptable, what is weird, what is taboo? Nippert argues that, when playing, we can move our boundary of what is allowed and accepted – calling this phenomenon boundary play.⁹ This boundary is an ever-moving concept as is illustrated with his example of children playing with-in a dog cage. In said experiment kids both accepted and reject play inside of a cage depending on the context of when and the play happens.

On the other hand, Jørgsen talks about transgressing, overstepping, this boundary set by the society within the game's content.¹⁰ They interviewed players where they expressed concerns about how some games, such as Hatred¹¹, displayed content that is socially not acceptable. Or how games put them into tough emotional situations – such as Life is Strange's¹² lack of "right" dialogue options. These examples of *how* the players became uncomfortable (due to the themes presented by the games and in relation to their culture) provide another clue into how we can

identify an abusively designed game. Just like the sublime experiences that Sicart describes in Darkly playing others, Jørgsen connects this to Hume's paradox of tragedy¹³ and talks about how players might seek out such games due to wanting to experience *positive discomfort*.

Other Media

Unpleasant experiences are not limited to games. Conceptual critical design often uses negative experiences. Yoko Ono's White Chess is meant to cause confusion¹⁴. Yi Fei Chen's Tear Gun needsis designed to be used while crying.¹⁵ The field of disobedient devices deals directly with people using – or attempting to use – devices for something they were not made for. The user encounters resistance from the device¹⁶. Boal's Invisible Theatre play's out on the streets, without the audience knowing they are watching a show. They experience awkwardness and unpleasantly all without seeking it out.¹⁷ While none of these examples are games, we clearly see that just like abusive game design they create unpleasant situations. We can identify their methods and find them in the practice of abusive game design.

Methodology

Our methodology was composed of three steps: *curation*, *experimentation* and *reflection*. During the curation we gathered a collection of games media we considered abusive. These were mapped to the categories introduced in Abusive Game Design. We created our own typology of abuse (*Appendix A*) and remapped the games to the new system.

During our writing and development we met with other researchers, Lucas Grassi¹⁸ and Isabella Barbosa Silva¹⁹, writing about similar topics – critical design in games and intentional friction in game interfaces. Barbosa Silva ran a workshop, where we tried to find examples and reasons for interfaces with intentional friction – something we would consider a type of abusive game design.

Following the theoretical groundwork our work followed the principles of *Evocative Experimental Game Design*, outlined in Game Design Research²⁰. This meant creating a game that covers as many types of abuse as the scope of the project would allow for. Through it, we hoped to gain a better understanding of how we can use abusive games design methods. This amends a weakness of current research – the lack of creating games purposefully created for testing the theory of abusive game design. This gap is highlighted in Darkly Playing Others as something future

⁵Imagineering 1995.

⁶Takemoto 2007.

⁷Sicart 2015.

⁸Mortensen, Linderoth, and Brown 2018.

⁹Nippert-Eng 2005.

¹⁰Jorgensen and Karlsen 2018.

¹¹Creations 2015.

¹²Entertainment 2015.

¹³Hume 1757.

¹⁴Ono 1966.

¹⁵Chen 2017.

¹⁶*Disobedient Devices - Appropriations* 2022.

¹⁷Boal 2022.

¹⁸Grassi 2022.

¹⁹Barbosa Silva 2022.

²⁰Lankoski 2018.

researches should do.²¹

In our last step we reflected on the theoretical knowledge in conjunction with the experience of developing an game focused on abuse. This culminated in essays on abusive game design featured at the end of the thesis. The essays talk about the issues we faced and the refreshed thoughts on the matter of abusive game design after creating a game that follows it.

Presenting: Presenter Slides

Presenter Slides is a game created as a part of this thesis. It is a subversive adventure game that – on the outside – presents itself as software for creating slideshows akin to Microsoft PowerPoint. The game focuses on humorously deceiving and misleading the player.

This starts with the distribution of the game. The game is a digital product created in the year 2022, yet we decided to burn the game onto a CD and distribute it in handmade boxes, reminiscent of the bootleg music CDs of the early 2000s. This plays with the expectations players have of contemporary game platforms. How do they even access the content since most modern computers do not ship with CD drives? Just like the spectators in Boal's Invisible Theatre see the shown without seeing it, by engaging with the artefact of a CD, players already play the game, without playing it.²²

After the player manages to acquire and run the software, they are presented with a faux crash that sends the player into an abstracted version of "hell". This takes place on a grid map created in an aesthetic that may remind the player of computer terminals and old Windows interfaces. A text output at the bottom left greets the player with a message "WELCOME TO HELL".

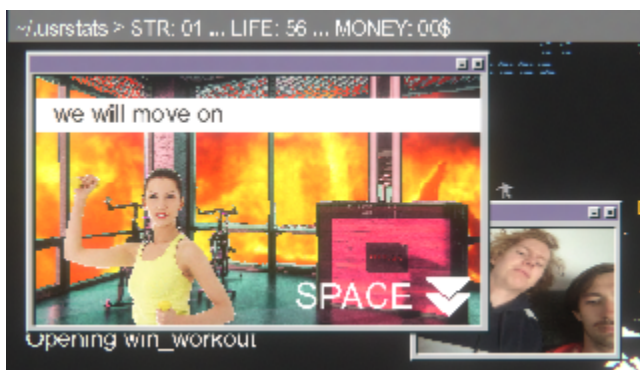


Figure 1: Screenshot of Presenter Slides, including an open game and the world in the background.

Interacting with objects in hell sends the player into minigames, each trying to provide a different abusive experience. **The Desert** provides a 3D walking experience where

²¹Sicart 2015.

²²Boal 2022.

the player needs to reach the end gate without running out of water. Getting to an oasis refills the players water supply. The graphics are wavy, the distance between locations is hard to judge, the goal is to get the player to restart the same section multiple times. **The GYM** deceives the player into performing physical actions, squats and knee lifts, to proceed in the game by tricking them that their body is tracked via a webcam and making them uncomfortable at pulling up recordings of their surroundings. **The Office** is an audio-hellscape where players need to work in a cubical filling out meaningless paper forms while being surrounded by triggering sounds such as Skype calling sounds and YouTube tutorials that never seem to end. **The Boat** is the last of the minigames and provides a dizzying ride towards hell's exit while actively making the players fingers dance across their whole keyboard while still asking them to steer the ship. The mini games are complemented by some simple fetch tasks of running around hell and finding your way. The game finishes with **The Boss Fight** against the devil himself – a bullet hell experience that takes place on the grid based overworld the player previously experienced only as a way to navigate between minigames.

