When will experiences replace movie theaters?

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When I was a kid, I remember my school putting on a production of *Peter Pan.* For the dramatic flying scenes, they rigged a special harness that would go under Pan's costume and hoist him around the stage. But what I remember most is sitting outside the theater, desperately wishing it was me who got to fly. I knew I had a long life ahead of me, but when do grownups get to fly as if by magic?

The world is weirdly disappointing that way. Billions of dollars are spent making and watching people explore mysterious tunnels, chase down alleys, and fly as if by magic, but there's hardly a single opportunity to actually do any of these things.

I know of two exceptions. In Boston, there is a company called 5 Wits. The experience is something like this: you enter an unassuming rug shop and when the salesman asks if he can help you, you tell him the secret pass code. He gets a funny look on his face, locks the door and pulls down the blinds. He pulls back the rug to reveal a television screen that briefs you on your secret mission.

Once briefed, he shows you a concealed door where you tiptoe down to an underground passage way, only to find one of those arrays of laser-triggers, where you have to crawl underneath the lasers without setting them off. This leads to a whole underground lair, where you have to solve various puzzles to find the stolen plans, erase evidence of your intrusion, and disarm a bomb. It's enormous fun.

It's hard not to think this will be the future of in-person entertainment in the era of the Internet. Sure, movie companies are loading up on gimmicks like 3D to force people into theaters, but it's hard to see that working in the long-term. No, we should embrace the trend — let the Internet distribute every movie ever made and free up these physical spaces to provide the kind of experience that you can only provide in an actual physical space.

I feel (have always felt) the same way about museums. Go to a local museum and look around — how much do you see that actually couldn't be provided by a website or a book? That's why I was so excited to visit the City Museum in St. Louis.

In the dark days of St. Louis, when everyone with money had fled to the suburbs, an artist named Bob Cassilly bought a large abandoned shoe factory downtown. He and his friends begun using scraps and bargains to turn the place into a giant sculpture park. As you walk in, you enter the mouth of a giant whale, inside

there are dozens of passage ways to crawl through and climb on, each filled with its own surprises and sculptures. Crawl down and you're led through a network of caves which spiral upward and upward until you find yourself atop a giant eight-story slide. As you slide down, picking up speed, you literally ride through a giant classical organ, playing music so loud it shakes you to your bones. And that's just the beginning.

The City Museum has been so successful, its led a renaissance of downtown St. Louis. Part of the building has been turned into offices and trendy lofts and the neighborhood now has some trendy restaurants and a shuttle. I flew to St. Louis just to visit it and I don't regret it one bit.

But I am mystified by why there aren't more places like these. There's definitely a universe where I work on building more. Instead we get bland amusement parks, pretentious performances like Punchdrunk, and dull museums and galleries. New York City worked itself into a tizzy when artist Carsten Holler exhibited a slide a quarter of the size of the one at the City Museum. Surely a city of that size can support a place like this of its own. What am I missing?