In order to produce a reasonably clear image

Text by Kyle Williams

Luke Rogers has made a series of contraptions. Small physics experiments, reconstructed from how-to videos on YouTube. A ping-pong ball held aloft by a hairdryer, a paper airplane that ceaselessly hovers between two electric fans, and a spout of water forced into a frozen sine wave by a loudspeaker and strobe light. Each piece of YouTube source material is steeped in its own self-astonishment: AMAZING: Can you believe it? Yes. We can believe it. The results are delightful and surprising, but they illustrate the mechanics of the physical world, not exceptions to them.

Taken together, the experiments are increasingly complex systems for suspending an object. Each requires a constant labor that points back towards those hallmarks of the physical world that suspension of any kind must overcome: inertia and entropy. These two constants are also forces that tie the touchable world to passing time. An object suspended in air may feel just a hair away from being frozen in time; which is actually to say that to view a suspended object is to sense the weight of time moving forward.

Rogers' meditations on suspension frame his larger inquiry about images. Each suspension system

becomes the subject of an individual camera obscura, its image inverted and projected in an adjacent darkened room. In Rogers' practice, he constructs the optical devices in real space. Here, in the Virtual Dream Center, the contraptions and their projected image both undergo a second transformation into a digitally mapped space, imaged as navigable objects and architecture.

An image created by a camera obscura shares a sensibility with a suspended object. Its unfixed situation in the physical world - its completeness, hovering in time - feels untenable. Like the YouTube experiments, its mechanism confirms the laws of the physical world rather than superseding them. But the hovering image does not require constant labor, it requires only simple negations: first, negate the light that bounces off an object by blocking it with a wall; then negate the wall by cutting a hole in it. The camera obscura merely frames a few selected rays of light. In doing so, it creates a new, singular object – a moving image – that hangs there, oblivious to the inertial forces affecting the other objects around it.

An object projected by a camera obscura is something like the inverse of the object's shadow. And, like any shadow, the projected image exists in real and continuous time. But the projections of camera obscuras have an uncanny quality because, as an image, it has a more open relationship to time than a shadow. Its subject appears to be the same, and when there is motion, it is at same pace, but it is flattened and inverted. The invisible forces that act on a floating ping-pong ball, and the weight of time

they imply, are not necessarily so within the image rendered inside the darkened room.

The basic principles of the camera obscura have been known for over two thousand years. One can draw a line (or many lines) from the digital imaging technology of contemporary computer graphics, back through moving image, back through Renaissance perspective, back through early optics, all the way back to the camera obscura. But computer graphics have an even deeper indebtedness to their lens-less lineage of geometry and algorithmic calculations of light. In the context of the Virtual Dream Center, Rogers' "reasonably clear images" bookend the history of optical media, with the long moment before lenses and our new moment after them.

In the Virtual Dream Center, Rogers' suspensions and their projections find themselves imaged again. The entropy, inertia, and light of the physical world gives way to data and algorithms forming a relationship between software, hardware and screen image. The element of suspension transforms to something omnipresent and flaccid, and the images' relationship to time changes again, tied as always to the peculiarities and possibilities of their medium.