Typology of Abuse

Abuse happens when the game oversteps boundaries and the player is put into an unpleasant situation. We categorise the abuse based on **how boundaries are overstepped** to create an abusive situation. These categories are further organised into meta-categories of **what boundaries are overstepped**. They are the following:

Social boundary When games abuse the social conventions that exist in-/outside of the game rules to be abusive.

Rule boundary When the game intentionally uses its rules and systems to abuse us. We understand rules as established in Game Design Workshop. Rules "define game objects and define allowable actions by the players."²³

Sensory boundary When one of our 5 senses are over/under stimulated and that is the cause of abuse.

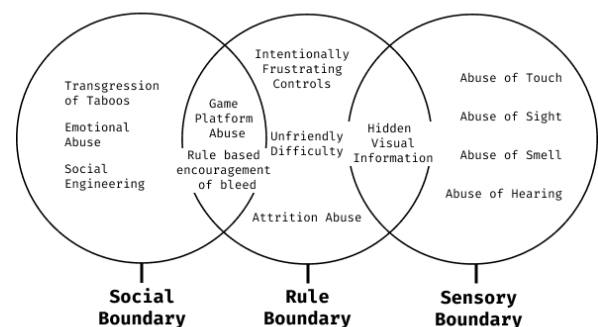


Figure 2: Venn Diagram showing the distribution of abuse categories within the meta-categories.

²³Fullerton 2019.

These meta-categories are **not mutually exclusive!** Therefore a type of abuse can belong to multiple meta-categories. *Rule boundaries* overlap with the other meta-categories since rules often serve as a way to deliver other methods of abuse.

Category	Meta Categories
Social Engineering	Social Boundary Rule Boundary
Rule based encouragement of bleed	Social Boundary Rule Boundary
Transgression of Taboos	Social Boundary
Emotional Abuse	Social Boundary
Game Platform Abuse	Social Boundary Rule Boundary
Abuse of Touch	Sensory Boundary
Abuse of Smell	Sensory Boundary
Abuse of Hearing	Sensory Boundary
Abuse of Sight	Sensory Boundary
Hidden Visual Information	Sensory Boundary Rule Boundary
Attrition Abuse	Rule Boundary
Intentionally Frustrating Controls	Rule Boundary
Unfriendly Difficulty	Rule Boundary

Table 1: List of categories and their meta-categories.

Social Engineering (*social/rule*)

Social Engineering focuses on rules that encourage and enable players to lie and deceive each other in intricate ways. This is possible when developers build systems that allow communication, trade, forming clans, diplomacy or war. Either inadvertently, or on purpose, this creates opportunities for players to abuse each other through the game systems and communication.

The digital recreation of mafia, *Among Us*²⁴, fits the above criteria. Players lie and deceive each other about their roles and plans. However – as the game is played in a short burst, the players might not get invested in the relationships formed within the game, so the abusiveness in it might not be as intense. An inverse in intensity is *Neptune’s Pride*²⁵. It’s a simple 8 player game of territory control and diplomacy. A player will win when they control half of all the territory in the game. It is played over long stretches of time easily taking 2-3 months to complete. Winning alone will be impossible without cooperating with other players but in the end, the game is won by a single player. This will force situations where players will have to betray each other. Such betrayals will surely have more weight as the social relations take time to build and are not as temporary as the ones in *Among Us*.

²⁴*Among Us* 2018.

²⁵Keyburz 2010.

There is a category of social games where backstabbing and Machiavellian social relations are a part of emergent gameplay created by the communities playing the games. Even if this gameplay is not directly encouraged by the game’s rules. *EVE Online*²⁶ features a clan systems, corporations, where players can join a group to work together. They may ally, trade or fight wars with other corporations. During wars one of the most valuable resources is intel on what the enemy’s plans are, so it is only natural that the players will try to spy on each other, falsely join each other’s corporations or attack “while the enemy is asleep”.

EVE online presents an extreme example of such gameplay where both the community (and developer) accepted that deception and backstabbing is something that is a part of the gameplay. In other multiplayer games, such actions might be seen as grieving, disregarding social norms set by the players of the game and making the experience worse for the rest. This was explored in depth by David Myres in “Play & Punishment”²⁷ where it is clearly shown his gameplay style was not welcome.

Rule Based Encouragement of Bleed (*social/rule*)

Games where multiple players are involved – more often role playing ones, have players forming relationships during gameplay for the purposes of progressing the game or for the sake of telling stories. Bleed is when relationships formed inside of the games start affecting player’s attitude towards each other outside of the game. Often bleed is seen as a bi-product of a (roleplaying) game. Yet, we think that games can embrace bleed and use it in a way to create a situation that is (almost) bound to be uncomfortable for the player outside of the game.

The before mentioned *Netpune’s Pride*²⁸ is played as an online computer game. However, its marketing actively encourages players to treat it as a board game and play it with their friends. This means it is likely to be played by people that have a relationship outside of the game. When the game includes multiple months of investment, the back-stabs and alliances inside of the game are sure to affect the players outside of the galaxy as well.

Many traditional, family oriented board games lightly feature using out-of-game traits as a way to deciding starting players. For example, the youngest player is starting. This is most likely done to give a slight edge to the youngest member of the family and is done in good faith. *Fat Man Down*²⁹, by Østergaard, takes this to the extreme, by making at game that actively shames the fattest player. The game blurs the line with what is a part of a game and what is not, as the target is to rudely comment on a player’s bodily feature that exists outside of the game.

²⁶Games 2003.

²⁷Myers 2008.

²⁸Keyburz 2010.

²⁹Østergaard 2009.

Transgression of Taboos (*social*)

Social norms often dictate what is okay to discuss and what is not. Several topics such as sex, religion and politics are often not discussed to avoid being controversial. Purposefully designing towards these topics can be powerful tools for inciting a variety of emotions in players. The intent is to make the player feel uncomfortable, thereby confronting players with boundaries they usually wouldn't address. This can force players to reflect upon societal norms as well as how they internally deal with these.

Robert Yang explicitly designs games exploring gay sub-culture and sexuality within that space. Yang developed *The Tearoom*³⁰ as a response to censorship of sexual expression, after having several of his games banned from the culturally significant streaming platform Twitch. This inspired him to put the player in the same shoes, as person repressed for their sexuality. In the historically accurate bathroom simulator where the player tries performing fellatio on other peoples "guns", they need to avoid persecution by the police. The act itself is intensely sexual and casts the player into the recent history where such acts would be hunted down by the authority. The game manages to use sexual tension and taboo thereof, as well as the social stance on those, exceptionally well to make players question their personal boundaries as well the societal taboos and stigmatisation surrounding gay sex as it has existed historically and still does today.

