

Re-Imagining Cirque du Soleil's Front-of-House Experience for *Alegría*:

The Final Solution

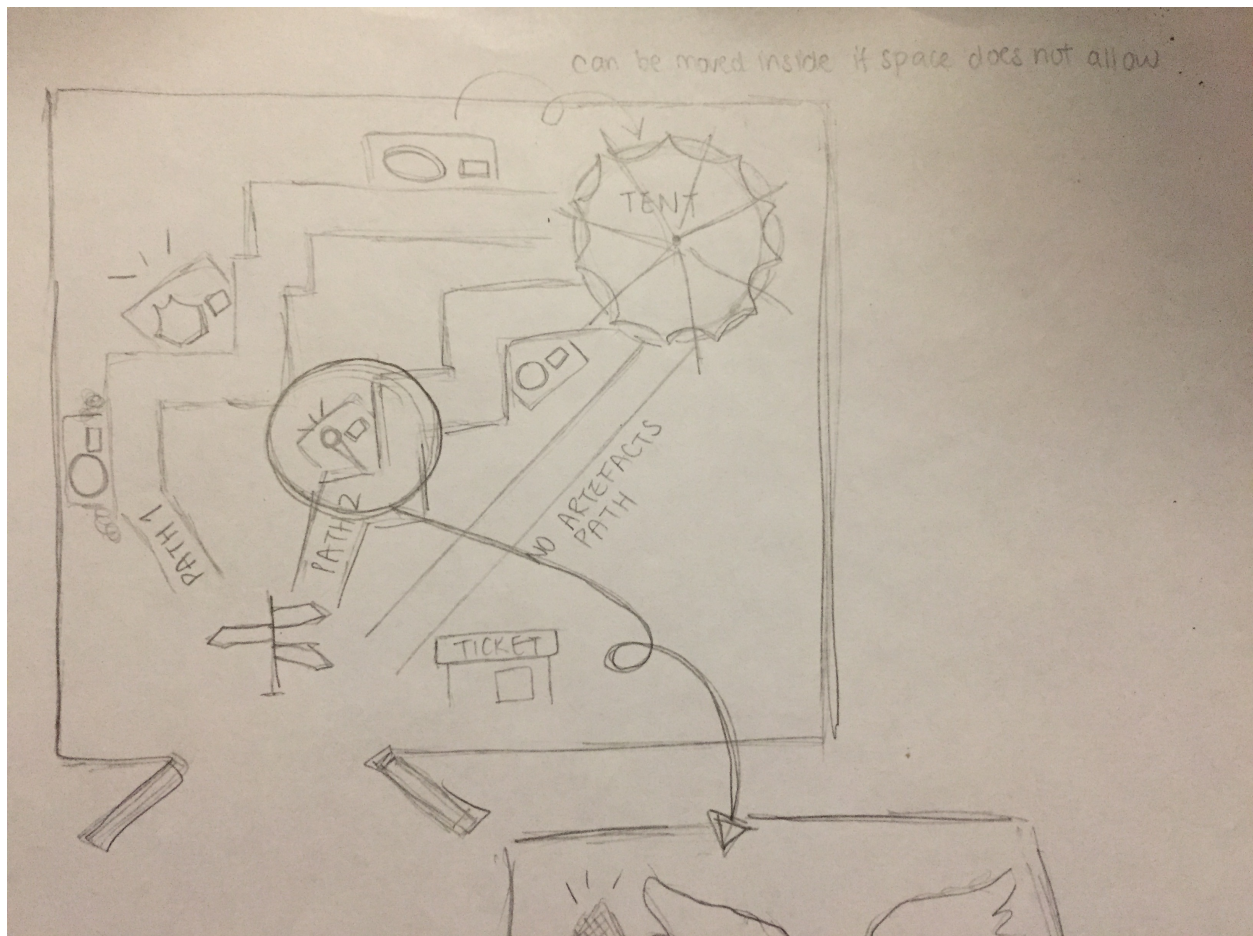
I. Overview of the Solution

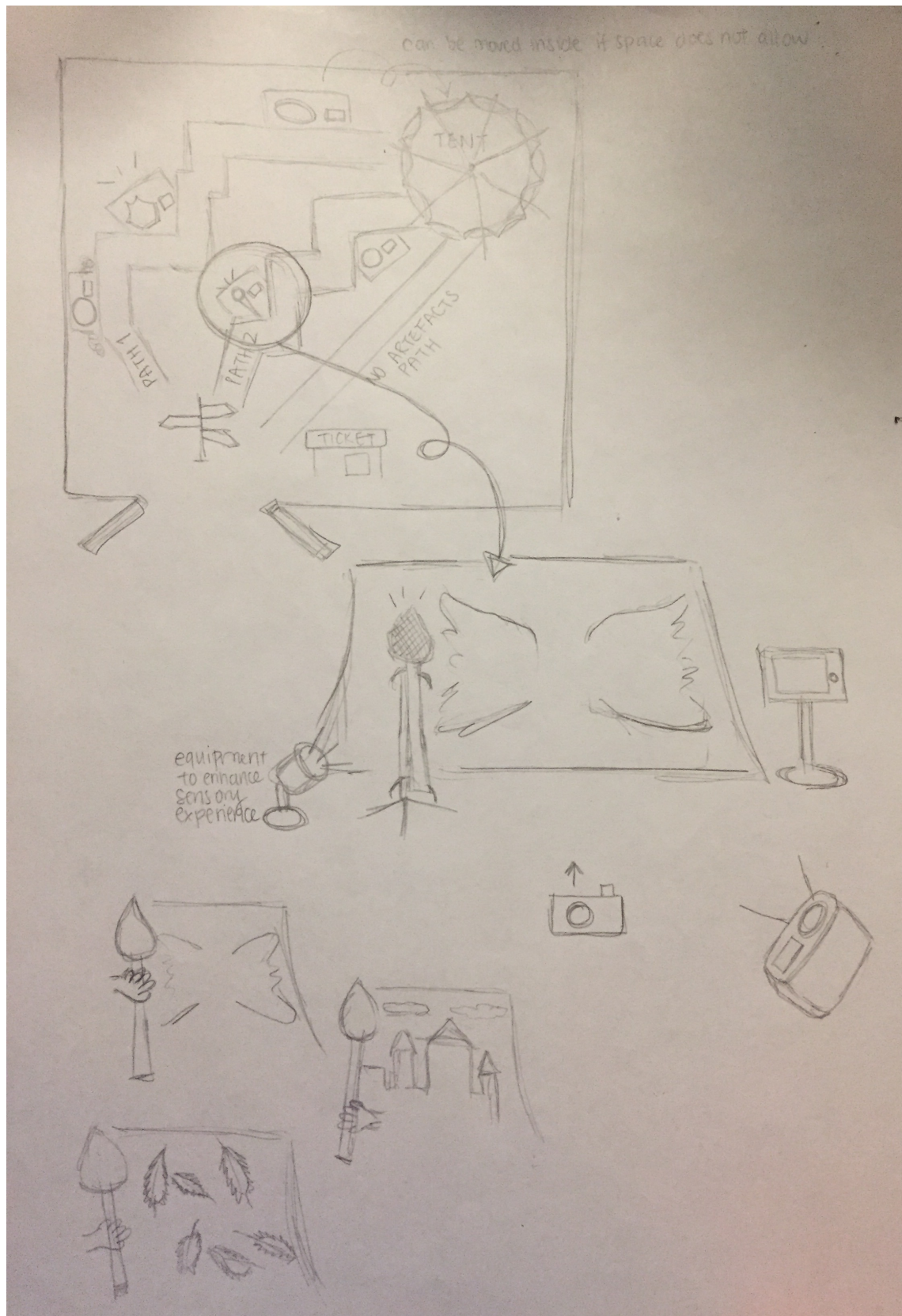
After experiencing the front-of-site and the front-of-house of Cirque du Soleil and the performance *Alegría*, it was evident that there were issues hindering the spectator's ability to fully immerse themselves into the fictional kingdom of *Alegría*. One of the biggest issues in the production was a lack of a sense of cohesiveness between the acrobatic performance on stage and the plotline. These two elements seemed disconnected and it was difficult for the audience to understand and grasp a linear narrative from the story. This was in part due to the non-verbal nature of the production, which does not allow characters to verbally set the scene. Also, another concern was in relation to the set design elements present in the front-of-site (i.e. the house of cards) and in the front-of-house (i.e. the throne). Neither one of these set design elements demonstrated a clear relationship with the production since guests were not given contextual information to frame the elements' relevance to *Alegría*. The set design elements did not provide a significant memorable experience beyond giving bystanders a photographic moment nor did they allow spectators to immerse themselves into the fictional kingdom's history and present. This paper will explore how our proposed immersive experience -- a pathway of set design replicas -- can enhance the front-of-site and the front-of-house experiences and provide contextual information for the storyline of *Alegría*.

