

Project Description

Background and Context

I am proposing a site-specific interactive installation for the intersection of Hunter and George streets. The proposed work is an electro-mechanical community blog (weblog) entitled anaBlog.

Part confessional, part message board, part soapbox, anaBlog is a DIY network that stands at the intersections of private and public space, personal and community standards, revelation and surveillance, graffiti and communication, vandalism and intervention.

Mimicking the internet but physically structured around a clothesline, anaBlog is a playful examination of the web phenomenon of anonymously bearing ones soul in a public space. While the high cost of access to technology often leaves online communities stratified by economic class anaBlog revels in low tech. anaBlog is a no-bandwidth system designed to facilitate open dialog and community engagement.

The march of progress demanded the clothesline be displaced by a robotic replica, the clothes dryer. Now, in a self-affirming reversal of technological advance, the automated clothesline of the anaBlog provides pedestrians in Peterborough's downtown core the opportunity to air their dirty laundry.

anaBlog Elements

The anaBlog can be thought of as two separate interfaces. One is a mechanical system for the public display of anaBlog entries (analogous to a server). The second is the paper anaBlog form (analogous to a screen shot).

Mechanical System

The heart of anaBlog is its electro-mechanical clothesline display system. A standard clothesline is strung between two points in a public location. One clothesline wheel is motorized permitting automated pulling in and reeling out of the line. Suspended on this clothesline are numerous wheeled supports (the kind used to keep the two strands of a long clothesline together and the clothes off of the ground). Each support is hung on the lower line by one wheel. The other wheel of each support is modified such that it can automatically lower and raise a regular clothes peg suspended on a string.

Modified clothes pegs mounted on a pole will act as control switches.

anaBlogs

anaBlog forms will be produced in numerous bright colors on 8.5 x 11 in. paper. The form will be designed to mimic the standard layout of popular blog sites and will likely include a space for the date, body of the entry and comments. The back-side will provide instructions for the piece and a map to the anaBlog display system. These forms will be distributed to merchants through out the downtown core.

System Behaviour

Uploading / Downloading: When a passer-by chooses to upload or download a message to the anaBlog they press and hold the control clothes peg. The anaBlog clothesline will automatically reel-in the blog entries. Once in, the entries descend, one by one, stopping once they reach eye level. The participant can then replace an entry, append their own comment, add a page to the blog or remove one or more entries.

Posted: Posted anaBlogs are reeled out, with clothes pegs raised up high. The contents of each peg flap lazily in the breeze, looking like bright banner flags between the poles.

Banner Ads: Should the frequency of new posts to the anaBlog decline, the system will attempt to draw attention to itself. anaBlog entries will be lowered and raised (remaining well above pedestrians) in random patterns. This dynamic state with its dance of colored paper suggests the frantic banner adds of the web.

Preferred Location

The ideal location for anaBlog is the intersection of Hunter and George streets. *An outdoor location is conceptually significant given the proposed materials.* This intersection has high foot traffic volume during most hours of the day, is the main crossroads of Peterborough's downtown and boasts a unique spatial configuration of utility poles.

anaBlog's clotheslines will be installed between diagonal utility lights above the sidewalk at two corners of the intersection. I have studied the layout of the light poles at this intersection and believe it can be safely and meaningfully installed between two of the traffic-light poles on each corner of the intersection. The utility poles are unique in that they have an empty top section above the last fixtures.

The piece is NOT to be strung across the streets. It is located directly above pedestrian traffic only. It will NOT obscure traffic or pedestrian signals.

I would prefer to install two clothesline systems, one located on the south-east corner in front of the Dollar Store, the other diagonally opposite in the north-west corner of the intersection in front of the Royal Bank.

Alternate Locations

If the Hunter and George Street intersection proves untenable, I would be interested in exploring the installation of a single system under the awning at the Mall entrance at Simcoe and George.

--OR--

If outdoors is absolutely impossible then I would be interested in installing at either:

Speak Volumes bookstore. The store has high ceilings with dramatic arches, an obvious affinity for the written word and a history of direct community engagement.

Dreams and Beans Roasting House. East room (no ceiling fans) or their patio. East room has a semi-private table at the back that could serve as site for writing and posting anaBlogs.

Technical and Safety Considerations

Exterior install

Require permission to hang clotheslines on the brown utility poles at the intersection.

The primary challenge in developing a public kinetic piece is identifying a stable power supply. The poles at the corner of Hunter and George have standard plugs that are often used to supply common Christmas lights. I assume these carry 120V, 60cycle AC power. This supply would be sufficient for running all mechanical, electrical and logical hardware. These plugs are high enough above the ground to be out of reach of passers-by.

All electronics will be placed in sealed plastic boxes to ensure protection from weather. These boxes will be securely mounted above the reach of people.

The main system elements will be installed well above people's heads. All elements will be safety chained.

The system will be automated to run only during daylight hours.

Interior Install

Require permission to hand a single clothesline in the interior of selected space.

I would require access to a 3-prong grounded 120V 60-cycle AC (standard wall outlet) power supply.

Security concerns all but disappear with an interior install.