# Æther9 – Remote Realtime Storytelling

**Initiated in May 2007 during a workshop at the Mapping Festival in Geneva, Switzerland, Æther9 is an experiment in collaborative realtime storytelling through the use of networked video transmission.**

## 1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Developed by an international group of visual artists and collectives working in a dozen of different locations (disseminated throughout Europe, North and South America, the Middle East) and communicating primarily through the Internet, Æther9 intends to become a functional framework for collaborative video performance.



**Figure 1. First public performance at BAC (Bâtiment d'Art Contemporain), Geneva, May 3 2007**

The project started during an international workshop held by N3krozoft Ltd during the Mapping Festival Geneva, which brought the participants to reflect on the heritage of communication art in the 70's and 80's. While re-examining pioneering works in teleperformance such as 'Hole in Space' (1980), 'Planetary Network' (Venice, 1986) or 'Piazza Virtuale' (Kassel, 1992), the participants explored ways of linking the spirit of those projects with the context of today's omnipresence of data exchange and media consumerism. The concept of a transnational network of narrative video performance was born.

## 2. TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Making use of available software protocols (Puredata/PDP and MaxMSP/Jitter for image processing and transmission, Puredata and Icecast for audio streaming, dynamic HTML and Javascript for the web interface), the system aims to function as an open platform available to artists of any technical level.

Currently, the method of image transfer consists in uploading isolated video stills to a server via FTP. The images are then "animated" by the web-interface (a custom html page), which cycles through the images at variable speed. This method allows to transmit images in situations were conventional "videostreaming" would be impossible, using for example low-bandwidth telephone lines. Since the project encourages participation of artists from all over the world, especially from locations were high-speed Internet lines are sparse, this is a very important issue. Similarly, the system allows the participants to use the operating system of their choice (it functions currently under OSX, Windows and Linux), a webcam, a computer and an Internet connection being the only technical requirements.
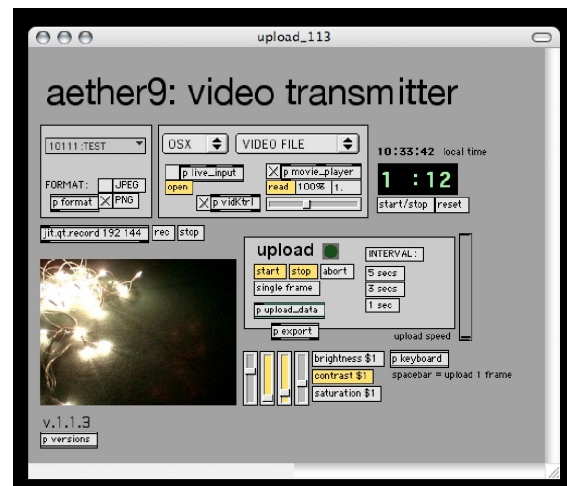


**Figure 2. Video transmission software (developed in MaxMSP/Jitter).**

## 3 REMOTE STORYTELLING

Beyond the technical aspects of the framework, whose functionalities still require numerous improvements, it appeared as equally crucial to develop a structured narrative, which would allow the performers to articulate their individual visions in a common language understandable for a remote viewer. Experiments with different narrative techniques and degrees of improvisation have been carried out, during internal rehearsals, but also in front of various audiences (at MAAC Gallery, Brussels, Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, and the NetUser4 Conference, Bulgaria). The performers quickly realised that the infrastructure for Æther9, similarly to an instrument, requires a period of experimenting and learning in order to master its new possibilities for expression. As the wish for a structured, text-based script serving as a guideline was shared by all the performers, a wiki page (1904.cc/timeline) has been developed to allow sessions of collaborative writing.

In the current state of the project, this process is still ongoing. One perspective envisioned by the collective is to base future performances on historical source texts, ranging from 19th century theories on Aether (a medium facilitating transmission through the global atmosphere) to the synchronous screenplays used during early Dada performances.

All the future developments of the project can be followed on the project's web page: www.1904.cc/aether
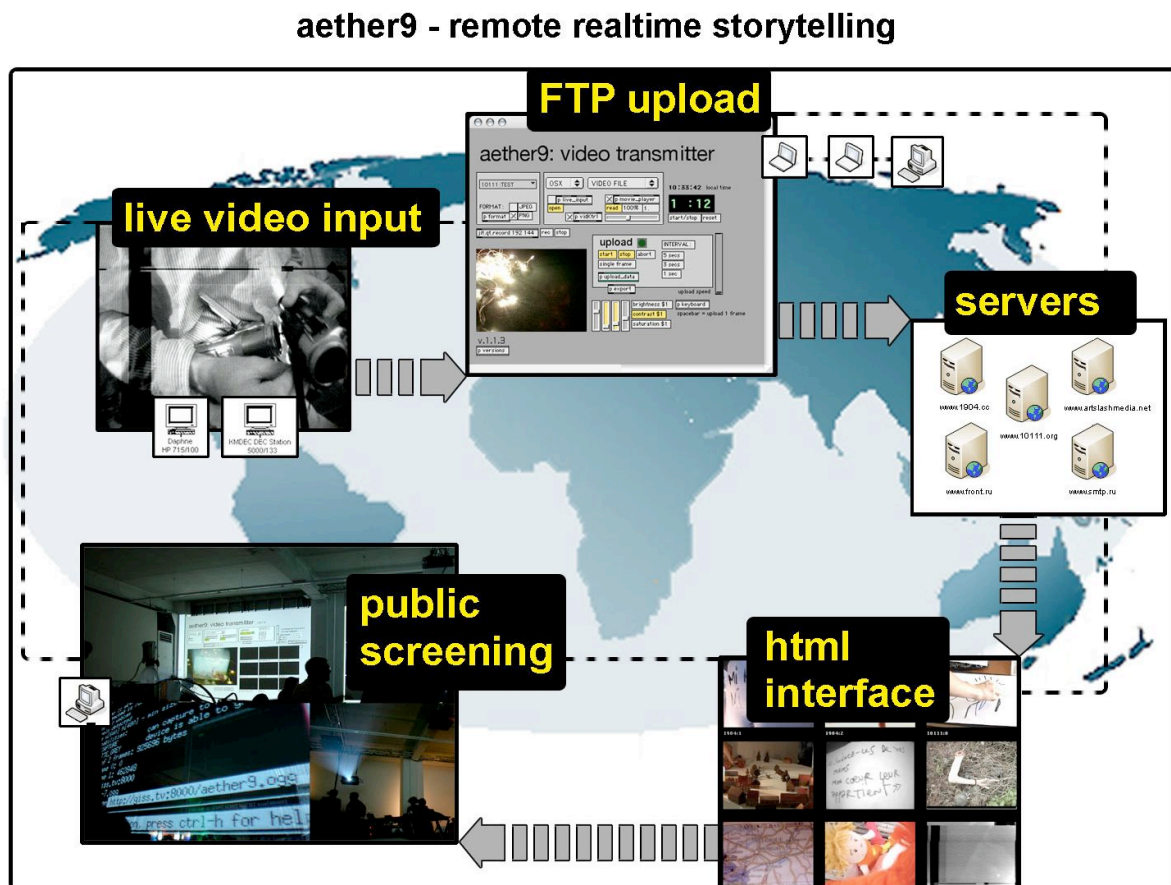
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**Figure 3. Schematic summary of the Æther9 project infrastructure.**