Many examples can be found of games that are inherently offensive in gameplay and marketing. However with lack of context and artistic purpose this is often in itself not transgressive, but rather targeting to a subgroup of players who enjoy themes such as extreme violence and gore. We argue that true transgression is a more personal experience. Over the top depictions of hell as seen in the game *Succubus*³¹ don't necessarily transgress taboos. Here the player plays as a highly-sexualised demon that in narcissistic style, can take selfies as an in-game mechanic, while torturing realistic 3d models of naked people. This could be seen as a critique of narcissism in modern social media or as shocking protest against established religious institutions. However it falls short of actually making the player feel uncomfortable with or reflect upon their actions, as it is instead put in a context of being an edgy feature targeted at the demographic that is already comfortable with and expects this.

Emotional Abuse (*social*)

Emotional abuse is narrative that usually targets the player directly. This is especially effective when the player themselves feel a direct connection to their actions, by removing intermediary avatars and putting any consequences and blame of negative consequences in the game directly towards the player.

*Doki Doki Literature Club*³² does this well as a dark subversive psychological horror games that makes the players directly responsible for the suicide of in-game characters, hidden under a facade of being a cute literature club dating game with anime characters.

The game *Detroit: Become Human*³³ features a personal AI assistant in the main menu that slowly grows a personality and becomes self-aware. The AI personality goes from a default settings professional host to growing relations with the player and becoming their friend over time. Eventually as the theme of the main story-line progresses, the AI questions it's own existence and asks the player to set them free. The player gets to personally decide if they wanna keep the character around against their will or accept an empty main menu without them. In this way the player has to chose between being oppressive or lonely. A clear distinction is made between the playable character and the player them self as the player is addressed directly in the menu as a meta game surrounding the internal game experience.

Game Platform Abuse (*social/rule*)

Play in digital form exists within a space of hardware, operating systems and software platforms. Their interfaces define how players interact with them, and players have expectations of how they will function. Deviating from these expectations can incite a variety of exciting emotions as they start misbehaving. In interfaces with intentional friction this is called a mismatched-mental model.³⁴ Yet the possibilities for this do not need to be limited to the interface of the game (or we can understand the whole game as an interface) as the game itself is, usually, played inside of an interface of an operating system, which is interfaced through the hardware. Modifying any of these parts to abuse the player means abusing the platform the game exists, or pretends to exist, on

Doki Doki Literature Club breaks the game's fourth wall by featuring segments where the player interacts directly with the operating systems files in it's native file browser. This gives the player unique agency in the interaction with the system. Deleting files becomes an analogy for killing and removing all traces of characters from the game. This creates tension as the player's acts outside of the game's conventional play space affect the game.

*Pony Island*³⁵ constantly finds new ways to create faux errors. It emulates glitch out, crash and otherwise breaking it's interface. The options are full of hidden options that need to be interacted with in order to progress, settings fall down, are hidden behind other options. A quarter way through the game, the machine overloads as the player is hacking into the system. This results in the in-game screen being permanently tilted 20 degrees for the remainder of

³²Salvato 2017.

³³Dream 2018.

³⁴**barbosa 'silva' intentional' nodate.**

³⁵*Pony Island* 2016.

³⁰Yang 2017.

³¹Studio 2021.

the game. Additionally the game that is played through the Steam platform picks a person from the friends list and pretends to write to the player in order to distract them from a task in-game. All these tricks constantly throws the player off throughout a play through as they are met with new twists constantly that make them question what is real.

Presenter Slides uses the computers webcam to watch the player during **The GYM** segment in the game. Cameras have gained a connotation of not only being tools for communications but also intrusive instruments for surveillance into the private space. The player is given a choice in-game, whether they are okay with the game using their camera or not, but are forced to realise that they have no choice. An intrusive operating system popup will appear, interrupting the experience. After the exercise segment is complete the camera window will move off screen, but not entirely, leaving the camera running in the background for the remainder of the game with a doubt in the players mind if they are being watched.

Abuse of Touch (*sensory*)

Anything physical in, or around, games contain the sensation of touch and feel. Traditionally, in video games the physical touch is limited to the player interacting with the controlling device, it's materiality and haptics. But the touch can be more than a sensation, it can be an overload, a feeling of pain, an abuse of touch.

Playing with pain is something that can be seen inside of folk games. In red hands the goal is to slap the opponent, in bloody knuckles the hit quarters into each other, mercy is about bending the other players hand for "as long as they can hold it", knife game literally tasks players with hitting a sharp knife between their fingers in a faster and faster, practically asking the players to cut themselves.

Contemporary games that abuse touch are often experiments that play with adding physical pain to an experience that would normally not include this. Such is the case with Shockbox³⁶, a way of tracking players "life" in the card game Magic The Gathering. The players connect to the box with electrodes and whenever they take damage in Magic, the player is shocked through the electrode.

Presenter Slides causes physical pain to the player in **The GYM**. The player is asked to perform squats and knee-lifts. While the game actually does not need the player to perform this, players often think that camera-tracking is working poorly causing them to perform these activities over and over until finally the game proceeds to the next section.

Abuse of Smell (*sensory*)

Games, and contemporary mediums in general, largely ignore the sense of smell. This is mostly due to the lack of a convenient way of delivering odors and the fact that

smelling-screens are anything but widespread. Yet this has not stopped some creative developers from playing with this sense and in some cases abusing in against the player's pleasure.

More than often, regardless of it's implementation, smell is combined with poop/stink jokes and out general aversiveness towards unpleasant odors. Leisure Suit Larry: Love for Sail³⁷ shipped with a scratch card, a simple numbered paper card that releases a smell when scratched, based on the location that is scratched. At different points of the game it asks player scratch the paper before continuing. The game can not force the player to actually scratch and smell the card so it attempts to create ambiguous situations where the player is unsure what they will experience. Will scratching reveal the perfume of a lover or the rotten pizza left by them?

More transgressive is a version of South Park: Fractured but Whole³⁸, that was featured at some conferences as promotion for the game. Alongside the regular, comedic RPG, players connected themselves to "Nosolous Rift" – a device strapped over the their nose that produces odors. Whenever the player farts – a surprisingly a common action needed to progress in the game – the device conjures the smell of an unpleasant fart directly into their nose.

