

The Ascent

by

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ABSTRACT

The Ascent is a live-action, theatrical ride/experience which combines mind-control and levitation via a custom built, dynamically driven automated show-control system. This interactive installation is designed to be experienced by a single participant—or rider—and a small of group of 20 to 30 audience members watching from an observation deck. The experience is dynamically driven by an individual rider's brainwaves and thought patterns. Outfitted with an EEG headset, which reads the rider's brainwaves, and wearing a waist harness, individual riders marshal their calm, focus, and concentration, and attempt to levitate themselves thirty feet into the air through fields of dynamically responsive sound and light. The experience is full of obstacles and contradictions. As riders ascend via the power of their concentration, sound and light create a storm of stimuli that conspires to distract them from achieving their goal: levitating into “transcendence,” and “winning” by becoming the central figure in a playfully overblown Renaissance tableau. The paradox is that in order to succeed, the riders need to release their desire for achievement, and contend with what might be the biggest obstacle: themselves.

In this paper I will discuss *The Ascent*, and its unique custom show-control apparatus, as well as the work's orientation inside of an emerging genre of experience called Augmented Physicality. I will also discuss some key theoretical strategies used in crafting *The Ascent*, and detail some of my previous theatrical work in order to provide context and background. I will explore how the experiences I cultivate, while rooted in the theater, take the form of immersive works of art, and are triangulated between three key frames—performance, installation, and ride.