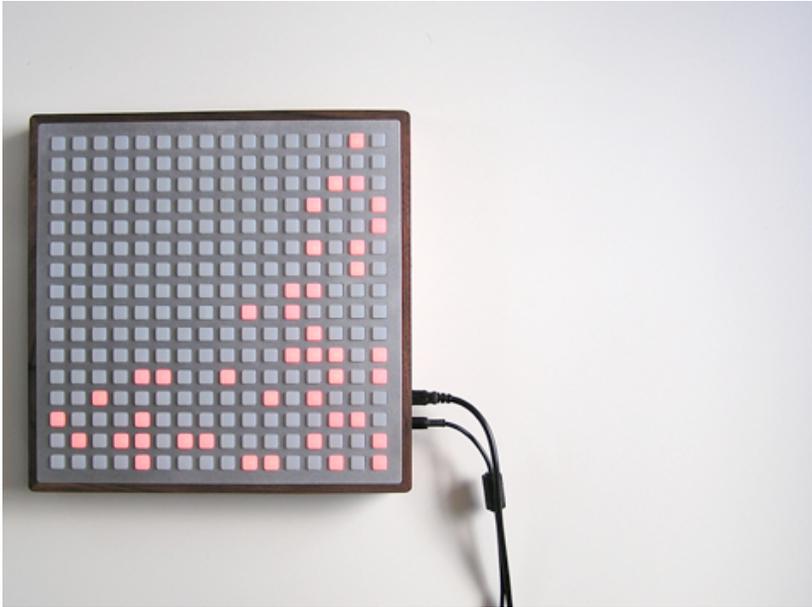# Monome open source creative practice project outline
for Gini Simpson @ SPACE Studios
from Lewis Sykes
DRAFT 1.0

Introduction

Through recent online research for my own creative practice I came across a fascinating, but hitherto unknown to me, USA based project - **Momone**.

Essentially the Momome is a beautifully designed, hand-crafted, minimalist interactive interface for controlling and monitoring pretty much anything audio, visual and beyond...

> *the monome 40h and new devices are reconfigurable grids of either 64, 128 or 256 backlit buttons. buttons can be configured as toggles, radio groupings, sliders, or organized into more sophisticated systems to monitor and trigger sample playback positions, stream 1-bit video, interact with dynamic physical models, and play games. button press and visual indication are decoupled by design: the correlation is established by each application. the 40h uses usb and talks serial, midi, and open sound control. it plays well with max/msp, pd, processing, reaktor, flash, java, ruby, and many others.*

Momome devices are hand-made by two Philadelphia based artists who open source all aspects of the unit's hardware and sofware to their community of users.

In all my years as a practitioner, producer and curator of music production, interaction design and digital art I have never come across anything quite like it. With its minimalist yet elegant design and focus on user-fashioned interaction, feedback and control I think its an incredibly flexible instrument with a multitude of applications - as the creators declare "we're making available devices with which you can have an entirely different relationship".

You can find out *a bit more about monome* in the section below or online at the Momome website <http://monome.org>.

A Monome open source creative practice programme

I'd genuinely like to investigate momome's creative potential and promote it to others - and so in the spirit of Monome's creators, I'd like to facilitate a **Monome open source creative practice project**, based at SPACE Studios, that engages a group of digital artists in collectively exploring, developing, documenting and sharing collaborative work around the device.

I think this would fit well within the ethos of SPACE Studios, integrating with existing programmes, but adding an extra strand to current creative exploration of open source hardware and software.

My role and approach

As a facilitator for the project I see my initial role as conceptualiser, advocate and convener - outlining an action plan, trying to gauge and generate interest, initiating useful links and networks, establishing a framework, attracting and securing resources and building momentum to launch the project.

On launch I'd like shift towards becoming a participant in the project - though early on I will still play a low-key facilitator roles as coordinator, host and documenter of the initial planning meetings. My objective is to empower the group to manage itself and make myself dispensable as quickly as possible.

This approach of establishing a non prescriptive framework - albeit with a clear sense of purpose - within which the group can develop a collective strategy and approach is a familiar one to me, refined from many years of developmental process-centered Youth & Community work. In simple terms its engendering a shared vision and being clear about the desired goal from the outset but leaving the means of actually getting there to the people involved.

A plan of action

I don't want to be prescriptive in detailing what the project might actually entail - I want to leave that to the group of artists and practitioners involved in the process to define - although I can envisage a range of outputs that might include:
-   artists and practitioners development blogs
-   an active community publishing site and use of selected Web 2.0 tools
-   plenty of communication and dialogue between project members and the International monome community
-   a range of monome software developed for specific application and work
-   a group of motivated artists, practitioners and coders experienced in working with the device
-   a group of interested commercial creative agencies with an involvement in the project
-   a series of pre-launch, launch, and post launch public presentations and events
-   cross-disciplinary collaborations within the group
-   an exit strategy to roll-out the creative practice to other SPACE Studios groups and the wider digital art community

But I would suggest a series of steps to initiate the process:
1. Explore the monome for myself - play with the virtual 40h (and hopefully a real device before too long), inverstigate and test the applications, delve into the forums and develop a genuine understanding of the device and its capabilities.