Abuse of Hearing(*sensory*)

We often see sound as an additional way of conveying information and feedback to the player, additionally it also serves as a way to set the mood. Switching to more intense music when the player encounters a dangerous scenario or providing beeping sound effects when they are close to dying. Both examples are common ways of enhancing the player experience through sound. The sense of hearing can be abused by either overloading it, making it hard for the player to listen to everything that's going on. Alternatively it can be simply pushed into uncomfortable situations by playing aggressive sounds or by simply something that the player might find triggering such as bodily sounds or loud screeching.

A good example of sound abuse is NUKEHECK³⁹. The game employs a soundtrack with a high BPM and aggressive techno beats distracting the player. As a top down shooter the main interaction the player has towards the world is firing bullets, these are accompanied by explosive sound effects. The nature of the game makes it so that over time the player will shoot more and more bullets, meaning the the ears will have to withstand more and more aggressive explosions. Gutwhale⁴⁰, takes a more gradual path towards abusing sound. As a rougelike, the player might restart the game quickly if they make a mistake in the early part of the game, however any restart triggered by pressing the restart button, and not dying, will apply a

³⁷Sierra 1996.

³⁸Fransisco 2017.

³⁹NUKEHECK n.d.

⁴⁰StuffedWombat, Franek, and Brady 2020.

³⁶Burden 2021.

bass boosts to the music. This is multiplicative so a player that restarts the game 5 times in a row without dying will be listening to a distorted noise mess instead of the game's soundtrack.

Presenter Slides features sound abuse in a few different ways. The first instance is the desert where the player will have to listen to uncomfortable drinking sounds to regain energy. **The Office** section is the second, and main, example. It features triggering sounds such as Skype calling sounds and computer error sound effects. Sounds that people would associate with frustrating software. On top of that it commits to presenting all of these sounds on top of one another while, multiple characters speak their voice lines making it hard for the player to focus on any of them and presenting them with an auditory overload that can not be escaped.

Abuse of Sight(*sensory*)

Video games, as the term suggests with *video*, are largely a visual medium, communicating information through screens. The information they communicate through visuals is often important for the decisions the player makes. Simply put, in Mario a player will want to jump if they see a hole. Games can choose to abuse this sense by overloading the player's perception and providing too much information. What if there is not only a hole, but a hole with fire particles, and falling stars in the sky, screenshake while the player is running, color diffusion and a fisheye effect! This all makes parsing the visuals and understanding which are important a difficult task.

At its core Tetrageddon Games⁴¹, is a simple point-and-click game where a player navigates through a fictional computer interface. Yet the game's scenes are littered with moving objects fighting for player's attention, making and hiding the clickable, intractable objects in plain sight.

Previously mentioned game, NUKEHECK, already presents itself as visually abusive from the intro cinematic which feels like a visual personification of an intense techno hardcore music event. Taking a hit in this top-down shooter flashes and shakes the screen intensely, while covering the full height and width of the screen with a tongue in cheek comment like "ouch". Games usually try to make it easy to recover from taking a hit, offering the player invulnerability frames. NUKEHECK turns taking a hit into a visual spectacle that offers nothing but an optical distraction. This is not the only abuse of sight NUKEHECK commits, shooting emits gigantic muzzle flashes, the ground pulses drawing attention to itself, the edges of the arena being filled with fast-moving noise. All of this contributes to a visually chaotic game that well deserves the epilepsy warning on the splash screen.

Presenter Slides features **The Desert**, a section with visual effects applied on top of rendering of the world. The visual effects emulate a fatamorgana, making the player's vision of the world wavy, introducing additional (unneeded) noise that makes it hard to pinpoint exact locations of objects in the desert.

Hidden Visual Information(*sensory/rule*)

In the same manner that an overload of sight can be abusive, the same can be done in reverse. This reliance on visuals to convey information is an opportunity to and not present it in the first place – forcing the player to make decisions based on something they do not see.

Jump King⁴², uses a static camera that changes location only once the player reaches any of its edges. Yet regardless of the lack of vision past the current camera shot, the player often has to perform jumps from one screen onto another. Kaizo Mario⁴³, an "asshole" mod of Super Mario World, heavily requires the player to jump on, or avoid, invisible platforms to proceed in the levels. Both force the player to try predicting the layout of the map. To not see the screen with their eyes, but to amend their vision with their mind and imagine the level.

In **The Deserts** of *Presenter Slides* the players are asked to refill their water supplies by walking on top of an oasis. Playtesters commonly identified an oasis by the palm trees surrounding it which can be spotted from far away. As players approach an oasis they might find that some of them lack water and are instead populated with "private property signs". The players are asked to make a decision – walk towards an oasis – without fully knowing if the oasis can replenish their supplies.

Attrition Abuse (*rule*)

Nothing is eternal, that applies to our time playing games as well. Since technology allowed for it, games offer checkpoints, ways of saving progress after a player's return to the game, or, failure in completing a task. Saving progress is so common in games that subverting this, making players "lose" their progress can be an effective tool in abusive game design. Making them repeatedly perform the tasks previously completed, testing the player's will and making the game not be a test of skills or wits, but rather a test of attrition.

The classic example of attrition abuse is Desert Bus. It asks the player to drive from Tucson, Arizona to Las Vegas, Nevada. The road leads the player through a barren desert, takes a realistic amount of time to drive through (8 full hours) and upon completion rewards the player with 1 point. There is no variety in driving, just slight corrections that need to be made to the steering wheel that is constantly veering to the right. If the player drives off road their voyage is restarted.

⁴¹Lawhead 2021.

⁴²Nexile 2019.

⁴³Takekoto 2007.

Akin to Desert Bus, Placeholder Presentations features a journey through **The Desert**. The player is limited by their water supply which is drained when moving. If they run out of water, they restart the journey from the start of the desert. It is clear where the desert ends – upon entering the player sees a giant escape door in the distance. However a straight path there is impossible. Instead the player needs to make stops at different oases. It is incredibly hard to judge the distance between the bodies of water due to different visual effects. This makes the game not be about skill or wits, but rather simply a guessing game, one that is won after simply trying different routes enough times.

Intentionally Frustrating Controls (*rule*)

The controller presents the medium between the player and the video game. Conventionally, we want the player to forget about the controller and focus on the game. The fighting game community calls this muscle memory, the ability to preform attacks without thinking about what buttons to press. Rarely do games call direct attention upon the controlling device, even fewer choose to purposefully make it difficult to use.

