

(Mobile ebook) Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, the Uses of Boredom, and the Secret of Games

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Ian Bogost

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#346016 in Books Basic Books 2016-09-13 2016-09-13Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.50 x 1.00 x 6.50l, .0 #File Name: 0465051723288 pagesBasic Books | File size: 53.Mb

Ian Bogost : Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, the Uses of Boredom, and the Secret of Games before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, the Uses of Boredom, and the Secret of Games:

34 of 36 people found the following review helpful. The World as ArtworkBy Frank LantzHeres a game I like to play. Next time you are in an art gallery, turn away from the paintings and look at the people. Look at them as if that was

the show. Look at the other visitors in the gallery exactly the same way you would look at the art, as if they had been put there to be seen, admired, analyzed, and understood. This game is harder than it looks. We don't realize how many different ways of looking there are, and how different they are. But if you are able to successfully play this game you will learn some things. First, you will learn how ruthlessly we look at art, how rapacious and haughty and impatient and demanding we are. What is this? Where did it come from? What's going on here? What does it mean? Do I like it? Is it worth my time? Turning our art gaze on our fellow humans is shocking, embarrassing, you will instantly want to recoil back to the polite and diplomatic gaze we use for each other. Don't. Because if you persist in this rude game you will learn something else. Humans are amazing. Judged as artworks, random people are deeply, desperately, heartbreakingly beautiful. They are strange, surprising, fascinating. They are overloaded with complex patterns, the primal pleasures of platonic geometry mixed with the playful, self-referential curves of postmodern signifier-tricks. Looked at as artworks, humans are bottomless pools of hypnotic meaning masterpieces of light and shadow, color and shape, symbol, signal and noise. You can do the same thing just walking down the street, or in a coffee shop, or a business meeting, or standing in line at a bank. It doesn't have to be people. It can just be a random street corner with its ordinary surfaces, and all the banal details of the regular world. If you can trick yourself into looking at things as if, as if they were someone's work, as if they had been arranged with a purpose, you may find yourself overwhelmed with the world's haunting beauty the subtle echoes of shape and pattern, the way the light hits the bricks at just the right angle, the suspenseful mystery of an errant shadow, the perfect punchline of an upended cup. This is the trick that Ian Bogost plays on himself, and us, in *Play Anything*. And according to this book it's the trick that games are playing on us all. This is a strange book, at first glance it looks a bit like self-help, pop psychology, or life advice, but it's far weirder and more interesting than that. One of the early voices and key figures in the history of game studies, Bogost's entire career has involved trying to figure out the tricky relationship between games and the world, starting with the primary question what would it mean to take games seriously? How should we approach games as a topic for serious cultural criticism? For a long time, Bogost's answer to that question involved thinking through the many ways games can be about the world. As a critic, and as a designer, he has emphasized how games, like other forms of media, can reflect the world expressing ideas, operating rhetorically, conveying arguments through dynamic models and interactive systems. He has celebrated their power to communicate and persuade and cautioned against their enthusiastic adoption by the snake oil salesmen who would apply them as a magic elixir for shaping behavior. This book marks something of a radical break with these concerns. In *Play Anything* games are treated less as things that work on or through or about or against the world and more as aspects of the world itself, invitations to experience the world as it is, not as we imagine, not for our sake, not in our interest, but on its own terms blunt, indifferent, but also endlessly fascinating and sublime. The way a ball bounces, the way tetronimoes fit together, the way code functions. This new perspective is not a reversal of Bogost's earlier concerns but it feels like the results of a dedicated effort to get beneath them, to discover something foundational about the underlying nature of play and games. His success in this effort suggests that this book belongs beside Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, Suits' *The Grasshopper*, and Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* as a key work in the field. It is probably Bogost's best book to date, and that's saying something. It is also (and probably not unrelatedly) his most personal book. The threads that tie the book together are drawn from his life, his work, his family, his habits and hobbies. Bogost is a writer known for calculated erudition and acerbic wit and this book has both, but it has more. It is weird and warm; human, worldly. It is as if, contemplating the central thesis that games provide an opportunity to confront the stubborn truth of the world, he decided to let the lived reality of his own life guide his thinking. Rather than grand theory-spinning we get close observation of games and life as they actually are. Not idealized, not demonized, not disappointing, or frustrating, or thrilling, or boring or amazing or fantastic. Not life-changing, just life. But look at life, look at the ways it moves and doesn't move. The world, with its limited degrees of freedom, unfolds into intricate arabesques more marvelous than any grand theory could contain. This is the secret of games as Bogost has come to understand them. In addition to being deeply personal, *Play Anything* is also deeply philosophical. For those of us who have followed Bogost's forays into Object Oriented Ontology without every quite understanding how they relate to his work on games, this book closes the loop, providing an intuitive and satisfying connection. The way that games draw us in to trace the convoluted surfaces of objects and rules and materials and code and the brute facts of their behaviors and interactions provides a model for a way of looking at the world beyond the demands of our egos and the distortions of our desires. (The apparent contradiction that OOO itself is an intensely human project, fully subordinate to our egos and desires, it just another one of those facts about the world that we can play with and admire.) It has long been a habit of many ambitious game creators and critics to expound on the glorious potential of games while disparaging their current status. This book suggests a different way of thinking about games potential. It is not up to games to evolve into a more beautiful form, one more pleasing to us, more full of meaning. It is up to us to rise to the challenge they present the challenge to inhabit the world's corners, to see how they work and how we work inside them. The beauty of games is the play of close attention, and it's all around us, waiting for us to look.

