

<p><b>Institution:</b> Bath Spa University</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 36-Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Videogames and the cultures of play</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study refers to a body of research on videogame studies conducted by James Newman. Since 2002, Newman's work has been at the forefront of international research on videogames. His work on fan cultures, media history and preservation led to collaborations with the international videogames industry and cultural heritage sector partners and the foundation of The National Videogame Archive (2008). Newman's public engagement and knowledge exchange activity have explicated the complexities of game studies and game preservation for a variety of audiences including the heritage and museums sector and development community.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Key researcher: James Newman. Prof. Digital Media, Director of Media Futures Research Centre.</p> <p>Since 2002, Newman's research has been centred on videogames focuses on a range of themes:</p> <p><b>1. Game studies and digital textualities</b> (e.g. Refs 1 and 2: 'In Search of the Videogame Player' (2002), and 'Videogames', (2004/2013). As one of the first scholars in media and cultural studies to address videogames, Newman's work has played an important role in establishing a critical language and methodology for interrogating games and gameplay. Newman's work is distinctive in its multidisciplinary, drawing on perspectives from media and cultural studies theory, geography, sociology, psychology, literary and technology studies. Key to this work is Newman's analysis of narrativist and ludological approaches to game studies which synthesises these apparently competing methodologies; as well as the detailed studies of game structure which offer theorisation of 'interactivity' through the interrelationship between 'play' and 'non-interactive play'; and the innovative analysis of the complexities of gamers' dynamically shifting subject positions.</p> <p><b>2. Gameplay as socially-situated activity</b> (e.g. Refs 3 and 4: 'Playing (with) Videogames' (2005); and 'Playing with Videogames' (2008). Taking its lead from fan studies, Newman's research extends game studies by exploring the practices of play and playfulness that are typically elided in examinations of games as technology, rules or systems. Newman's work on game cultures has been key in highlighting the shadow economies of production in relation to practices of 'modding', 'cosplay' and collecting that support and sustain gaming. In particular, Newman's work on gameplay as 'lived experience' and 'configurative practice' has provided rich case studies of the ways games are remade through self-consciously resistant acts of play, superplay, and reverse engineering. By problematising the object of study as a fluid, mutable set of resources constituted through acts of play and performance, Newman's work has foregrounded the shadow economies and cultures of videogame fandom.</p> <p><b>3. Game preservation</b> (e.g. Refs 5 and 6: '(Not) playing games' (2011); and 'Best Before: videogames, supersession and obsolescence', 2012). Newman's work on digital media preservation highlights the vulnerability of digital games and the need, and complexity, of</p>

concerted strategies to archive, interpret and exhibit them as part of cultural heritage. This work leads in the emerging field of game studies by drawing scholars, curators and preservation practitioners' attentions to the challenges of physical media and data decay; the effects of the discursive production of technological obsolescence upon which the global videogame industry's business practices are based; and the need for a new approach to game preservation in which playability is reconceived not as the outcome but rather part of the object of preservation practice (what Newman proposes as 'gameplay' vs 'game' preservation).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Newman, J. (2004/2013 second ed.) *Videogames*, London and New York: Routledge.
2. Newman, J. (2005). 'Playing (with) Videogames', *Convergence: the International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 11(1): 48-67.
3. Newman, J. and Oram, B. (2006) *Teaching Videogames*, London: BFI Publishing.
4. Newman, J. (2008) *Playing with Videogames*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
5. Newman, J. (2011) '(Not) Playing Games: Player-Produced Walkthroughs as Archival Documents of Digital Gameplay', *The International Journal of Digital Curation*, 2(6) <<http://www.ijdc.net/index.php/ijdc/article/viewFile/186/266>>
6. Newman, J. (2012) *Best Before: videogames, supersession and obsolescence*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

#### Recent grants

- 2013: Co-Investigator on AHRC 'Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange' project. 'Feasibility study: National Videogame Archive, Cultures of Play' (total funding £12,048)
- 2013: Daiwa Foundation Grant for research on Japanese game development in Kyoto (£3,000)
- 2009-10: Newman, J. and Simons, I. 'The use of videogames as public engagement media', Literature review and strategy document. (£10,000, Wellcome Trust Broadcast Unit). (Ref: SPEC/DEC09/JNV001)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

**1. Game studies and digital textualities** Newman's work on game studies has been key in focusing attention on games as complex digital objects. In 2006, he was invited to collaborate with A-Level Media Studies tutors and the former Principal Examiner for A-Level Media Studies on the first textbook on videogames for post-16 media studies. Subsequently, Newman was invited to act as an advisor on the DfES Nottingham eGames project and is currently working on developing materials on videogames and digital literacies for Key Stage 3 in association with the GameCity team and Autodesk.

Newman's expertise in game music and digital audio have led to invitations to chair public events on writing and producing interactive game music (e.g. 'Ear Candy' public lecture event Barbican, May 2011, audience approx. 100) interviews (e.g. *New Statesman* 2011 on the cultural impact of videogame music); features (e.g. *360* magazine on game audio); and gallery guides (e.g. on game music technology for the National Centre for Craft and Design's 2013 book accompanying the 2013-14 'Revolution in the Bedroom, War in the Playground' exhibition).

Newman has been part of the GameCity festival's steering group since its inception and continues to work closely with the Director and team programming events and strands, as well as convening and presenting sessions on aspects of game studies, design and history for the festival's general public audience (attendance over 45,000 in 2012).