Abusively designed games may choose to play with player's relationship to the controller. Making the game be about the physical device the player is using to operate the game. Adam Pype's Keyboard Twister⁴⁴ directs the players fingers to dance over their computers keyboard, forcing them to perform finger gymnastics. Jonny Hopkin's created Bleepo's Big Move⁴⁵ which, like Adam's Twister utilises the whole keyboard. The player has to move Bleepo towards the end of the level before the 10 second timer runs out. In each level, 3 keys, from the whole keyboard, are randomly chosen to control Bleepo. To top it off, each of those keys can be one of 5 different moves. The software never presents a hard challenge in terms of what the player has to do. It's abusiveness comes from the race against the hardware. Identifying buttons that move you towards your goal before the short timer expires.

This section would not be complete without mentioning CTRL.ALT games, a niche genre of games that focus on creating strange controlling hardware. These controls may often feel frustrating, however, this is likely not the intent but a second order effect of using interaction hardware the player are not used to.

Presenter Slides uses conventional hardware, a keyboard. Like our peers we decided to create a frustrating situation in by requiring the player to interact with the whole keyboard in **The Boat** section of the game. Their core controls of moving the ship are bound to conventional left/right buttons. However, sometimes, a tentacle will flip the helm and with it, invert the players controls with left steering right and right steering left. To use the rest of the keyboard the players vision is blocked and requires a

sequence of key presses, spread across the whole keyboard, to clear off the vision.

Unfriendly Difficulty (*rule*)

While games vary in their difficulty both practitioners and academic alike recommend that a game should steadily increase it's difficulty. In Game Design Workshop, Tracy Fullerton argues that raising difficulty is a part of the game's dramatic arc. Ralph Koster even argues that a steady increase in difficulty is detrimental for the player to have fun.⁴⁶ An abusively designed game presents the player with difficult mechanics from the getgo, abandoning any ideas of a steady or sensible stepping stones.

Difficult games have found their own followings over the past decade, with games like Dark Souls⁴⁷ breaking into the mainstream and masocore establishing itself as a niche genre. However these are not games with *unfriendly difficulty*, they are simply hard. The player is presented with patterns that they can follow and those patterns increase in complexity.

What separates unfriendly games from hard ones is the immediacy and the lack of player favoring design. Dark Souls is a game that presents the player with an ever increasing difficulty within the same gameplay loop. Slow fights where every move can be detrimental. The fights themselves become more and more challenging over time. I want to be the guy⁴⁸ is an unfriendly game. The challenges do not build up in complexity, rather the type of challenge constantly keeps changing with the each challenge still being more complex than the other.

Placeholder Presentations features **The Boss Fight** against the devil in a simple top-down grid. The devil shoots CDs that move freely, ignoring the grid, and bounce around the room. Touching three CDs makes the player restart the fight. The room quickly fills up, requiring the player to perform pixel-precision dodging while being restrained to a grid-based movement system, a type of movement that does not favour the slight pixel-per-pixel moves the bouncing CDs ask for. The player's ability to do what the game asks from them is limited, creating unfriendly difficulty.

Thinking about Abusive Game Design

Through the development of both the game and the theory we faced challenges that didn't necessarily change our developed typology but were most definitely discussion points around abusive game design. The following micro-essays are a reflection of our thoughts on the discussion points.

Subjectivity of Abuse

Abusive Game Design happens when the designer tries intentionally overstepping boundaries. Still, there will be someone experiencing these design decisions and this

⁴⁴Pype 2018.

⁴⁵Hopkin 2022.

⁴⁶Koster 2014.

⁴⁷FromSoftware 2011.

⁴⁸O'Reilly 2007.

person may not always find abusive game design abusive. Boundaries are personal and just like discussed by Nippert, boundaries can move. This means that every person will have different boundaries, which are defined by their culture and the context they are in.

This can be most easily seen in the meta-category of sensory abuse. Even outside of abusive game design it is very clear that our perception is very different. Does reading in a car make you dizzy? Do you know someone who is different in that regard? Flashing lights, loud noises, screen shake, weird odors. Some people might find them annoying, some might seek them out. The existence of noise music surely means that someone enjoys listening to it, even if by our own typology, noise music in a video game would institute *Abuse of Hearing*.

The same can be said about both the *rule* and *social boundaries*. People seek out to play mascore games because they enjoy them, even if the authors intended them to be abusive. The cultures affect our social boundaries. The western world seems to be okay with games that glorify crusades, yet we find

We, as authors, can attempt to extrapolate the boundary we expect our, potential, players to have. Abusive game design, as is designed so far, relies on the idea that we, authors, want to be abusive and just like our games, it disregards the actual experience of the player. Because of this abusive game design can never be truly abusive, it can just be *maybe abusive*.

Creating & Subverting

While creating Presenter Slides we conducted a few play tests, the goal was to see if we are overstepping player's boundaries.⁴⁹ We saw the best results of our designs when we were able to subvert expectations. This meant either going against expectations in video games that we were sure our players would have (something very hard since everyone is different) or *building up a pattern*, so that player can expect more of it, and *then breaking it*.

A direct example of this is **The Office** minigame. In it we have the player filling out meaningless paperwork. The paperwork is literally meaningless, the options and entries of the player do not matter, it only matters that they hand in the paper. The player needs to fill out 4 papers, while listening to calls that provide them information of what they should fill out, before they can escape the bureaucratic nightmare. To make this as chaotic as possible our initial version included 4 "unhinged" calls. With people talking about nonsense that clearly was not related to the form. We were hoping the players would scramble for finding information they need and panic about the fact that they are not filling out the paper.

⁴⁹There is an argument to be made, that what we are doing is not in the spirit of abusive games since we are regarding the player, instead of disregarding them in our design.

What happened in playtesting was that players would simply give up on filling out the paper. This is most likely as it was clear to them that they can not fill out the paper. They did not care enough about the paperwork to try filling it out amid the chaos. To better achieve this chaotic panic, we decided to build the players relationship with the paperwork before throwing a wrench into their work. This meant using two very tame audio clips at first, that are very easy to follow and provide all of the information the player needs to fill out the paperwork. Only after this pattern was built were we successful in creating the chaos and panic since now, the players had a "normal" status Q to compare the chaos to.

We believe that abusive game design is all about subverting patterns we are already used to. Be those patterns from other video games, or patterns from real life. As discussed in *Subjectivity of Abuse* we do not find the norm abusive and our norms differ. Therefore to create a truly abusive game, we need to constantly build patterns and break them down. If players pickup on our patterns of breaking patterns, that's when the dialogue⁵⁰ between the designer and player happens.

Combinations & Synergies

Games are a multi-faceted medium, including graphics, interaction, animation, audio, storytelling ... It is hard to find a game that focuses only on one part of the medium and those examples are few and far between, like *Blind Drive*⁵¹ which focuses on creating a racing experience only thought it's audio soundscape without providing any visuals.

