

DAMOCLES

continuous insistence

What I saw confounded and amazed me. The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard. As a natural consequence it's velocity was also much greater. But what mainly disturbed me was the idea that it had perceptibly descended.

EDGAR ALLEN POE

Suspension is a mechanical reformulation of a pendulum, with the addition of motor control over the speed, arc, and plane through which the pendulum swings. Using two linked motors, the installation recreates the natural feel of a swinging pendulum while allowing its swing to rotate and change speed in space. Unlike the long wire of a traditional pendulum, **Suspension** uses a thin, stiff 7' aluminum rod to swing a weight at one end. One digitally-controlled motor at the end of the rod controls this swing; another

motor then controls the positional angle of the first, allowing the arc of the pendulum to be moveable in three dimensions.



The pendulum weight in this installation is a large blade that swings at torso level. **Suspension** is a scythe. It is a reminder and a threat to the self, a mechanical Sword of Damocles. Its prodding message is one of urgency and situation, for **Suspension** is aware of its audience: attached to the knife are proximity sensors which act as positioners: if someone moves within range, the installation is attracted to that presence, and the pendulum rotates and swings closer; if that person is too close to the knife, the motors adjust the plane position – but not the fluid arc – of the pendulum to move away. In an installation setting, this would produce a smoothly swinging pendulum which is interactive but in a retiring sense: it displays an obvious affinity for visitors but avoids actual contact. **Suspension**, for example, might begin moving as one would expect of a pendulum: slowly, with a short

period close to the ground. As visitors arrived, it might drift closer but then be forced to turn aside, maintaining a watchful distance.

The cutting sweep of the pendulum carries with it a silence and purity of action that has remained essential through the ages. The unmediated physicality of the image is perhaps even more surprising now than when Foucault first exhibited his great pendulum in 1851 in a proof of the axial rotation of the Earth. The pendulum operates largely without sound, save for the quiet hiss of air as it passes; it seems to require no added energy to continue its motion indefinitely. Its shape and action produce an ancient signification that retains its strength in an increasingly non-physical age. The pendulum, in incarnations from the Sword of Damocles to Poe's inquisitorial torture, conjures deep-seated sensations of time and death. **Suspension** exists to exploit these connections.