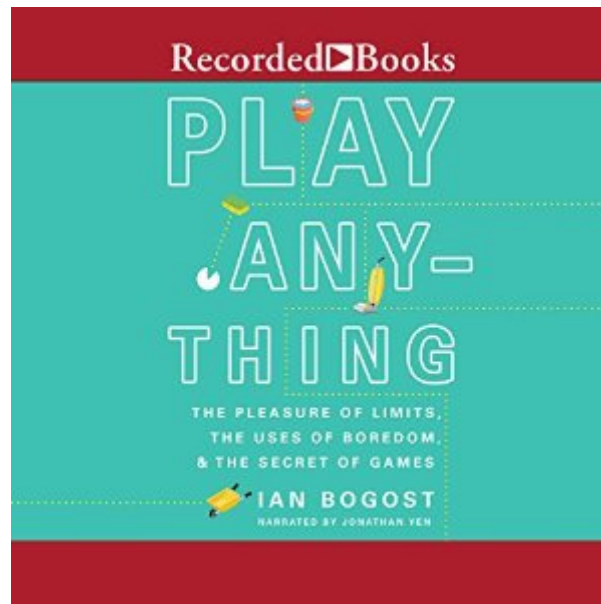


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Play Anything: The Pleasure Of Limits, The Uses Of Boredom, And The Secret Of Games



Synopsis

Life is boring: filled with meetings and traffic, errands and emails. Nothing we'd ever call fun. But what if we've gotten fun wrong? In *Play Anything*, visionary game designer and philosopher Ian Bogost shows how we can overcome our daily anxiety; transforming the boring, ordinary world around us into one of endless, playful possibilities. The key to this playful mindset lies in discovering the secret truth of fun and games. *Play Anything* reveals that games appeal to us not because they are fun, but because they set limitations. Soccer wouldn't be soccer if it wasn't composed of two teams of 11 players using only their feet, heads, and torsos to get a ball into a goal; Tetris wouldn't be Tetris without falling pieces in characteristic shapes. Such rules seem needless, arbitrary, and difficult. Yet it is the limitations that make games enjoyable, just like it's the hard things in life that give it meaning. Play is what happens when we accept these limitations, narrow our focus, and, consequently, have fun. Which is also how to live a good life. Manipulating a soccer ball into a goal is no different than treating ordinary circumstances - like grocery shopping, lawn mowing, and making PowerPoints - as sources for meaning and joy. We can "play anything" by filling our days with attention and discipline, devotion and love for the world as it really is, beyond our desires and fears. Ranging from Internet culture to moral philosophy, ancient poetry to modern consumerism, Bogost shows us how today's chaotic world can only be tamed - and enjoyed - when we first impose boundaries on ourselves.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours and 51 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: September 13, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01KP45MMG

Best Sellers Rank: #20 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling >

Creativity & Genius #21 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Philosophy #22

in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Ethics & Morality

Customer Reviews

Ian Bogost begins his new book, *Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, The Uses of Boredom, and The Secret of Games*, with the following story: "Years ago, I was running an errand and an upscale shopping mall in Atlanta, where I live. I was in a hurry, rushing from one store to another to meet up with my wife. The mall was crowded and bleak and I wanted to leave." I had my young daughter in tow - she was four years old or so. She clutched my hand as I steered us quickly through the throngs of weekend shoppers. I was moving too fast for her small legs, and she was struggling to keep up." But even as I felt her skipping between steps to keep up with me, I also felt her tugging me back intentionally, resisting my forward momentum, pulling me in another direction. When I looked down I saw why: she was staring straight at her shoes, timing her footfalls to ensure she stepped within the boundaries of the square, white tiles lining the mall floor. This sensations I interpreted as pulls and tugs having caused by shifts in her weight as she attempted to avoid transgressing the grout lines, while I pulled her forward and sideways around crowds." [...] she made up a game; she was 'playing,' we say, often dismissively. She made the most of a mundane situation. She turned misery into fun." He concludes: "...We could all benefit by being reared by the blind. Living with things requires that we become continuously blinded to them, that we exercise the ability to see them fresh, familiar or not, by refusing to allow them to collapse into servants or obstacles. Blindness, fun, play, limits, constraints - all these are synonyms for humility. There between earnestness and cynicism [...] we can also find solace if we are willing to pause long enough to stop scolding things for failing to yield us comfort. This is the pleasure of limits, the fun of play. Not doing what we want, but doing what we can with what is given." In between, he upsets almost every theory of play and every foregone conclusion we have ever gone for about fun and games. "Fun Isn't Pleasure," begins the title of his third chapter, "It's Novelty." The subheading: we think fun means enjoyment, and that we want the enjoyment above all else. But we're wrong. Fun is the aftermath of deliberately manipulating a familiar situation a new way. "Play is in Things," he writes in chapter four, "Not in you." "Play is possible," he continues, "when freedom is limited rather than expanded. It is not the opposite of work, nor the opposite of oppression. Play is deliberately working with the materials we encounter." For anyone who cares or works with or thinks about things like fun, enjoyment, happiness, play, and games, *Play Anything* is a conceptual thrill ride. Poetic. Deeply philosophical. Refreshingly insightful. It will challenge almost everything that you think you know about play, and then lift you towards a new and remarkably freeing perspective on everything else - all brought to you courtesy of a father who let himself be momentarily guided through a department store back to the real world by the gentle tugs of a child at play.

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