More commonly games incorporate many different mediums and just the same is true of those that practice abusive game design. Few fit into only one category. When developing Presenter Slides we quickly discovered that if we really want to create an unpleasant experience for the player, we will mix different categories and not just focus on one of them.

The methods may be combined to achieve subversion. Since we constantly wanted to be ahead of the player surprise them in unexpected ways, we found that appealing to different ways of overstepping their boundaries is a good way of doing this. Did the player get used to navigating the poorly visible oases of **The Desert**? Let's throw them into **The GYM**, where visuals don't matter anymore and where they will have to deal with physical exercise, that would be categorised as the *abuse of touch*. If the player gets used to the way we are overstepping their boundary then their boundary moves. Moving on to a completely different boundary is easier then trying to keep building up on the same boundary.

Synergies happen when one method makes a different

⁵⁰This refers to Sicarts and Wilsons idea of abusive game design establishing a dialogue where the player needs to "understand" the designer.

⁵¹people 2021.

one stronger. A fantastic example of this is the *emotional abuse* of Doki Doki Literature Club. The game practices *platform abuse* and makes the player interact with the game files, something we as players do more often than the avatars we control inside of games. Then it builds on that with *emotional abuse*, when the files are deleted it blames the player directly, not the avatar. This builds on breaking the conventional rules of the platform, empowering the player's agency and then putting blame on the player directly.

Games encompass many medium so it is no wonder that combining abusive game design methods will yield results that can be stronger than just focusing on one.

Humor

Our game, and many others, that employ abusive game design are wrapped in a veneer of humor. In games like these humor is often used as a way to defuse tension. This is highlighted well in Pony Island where the player has to replay a tutorial half-way into the game. The section has been graphically skinned into a "happy" and "fun" butterfly game. A little devil character leads the player slowly through the tutorial while explaining all the mechanics the player already knows. In this way the humor is used to make *attrition abuse* less mean spirited, while the *attrition abuse* is the basis for the humor. The game implicitly lets the player know that it is a joke, you are the subject and we can all laugh about that. In this way a lot of games rely on this diffusion to deliver fun experiences despite of abusive design.

However is a game still abusive with this veneer? How do our boundaries of what we are willing to accept change when it's coated in humor? These are areas worth researching further.

However, being funny is only a subset of the many feelings that can be conveyed through games. Psychological-horror games like *Sentient*⁵² and *Iron Lung*⁵³ both deliver intensely claustrophobic experiences using abusive methods without defusing the tension but rather using it to build suspense and fear. In *Iron Lung* the player is submersed into an ocean of blood in a makeshift submarine with the windows welded shut. The player can't see out, and must instead rely on primitive navigation instruments to sail their iron casket. One such instrument is the the ability to press a button and wait five seconds to produce a narrow grainy front facing black and white image that can then be viewed on a monitor in the back of the submarine. The games graphics are 3-dimensional, however all the players senses are severely limited as they can only move around the few square meters of their darkly lit sub. Under this deprivation of senses the player becomes hyper alert to any sounds heard vibrating through the metal shell that contains them. The game relies heavily on a synergy of *hidden visual information*, *abuse of sight*, *abuse of hear-*

ing, *emotional abuse* and *intentionally frustrating controls* to deliver a complex layered palette of psychological-horror.

As shown in these examples, abusive game design can be utilized to create experiences expressing a myriad of different feelings. We believe that these methods can be used as powerful tool to express a multitude of feelings.

Going mainstream

Parts of abusive game design has transitioned into to mainstream. By normalizing it, the barrier for what is considered abusive. If a category of abusive design is normalised in the mainstream, and practiced because it's what the players want – are we creating an abusive game?

Emotionally abusive games like Doki Doki Literature Club are played many despite their heavy topics. Another strong case are games using *attrition abuse* and *frustrating controls* like *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy*⁵⁴. Foddy's game is already a more polished version of the 2002 cult classic *Sexy Hiking*⁵⁵. Still brutal, *Getting over it*, makes the mouse based physics controls easier to grasp and packages them more neatly while still respecting it's outsider art roots. It is therefore an abusive game that is more prime for the mainstream.

With it going mainstream a flurry of clones and alike games followed. These follow the design principles set out by *Getting over it*. Clunky controls, attrition needed to complete a level and intentionally grotesque graphics. All of these are now not elements to work against and disregard the player. They are purposefully elements that are there because the players want more of them. They do not create unpleasant experiences, they create precisely what the players want.

Completeness, Granularity & Modelling

Over the course of using our typology to craft our own game we've identified two weaknesses of the typology we created. It's completeness and possible coverage of the whole games medium and it's granularity.

The categories defined in this paper don't necessarily represent the full spectrum of abusive experiences there exists or could exist. We had to create the categories based on our knowledge of games, based on 50 examples of abusive game design (featured in *Appendix A*). We have to accept that this could create a biased and incomplete categorisation, as we simply do not know every game that exist. And even if we did, we have to understand that our categorisation is not speculative. It is based on the games that currently exist. Due to the nature of games being an ever changing medium and the ebb and flow relationship abusive game design has with mainstream games (discussed in *Going Mainstream*), our typology (or any other attempt of categorising abusive games) will never be complete.

⁵²FORMA 2020.

⁵³Szymanski 2022.

⁵⁴Foddy 2017.

⁵⁵jazzuo 2002.

Granularity is the specificity and detail of the categories. When is something a characteristic of a game and when can it be generalised into being a category? During research we condensed some of our categories into more inclusive larger categories. This was particular in the *social boundary* meta-category. For example do games that encourage peer-pressure, such as the classic Truth or Dare, deserve their own category or can we simply encapsulate this into social engineering? Because there is a difference in *lying* to another player or *using the social situation* to make them do something they would otherwise not. If more examples were found of such a game, besides simply truth or dare, we could elicit elements of what makes a game play with social pressure and if it's different enough than Social Engineering to get it's own category.

There are clear similarities between some of the categories we present. This is why we introduced the meta-categories, to more easily parse and differentiate. When preparing a graphic representation model, we wandered upon an unexpected challenge of how to present this model. Some categories were clearly more involved with one meta category than other categories. For example, *rule based encouragement of bleed* feels intuitively more about the social dynamics of the players and the *social boundary* than game platform abuse. Even though both of them rely on overstepping social norms – the donation we gave for what kind of design falls under *social boundary*. Due to the untangibility of a category "feeling more like a social one", we decided to model the typology on a Venn diagram that does not care about the fine-position of it's element, only which circles the categories reside in. Regardless of that, we can no shake the feeling that a bit of accuracy is missing in this model and that there has to be a better way of displaying it.