**2. Gameplay as socially-situated activity** Newman's work on gaming fan cultures was supported by Capability Funding throughout 2004-07. Among the deliverables of the project were a series of industry-facing seminars that sought to establish and promote awareness of amateur, grass-roots production. Consequently, Newman was commissioned by Publisher Eidos to provide consultancy on strategies for engagement with fans of its Championship Manager franchise. Newman was later invited to provide consultancy for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's PR agency, and to speak about his published work on player subjectivities to JCPR and Flamingo research as part of the development of the European PlayStation 2 launch strategy and the PlayStation 'Mental Wealth' TV campaign.

Following a keynote presentation at the Games Marketing Forum (2007) and public lecture at The National Archives (2009), Newman was invited by The Wellcome Trust to chair a panel on gaming and science at Sheffield Doc/Fest (2009). Subsequently, Newman was commissioned by the Wellcome Trust's Broadcast Team to provide a literature review and strategic consultancy on ways of using videogames and gameplay to broaden the Trust's public engagement with science agenda. The internal report was delivered in 2010 and a series of presentations to the Trust's Broadcast team drew explicitly on Newman's work.

Newman's work has led to interviews and media appearances (e.g. for *The Wall Street Journal* on cultures of play and superplay) and invitations to deliver public lectures (e.g. at the British Library and The National Archives). Following these events, Newman was invited to advise on the terms of reference for a Computer Games and Gaming Cultures special collection of the British Library's UK Web Archive project (Paul Whatley, project lead at the BL supplied Newman's 2011 IJDC article as the 'recommended reading' to participants prior to the first collections group meeting). Newman sits on the Collections Board with colleagues from museums, libraries and the UK videogames industry (and was interviewed in *The Independent*, Feb 2012 on the collection's launch). As well as interviews in the gaming press, Newman has made appearances on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* discussing user-generated content in gaming, and the influence of Nintendo's Super Mario series; BBC World Service on games history, and BBC4 TV's 'Games Britannia' (first broadcast 2011) discussing the emergence of videogames as a mainstream popular cultural form.

**3. Media preservation** In 2007 Newman was invited by the curatorial team for New Media Collections at the National Media Museum to advise on a possible special collection of videogames. Newman was commissioned to conduct a feasibility study researching the extent of current formal and grassroots videogame collecting activity across Europe and the US. Newman was subsequently invited to join the team in establishing the National Videogame Archive. The launch of the collection was widely covered in the mainstream and specialist press in the UK, Europe and US and Newman gave numerous print, online and radio interviews. Working with the Curator of New Media and Head of Collections at the National Media Museum, Newman co-authored the Special Acquisitions Provisions for the collection. Approved by the Museum's Board of Trustees in 2008, this document and its six collecting themes, draws explicitly on Newman's work.

Through his work on the GameCity festival, Newman has programmed a series of public-facing events highlighting the vulnerability of digital media to obsolescence and media decay. He has convened and chaired public panel sessions with scholars such as Henry Lowood of Stanford University and the Preserving Virtual Worlds Project; Stella Wisdom, Digital Curator from the British Library; as well as organising a series of 'Director's Commentaries' events in which videogame developers critically reflect on their professional practice. These events allow audiences to interrogate game design practice and form part of the archival documentation for the games held by the NVA. Newman was also commissioned by Guinness

World Records to write a feature on the history of videogames for the 2014 Guinness World Records Gamers Edition volume.

Throughout 2012-13, Newman embarked on a programme of public talks supported by Electronic Arts and media partner Future Publishing. Held at arts and cultural venues throughout the UK, including the BFI Southbank, Liverpool FACT, Midlands Arts Centre, and Bristol Arnolfini (audiences average 75-100), the events focused specifically on aspects of Newman's work as set out in his 'Best Before' book. Positive feedback from audiences and venues has led to a second national speaking tour and a quarterly residency at the BFI Southbank to deliver public-facing events on videogames (the 2012/13 BFI events sold out in advance).

Following a keynote presentation on game preservation at the Japan Foundation in London, Newman was invited to Kyoto in January 2013 by the Ritsumeikan Game Research Center. Newman delivered a keynote presentation on UK approaches to game preservation and, along with Henry Lowood of Stanford University, was invited to consult with officials from the Japanese Ministry for Cultural Affairs on strategies for establishing game preservation projects. In 2013, Newman was awarded a grant from the Daiwa Foundation to support further research in Japan.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 1) Individual: Festival Director, GameCity, Antenna, Beck Street, Nottingham. Impact on GameCity festival organisation and audience.
- 2) Individual: Curator for History of Science & Technology, Stanford University Libraries. International approaches to game preservation
- 3) Individual: Digital Curator, The British Library. Impact on game preservation policy and practice
- 4) Individual: Professor at Graduate School of Image Arts, Ritsumeikan University, Japan. Impact on international public policy for game preservation (Japan).
- 5) Individual: Keeper of Technologies and Engineering, Science Museum, London. Impact on game preservation in the UK.
- 6) Online resource: National Videogame Archive [www.nationalvideogamearchive.org](http://www.nationalvideogamearchive.org).
- 7) Documentary: 'Games Britannia: Ep.3 Joystick Generation', BBC4, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1566015/epcast>. Confirms involvement of James Newman in the documentary, demonstrating impact on public engagement and perceptions of gaming.