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Great idea-sharing potential, very poor delivery
By Shawn Pierce
For the first time in a long time I started a book without finishing it. The idea of starting a book without finishing it does not frazzle me as I would prefer not to be a slave to be

a book that is leading me nowhere. However, I do consider myself able to bring out key details and ideas despite annoyances with a book or writing style. I struggled with Bogost's writing style. He proclaimed his wonderful ideas (and they were really great ideas - no sarcasm) but in a way that was repetitive and boring. There were many insights that came up and interested me, but so much of it was weighed down by the cloudy presentation he gave in his book. Also, despite his repetitive style, I continually found myself having to go back to the beginning of the chapter's to identify the definitions he gave to his key terms: boredom, fun, and games. I loved his definitions and they fit into a holistic worldview (one that I encourage) but they were muddled with so much extra verbiage that I couldn't see the forest for the trees or vice versa. Overall, this is a book that has great idea-sharing potential. But it just doesn't deliver those ideas through a great medium. For a more cogent presentation of Bogost's ideas, I would recommend checking out an interview between Bogost and Brett McKay of the Art of Manliness podcast. 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. For me, it's a self-help book. By Bryan W. Bortz This book has come along at just the right time to help me with my depression and anxiety and understanding what was holding me back as a very intellectual but lonely person. In therapy in early September I came around to a strong but vague thought that I did not know how to play. I felt like I summed up what I struggle with in social situations, but I did not really understand what I was saying. It was a vague and limited thought because I did not understand what Play was. I ran across a tweet in my twitter timeline that had to do with the authors daughter making a game of skipping along tiles in a mall. And all of a sudden I was looking at a book that said on the cover it would teach me how to play. It's "ironic" that I'm so into video games and the culture around them and their production, but I also had this idea that I don't know how to play. This book has shown me that because I didn't even understand what play was, I couldn't see where I was chronically avoiding play. Or how I was keeping it at arms reach out of fear. I couldn't see how I was not respecting situations and activities. I was brushing them off with rationalizations like "It's too cliché" "People are just all doing activity X with little thought" "It's just tribalism" "it's just a distraction from what's important". The book has also shown me that I have a lot of toxic ideas and assumptions about many social situations/activities because of being exposed to so many ironic depictions in culture that don't show me why or how to respect them. Anyway, lots of rambling in my review here. And I admit a lot of it is to help myself reinforce the ideas in my own head so I can better internalize them. But if any of this sounds a bit like you, giving this book a shot might help you get a new perspective on how to play life, instead of existing in it. Edit: I own/read the Audible version. I'm not sure why the purchase is not "verified".

How filling life with play-whether soccer or lawn mowing, counting sheep or tossing Angry Birds-forges a new path for creativity and joy in our impatient age

"Proposing an aesthetic of play, [Bogost] draws on myriad examples, from golf to the task of watering his lawn to his daughter's self-directed rules of 'step on a crack, break your mother's back.' ...[the] idea-driven prose of PLAY ANYTHING might remind you of the applied-philosophy tactics of an Alain de Botton... demonstrate[s] the importance of thoughtful, serious criticism on gaming and play."