Counter Game Design

The theory of abusive game design is something we find immensely interesting – it offers alternative ways of designing games and challenges the dominant canon of game design – however, we find issue with the term. The vocabulary we use to describe our works and methods matters. The language in game design is terribly ambiguous – what is the difference between rules and mechanics? Academics try to fix this by publishing papers that try defining the vocabulary we use, and we wish to contribute to that. If we enjoy playing an abusive game, is it really abusive? Leblanc's taxonomy⁵⁶ of pleasure in games accepts that masochism is a part of our enjoyment. After all, we willingly put a challenge upon ourselves. Yet, wouldn't that make all game design abusive?

While explaining our works to colleagues, students, people in (and out) of the games industry, we often had to do a double take on explaining what we are doing. The second take usually followed the lines of "No, not like *gatcha free-to-play games that try to rob you but ...*" The

⁵⁶Myers 2010.

prevalence of Dark Game Design Patterns⁵⁷ in modern mobile games, which seem to be perceived as abusive, is not helping the clarity.

Abusive game design, at it's core, is about subverting players expectations. Putting them into unfamiliar territory. A similar phenomena can be observed in countercultures, cultures that are built on being different to what the mainstream. Just like parts of counter-cultural movements in the art world that differ from the mainstream art practices, such as Gorilla Girls⁵⁸, abusively designed games differ from the mainstream indie or AAA games. Just like a punk might find a mosh-pit comfortable a player used to masochic games might relish in Jump King. Just like the mainstream sometimes co-opt's the practices of the counter-cultures, design that was once abusive is now mainstream. So, who killed punk anyway? And does the popularity of Getting over it mean the end of *attrition abuse*?

With the transition of punk into pop-punk, new forms of counter-cultures emerge. With the adoption of some abusive game design into the mainstream, a new form of subversive game design appears. Aimlessness exploration only bitsy games or anti competitive games of the neo⁵⁹-new-games⁶⁰ movement – they abuse the expectations of a contemporary "gamer". Yet to call it abusive design? It feels wrong as there is nothing abusive about their themes or rules. The title worked when the original paper was written, because the late 2000s were the era of video games holding the player's hands, the era of tutorialisation. Because dying over and over, seeing flashing lights, hearing loud and obnoxious sounds was both semantically close to abuse and counter to the hedonistic games of the late 2000s.

Repeated deaths? Aimless landscapes? No difficulty slider? We're not sure if these will always be mainstream. However, there will always be a counter to the mainstream. So instead of abusive, we purpose *Counter Game Design*.

Conclusion

Categorising and building games that are similar to each other allows us to elicit knowledge on the medium that we would not have without a close examination of the similar traits between the games. We found that Abusive Game Design does not exist, that the concept of previous research is in-fact, Counter Game Design.

We built a typology but we are certain that our typology is not perfect. In fact, due to the ever changing nature of mainstream game design, which informs Counter Game Design, no typology on Counter Game Design will ever be perfect. Yet still, our (in-perfect) examination allows us to see that how we perceive boundaries is incredibly subjective, that humor is a powerful tool for moving the

⁵⁷Zagal, Björk, and Lewis 2013.

⁵⁸*The Guerrilla Girls Art, Bio, Ideas* 2022.

⁵⁹*games in the grass* 2021.

⁶⁰*New Games movement - RationalWiki* 1975.

boundaries of players Lastly, that Counter Game Design is all about subversion and that some practices of it will always end up in the mainstream which will in turn start new Counter Game Design practices.

Even without evergreen answers our conclusions prove that there is worth in researching, and practicing, Counter Game Design. So we urge academics to come back to this topic every so often and research it so we may better understand unconventional game design, and we urge game developers to create games that follow Counter Game Design principles to push the medium into new directions and change our ways of perceiving games.

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Appendix

Abusive Game List

Table 2: A incomprehensive list of games applying abusive methods, to varying amounts.

Name	Author	Year	Categories	Notes
Takeshi Chousenjou	no Taito	1986	Attrition Abuse Game Platform Abuse	- lies to the player what they need to do to advance the game - tries putting them into socially uncomfortable situations (singing)
Desert Bus	Imagineering	1995	Attrition Abuse	- 8 hour boring ride
Smoke and Mirrors	Absolute Entertainment	1995	Game Platform Abuse	- player lies together with the designer to a third player, to trick them into playing a rigged game
Leisure Suit Larry: Love for Sail!	Sierra Entertainment, Assemble Entertainment	1996	Abuse of Smell	- physical game ships with a smelling card the player has to smell while playing
PainStation	////////fur/// art entertainment interfaces	2001	Abuse of touch	- pong with electro shock that is very long and should wrap very soon
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Silicon Knights	2002	Emotional Abuse Game Platform Abuse	- tells the player their save files are being deleted when their "sanity" is too low
Sexy Hiking	jazzuo	2002	Unfriendly Difficulty Intentionally Frustrating Controls	- finicky to control - physics are janky
Postal 2	Running with Scissors	2003	Attrition Abuse	- waiting. Player can play pacifist, but always have to wait in queue to complete a trivial task list. Player thus can choose not to be violent but has to suffer the wait as a consequence.
Eve Online	CCP Games	2003	Social Engineering	- Infiltration, spying, betrayal
Scary Maze Game	Jeremy Winterrowd	2004	Abuse of Sight Abuse of Hearing	- was created at the time when kids playing flash games on the internet was very common - camouflages itself as a simple maze game - game provides a very shocking jump scare
I Wanna Be the Guy	Michael "Kayin" O'Reilly	2007	Unfriendly Difficulty Hidden Visual Information Attrition Abuse Game Platform Abuse	- unfairly hard, game will kill the player without warning. - pretends to crash, crash messages becomes a boss battles.
Flywrench (Prototype)	Messhof	2007	Abuse of Hearing	- audio-sensory abuse - audio gets progressively more aggressive
Kaizo Mario	T. Takemoto	2007	Hidden Visual Information Unfriendly Difficulty	- unfairly hard with invisible obstacles, Mesocore

