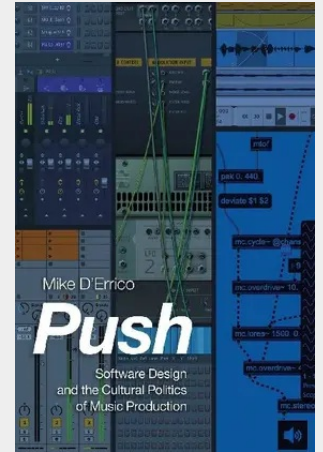


Push

Software Design and the Cultural Politics of Music Production

Push: Software Design and the Cultural Politics of Music Production shows how changes in the design of music software in the first decades of the twenty-first century shaped the production techniques and performance practices of artists working across media, from hip-hop and electronic dance music to video games and mobile apps. Emerging alongside developments in digital music distribution such as peer-to-peer file sharing and the MP3 format, digital audio workstations like FL Studio and Ableton Live introduced design affordances that encouraged rapid music creation workflows through flashy, "user-friendly" interfaces. Meanwhile, software such as Avid's Pro Tools attempted to protect its status as the "industry standard," "professional" DAW of choice by incorporating design elements from pre-digital music technologies. Other software, like Cycling 74's Max, asserted its alterity to "commercial" DAWs by presenting users with nothing but a blank screen. These are more than just aesthetic design choices. Push examines the social, cultural, and political values designed into music software, and how those values become embodied by musical communities through production and performance. It reveals ties between the maximalist design of FL Studio, skeuomorphic design in Pro Tools, and gender inequity in the music products industry. It connects the computational thinking required by Max, as well as iZotope's innovations in artificial intelligence, with the cultural politics of Silicon Valley's "design thinking." Finally, it thinks through what happens when software becomes hardware, and users externalize their screens through the use of MIDI controllers, mobile media, and video game controllers. Amidst the perpetual upgrade culture of music technology, Push provides a model for understanding software as a microcosm for the increasing convergence of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and techno-utopianism that has come to define our digital lives.

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