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Case Study: Moldover

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NewTECH Musician Case Study 2: Moldover

Moldover is an electronic musician from the United States, currently living and working in San Francisco. He is a pioneer of a new style of creating and listening to music, referred to as 'controllerism', (Golden, E, 2007) which sees music devices stripped down, hacked and rebuilt to create new, modified interfaces. He has received a lot of attention for the creation of a device called 'The Octamasher', a multi-input combination of 8 modified keyboards that link to a single brain (computer), the output of which is coordinated and controlled to allow for multiple users combining together to perform new music. (Gallant, M, 2007) 'I wanted to come up with a way to make it really easy for people to get a taste of what it's like to perform music the way that I do. It's really so easy with technology, it just makes sense to build systems where multiple people can interact at the same time. It brings back the group experience and the communication, the social aspects of music that get lost in a lot of electronic music.' (Octamasher VIDEO)

Moldover's creation of the Octamasher is an innovative and contemporary example of how technology influences the sound of modern music. An emerging trend referred to variously as 'tech-hacking' or 'modding' sees people around the world customising technology in various ways. (Rowan, D, 2005) Examples of this include robots with small libraries of functions customised to perform specialist actions or tasks for their owners, computer systems built to fit into various unconventional cases such as wooden grandfather clocks, and toy musical instruments that are rewired to be played in new ways. Moldover has experimented with varying ways of modifying musical controllers to create new interfaces and the Octamasher is one of the most impressive.

In addition to developing innovative new cannibalisations of existing technologies in order to create new experiences, Moldover creates music in a more traditional capacity. As an electronic

producer/composer, the field of competitors is massive and creating a unique and engaging product is a challenging task. One of the consequences of the rise of the Internet has been the explosion in distribution of musical content.

With all this competition, innovation is one way of distinguishing an artist from their competitors. Moldover's approach to creation is a perfect example of innovation within the artistic development of a musical 'product' – in this case, his debut album. Moldover has designed a range of different albums available for purchase, with different types of artwork corresponding to the different prices of each format. The most attention grabbing version features a fully working circuit board as the album artwork. The track listings and title of the album have been created using circuitry, and the board itself is actually a playable musical instrument in its own right. The board forms a light based theremin, an electronic instrument that plays a tone variegated by the amount of light hitting the on board sensor. The performer alters the tone created by moving their hands in relation to the light sensor, and through pressing a button that triggers the tone. This theremin is contained entirely within the circuit board artwork of the album, designed to fit into a traditional jewel case. Such a product is not cheap, and in order to cater for this fact, Moldover also created some cheaper versions of his album to ensure that he was not pricing potential customers away from his work. The second cheapest alternative features traditionally printed album artwork with a miniature theremin accompanying the work. Cheaper again is a 'traditional' album, that features a printed image of the circuit board and CD. The cheapest version of his album is available for purchase solely as an mp3 download. (Moldover, 2009)

This approach to considering all aspects of the creation of his album has seen Moldover occupy a variety of roles that in a normal setting would be occupied by a variety of designers and production staff. This hands on approach builds on the DIY ethos established with the early punk bands of the late 1970s and 80s, and the consideration of technological possibilities has translated into massive sales figures (compared to expectations). After making his album available for sale mid August 2009, Moldover was swamped with orders for the album beyond any expectations prior to launch, thanks in part again to the user centric nature of the Internet. Online discussion boards discussed the distinctive cover art and promoted visitors to Moldover's site, and the ensuing sales figures (Not yet published/available) demonstrate how all encompassing new technologies can be for artists today.



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