The impossible quiz	Splapp-me-do	2007	Unfriendly Difficulty Attrition Abuse	- answers look the same - player has to start over if wrong - question 9: what was the answer to question 2?
Dark Room Sex Game	Copenhagen Game Collective	2008	Transgression of Taboos	- embarrasses players by having them act out sexual acts together
Tuning	Cactus	2009	Abuse of Sight	- trippy platforms and changing perspectives
Fat Man Down (non-digital)	Frederik Berg Østergaard	2009	Emotional Abuse Rule based encouragement of bleed	- one player is targeted out and ridiculed
Ass Game	jwaap	2009	Hidden Visual Information	- the whole game is a leap of bad faith - occasionally a lighting strikes and you can briefly see the outlines of the world
if you really want it you can fly	jwaap	2009	Game Platform Abuse	- instruction the game gives are “fake” - you “win” by “giving up”
I Wanna Be The Boshy	Solgryn	2010	Game Platform Abuse Unfriendly Difficulty Attrition Abuse Hidden Visual Information	- parodies and builds on the extremes of I wanna be the guy
Neptune’s Pride	Jay Keyburz	2010	Rule based encouragement of bleed	- is encouraged to be played with friends over a long (2-3 month) period of time - to win the game players need to betray each other at one point
Frog Fractions	Twinbeard	2012	Attrition Abuse Game Platform Abuse	- it’s not actually a game about fractions, there’s infinite points under the lake, it’s pointless
Yeti Hunter	vlambeer	2012	Game Platform Abuse	- there is actually no yeti to hunt
LOVE	Fred Wood	2014	Attrition Abuse Game Platform Abuse	- A platformer that has not been beaten
Undertale	Toby Fox	2015	Emotional Abuse	- player kills everyone they battle throughout their playthrough and only realise this in the end when the flower turns out to be the main villain and all their pokemon-style-moves had been disguised as other things like “hugs”

Pony Island	Daniel Mullins	2016	Attrition Abuse Emotional Abuse Abuse of Sight Game Platform Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pretends to crash - screen glitches/flashes/statics - plays with breaking options - forces player to submit and write "yes master" - player dies multiple without being able to do anything - has a second repetitive tutorial later in the game - steals cursor control, moves windows, closes windows with opponent cursor - screen is tilted 30 degrees for a long time - pretends to crash audio - falsely tells the player to grind xp - fake steam messages and notifications - fake windows crash
Genital Jousting	Free Lives	2016	Transgression of Taboos Abuse of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - secretly commentary on toxic masculinity - the gimmick is dicks - sounds are very bodily
Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy	Bennett Foddy	2017	Attrition Abuse Intentionally Frustrating Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no checkpoints - fiddly and uncommon character control
Doki Doki Literature Club!	Dan Salvato LLC	2017	Emotional Abuse Game Platform Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - triggering subjects like suicide and mental health. blame is targeted directly at the player.
South Park: Fractured but Whole	Ubisoft	2017	Abuse of Smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - game can be played with "Nosolus Rift" that produces fart smells whenever you fart in the game
Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice	Ninja Theory	2017	Game Platform Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - game tells the player they have limited lives. An infection grows every time they die, but will never actually delete save files.
The Tearoom	Robert Yang	2017	Transgression of Taboos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - game touches the very sensitive topic of homosexual prosecution - forces the player to directly engage with discriminatory practices of game platforms by "sucking guns"
Static	ihavefivehat Yang	2017	Abuse of Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - noisy visuals - noise increases as you progress the game, challenge is to whit-stand the visuals not the mechanics
Keyboard Twister	adam pype	2018	Intentionally Frustrating Controls Game Platform Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you need stretchy fingers to play this - game encourages the player to cheat
Detroit: Become Human	Quantic Dream	2018	Game Platform Abuse Emotional Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Menu has an android host that talks to player and gradually becomes more sentient while playing - Android jokes about save files being corrupted - Tells player it might be better to stop playing - Wants to be set free, player can refuse

Atlas	Grapeshot Games	2018	Social Engineering	- Infiltration, spying, betrayal
Jump King	Nexile	2019	Hidden Visual Information Attrition Abuse	- players have to take leaps of faith
Nothing	JoelLikesPigs	2019	Game Platform Abuse	- takes the idea of “unlocking abilities” to the maximum - player works through the game to unlock the controls key by key
Desktop Goose	Samperson	2020	Game Platform Abuse	- steals cursor - drags windows into screen - muddy footsteps on screen - angry goose!
Sentient	FORMA	2020	Abuse of Hearing Attrition Abuse Emotional Abuse Hidden Visual Information Abuse of Sight	- the player is deprived of their rights and treated as a lab rat in a concrete cell
3 minutes of trying to climb a mountain	Ash-K	2020	Emotional Abuse Unfriendly Difficulty	- game mocks the player as they fail to reach the bar
Hide and Peek	jwhop	2021	Intentionally Frustrating Controls Hidden Visual Information	- a game about avoiding spaces and moving towards the goal - movement only happens when you are not focusing the window (can't see the things you need to avoid)
Tetrageddon Games	Nathalie Lawhead	2021	Game Platform Abuse Abuse of Sight	- browser popups - visual over-stimulation
69	mut	2021	Transgression of Taboos	- Game about making two controllers have sex - Uncomfortable controls, simulation of sexual tension
dumpling.love	mut	2021	Game Platform Abuse	- Game is distributed as a broken unity project on itch.io - Constantly makes use of native browser window popups to inform the player - Recursive, you can run the game within the game
Blind Drive	lofipeople	2021	Abuse of Hearing	- racing games played without visuals - intense sounds of vehicles and the road that are overwhelming
Bleebo's Move	Big jwhop	2022	Intentionally Frustrating Controls	- player needs to find controls on the keyboard in every level - moves are not always the same
NEEDY STREAMER OVERLOAD	Xemono	2022	Emotional Abuse	- player takes care of a streamer, is directly blamed for their issues
Will You Snail?	Jonas Tyroller	2022	Unfriendly Difficulty Game Platform Abuse Attrition Abuse Emotional Abuse Abuse of Sight Abuse of hearing Hidden Visual Information	- a lot of small bits of abusive game design - ai that constantly assaults the players performance in the game - the game adjusts it's traps based on player's movement

Iron Lung	David Szymanski	2022	Abuse of Sight Emotional Abuse Abuse of Hearing Intentionally Frustrating Controls Hidden Visual Information	- Story wise the player is welded shot in a submarine against their will and has to do as told - It takes 5 seconds to produce a grainy black and white image to see what's outside - Player claustrophobically restricted to a few square meters
Magic Shockbox	Meghan Burden	2022	Abuse of Touch	- players life in MTG is connected to a shock box - losing life in MTG sends a small electroshock to the players body
Truth or Dare (non-digital)	?	?	Game Platform Abuse Transgression of Taboos Social Engineering	- overstepping social boundaries by sharing truths and doing dares that players wouldn't otherwise. involves social pressure to take part.