2. Contact momome's creators, explain the idea and discuss opportunities with them. Would they be interested in coming to the UK themselves to present the project - funding allowing? Could they offer discounted rates on devices specifically bought for the project - particularly if we were to buy several units? Could they add us as beta testers for new and relevant hardware and software? Would they create a specific strand on the monome website for the project?
3. Make contact with UK based monome users via the online community. Would they be interested in sharing their practice with others and/or being part of the project?
4. Discuss the idea with existing projects at SPACE Studios e.g. Tagged to explore possibilities for cross-fertilisation.
5. Shortlist and approach some digital artists and creative agencies who may be interested in this technology, gauge their interest and invite involvement e.g. Jason Bruges Studio, SHOWStudio, GreyWorld, Adrian Ward, Alex McClean, Sophie Clements and her Diss Studio colleagues.
6. Approach MaxMSP, PD and Processing coders known to us - e.g. David Muth - and invite them to join the project - or at least be willing to provide some coding services as required and funding allows.
7. Write a proposal for ACE funding.
8. Set up a community publishing website and selected Web 2.0 tools to promote, facilitate and document the project - and find ways to link this with the monome website.
9. Make presentations prior to the project launch at events such as dorkbot, minibar, body>data>space's Open Session, Brighton Lighthouse's digiville and other relevant London and SE England events and festivals - as tasters but also as 'dry runs' for the launch event.
10. Send out a 'call for interest' to relevant mailing lists - Cybersalon, SPACE Studios, NODE.London, Future Of Sound etc...
11. Launch the project through an "open" session inviting anyone interested in the device to come along and find out more. This could involve the monome creators - in person or via video conference tool, UK based monome users demonstrating their devices in action, presentations by interested artists/agencies on how they might use use a monome etc.
12. Start the ball rolling with an initial three planning meetings to collectively discuss and work towards agreeing a concerted creative practice development plan.

Timeline

Oct 07   Steps 1-6
         This is a research and network building period - discovering the capabilities of the device, trying to gauge and generate interest, initiating useful links and networks and establishing a framework.
Nov 07   Step 7
         As a result of steps 1-6 I'd be well positioned to write an ACE application for £5k as seeding fund to get the project launch programme underway - though I'd make it clear the group will likely reapply to ACE the following year for particular artistic projects using the device.
Jan 08   Step 8 & 9
         If the ACE application is successful there'll be resources to set up the basic website and begin the programme of presentations, send out the call for interest, run the launch event and then consolidate through the planning meetings.
Feb 08   Step 10
Mar 08   Step 11
Apr 08   Step 12 on onwards...

Resources

I haven't drawn up a budget, but I'm confident that a £5k ACE award - and I'm suggesting this because it's more likely to succeed in the current climate and because of the 6 week turn around on a decision - will cover most of the costs from step 8 onwards - as well as purchasing a couple of the smaller devices.

I expect SPACE Studios will provide support in kind - through use of space and technical resources.

If SPACE Studios were also able to provide some administrative support and webspace that would be better still.

And if SPACE Studios were able to allocate a small amount - say £200 - to cover my travel, phone and general expenses for steps 1-6 that would be mucho appreciated.

I'm going to propose the project to the Cybersalon Directors - to see if they can find some resources to help initiate the project too - which will draw them in as partners - and I'll pass it by Helen Sloan of SCAN to see if she can think of other ways to draw in more support.

I'll also discuss possibilities for getting additional resources with some of the commercial agencies I'm approaching - though this might be for the longer term development of the project.

A bit more about monome

This text, copied from the 'Why' screen in the _40h_fake.mxb file - a virtual monome 40h - says a lot about the potential of the device:

this is a fake 40h

so you can get the smallest idea of the capabilities of the real hardware. and so you can play with our software for free.

this is a tragically poor interpretation of the actual experience and for the longest time we refused to release a patch like this.

what you're missing:
- *pretty much the whole purpose of the interface, which is to accelerate your access to an application, transforming it from a boring click fest into a real, dynamic, organic instrument.*
- *tactile response of the buttons.*
- *less time looking at a screen. having your hands on an interface that visually responds creates intuitive functional understanding.*
- *both speed and forms of gestures (for example, holding multiple buttons, or selecting ranges of buttons, or sliding your hand across the interface).*
- *the ability to explore quickly and with great depth, the potential of reduced systems. emergence occurs frequently with the 40h.*
- *the sheer weight of the device (the aluminium is 1/4") paired with the rubberized texture of the base enclosure. the lack of corporate branding.*

While the momome does have some similarities to the recently launched **Tenori-on** - "a collaboration between media artist Toshio Iwai and Yamaha to develop a new digital musical instrument for the 21st century" - it differs in significant ways. In fact the launch of the Tenori-on prompted Brian Crabtree and Kelli Cain to clarify their unique approach:

> *monome is a project by brian crabtree and kelli cain. we design minimalist hardware interfaces and software. we also make music, films, mechanical installations, and felt. we like to grow and eat vegetables, and we like books and bicycles. hello.*
>
> *monome grew out of our art practice, to meet the numerous requests for devices we designed for ourselves. monome is how we support ourselves, though we certainly are not a huge multi-national company.*
>
> *that said:*
>
> *our devices are designed and hand-made in our philadelphia live-work space. all parts are sourced domestically, as locally as possible. (molded silicone pads from pennsylvania, woodwork from atlanta, machined aluminum from maryland, printed circuit boards from colorado.) we're dedicated to continued implementation of sustainable practices.*
>
> *the 40h and new devices are completely reconfigurable. this fundamentally sets the device apart from others. it is not specifically designed for music (though it is well suited for such) and has been used in lighting control, video mixing, and even neural network simulations. the potential for diverse uses is what makes this project so important to us. we look forward to the new and exciting uses our community invents.*
>
> *all of our software is free. free to use, free to take apart, free to change for your own inventions.*
>
> *we make available schematics, firmware, and hardware specifications. it's both an invitation for modification and an infinite warranty.*
>
> *these points in mind, we do not see our designs as "competing" with others. it's a slightly absurd presumption—we're doing something entirely different. we're making available devices with which you can have an entirely different relationship.*