The proposed solution is to create an informative and tactile experience by providing touch points to help spectators gain a better understanding of the plot before watching the performance. The solution will be achieved through the creation of a pathway navigating spectators towards the seating area. Replicas of notable set elements playing a significant importance in the

development of the storyline or contributing to an amusing scene break in the production (e.g., the throne, the scepter, the suitcase of snow) will be placed along the path. These replicas will be accompanied with interactive touchscreens that will give information on their significance to the story and their historic contribution to the kingdom. Projections will be displayed behind the artifacts illustrating imagery such as wings or a snowstorm. The tactile nature of the path encourages interactivity by permitting guests to play with the set design replicas, and encourages taking photographs and sharing them on social networking sites. The pathway can be either set up in the front-of-site or the front-of-house or both. Guests will have a choice to either enter the pathway or go directly to the seating area, facilitating a smooth flow of traffic.

II. Technical Description and Other Operational Considerations





Technical elements needed:

- Motion sensors in the suitcase that open suitcase when activated
- Depending on where people touch/hold the replicas, for example the sceptre, a different description and background projection appear
- Establishing the connection between interactivity point on replica and its associated description on the screen of the tablet as well as the projection
- Configuring connections between the replicas and the associated projection
- Fog machine and floor lights to enhance atmosphere and sensory experience

Fabrication materials needed:

- Sensory lights
- Motion/ touch sensors
- Floor lights
- Projectors / screen
- Fog machine
- Tablets
- Wi-fi network
- Speaker (for background music)

III. Risks and Benefits for Cirque Du Soleil's Spectators

Benefits for Cirque du Soleil's Spectators

The primary benefit of the solution is addressing the relationship between the acrobatic performance and the storyline through informative interactive replicas of notable set design elements. Spectators will develop an inclusive understanding of the world of *Alegría* and what can be expected to come from the production without spoiling the performance like a cinematic

trailer might for a film. Also, the interactive experience being provided before and after the performance gives a meaningful and memorable time through visual, textual and tactile encounters. It encourages taking photographic moments to share on social media, generating interest to other potential guests through word of mouth advertising. Furthermore, a pre-show spectacle open to all patrons of *Alegría* may entice people to come earlier than intended, exposing guests to the concession stands and merchandise by strategically situating selling stations next to displays, thereby tempting guests to buy products before the performance (especially food) or after the spectacle (especially merchandise).

Risks for Cirque du Soleil's Spectators

Some of the logistical risks for Cirque du Soleil using the proposed solution include line-ups and crowding, property damage and technical difficulties, and personal injuries. First of all, while the pathway encourages a controlled flow of foot traffic, there is a high likelihood that lines and crowds will form around one or more replicas that prove to be more popular than others. The line-ups and crowding can cause certain guests to become antsy, irritated, frustrated, impatient, annoyed, and angry, putting them in a bad mood before taking their seats, possibly turning a positive experience into a negative one. These crowds can also prevent other patrons from manoeuvring around, forming blockages and bottlenecks at different points in the path. It can produce a claustrophobic environment, potentially causing emotional discomfort to some visitors. As such, Cirque du Soleil will require additional security guards to facilitate a continuous flow of foot traffic in the front-of-site and front-of-house, preventing people from forming clusters around set design replicas and overspending time in one specific area. Unfortunately, there will be additional labour costs in order to maintain a calm and orderly environment.

Secondly, we must keep in mind the inevitable issues of property damage, technical difficulties and maintenance. The interactive nature of the proposed solution leaves it vulnerable to the wear and tear of the set design replicas, resulting in them needing maintenance or even needing to be entirely replaced altogether. The demographics that are likely to be responsible for these damages and maintenance repairs are young children, teenagers and young adults. Children are notorious for damaging and breaking their toys and other household items, and the same must be assumed for the replicas of Cirque du Soleil. Also, there is the possibility of vandalism at the hands of teenagers and young adults, ruining the experience for other patrons. Furthermore, the digital technology accompanying the replicas will have an upfront cost of concept design, prototyping, wireframing, developing, testing for usability and maintaining the hardware and software. Cirque du Soleil will have to either ensure they have a staff member with the knowledge, skills and abilities to work with the digital technology along with the general construction skills for repairs if it occurs during the pre-show, or hire outside aid to fix it during or after the performance. The company will have to set aside a percentage of their money for the purpose of preparing and maintaining the replicas and their accompanying features, cutting into their profit margins.

Lastly, there is the risk of personal injuries. Personal injuries can occur due to a variety of reasons; however, the most likely causes of injuries involve guests injuring others as a result of physical agitation in tight spaces. As previously mentioned with line-ups and crowding, tensions may boil between visitors, to the point where some may resort to physical forcefulness and then potentially violence out of frustration, thereby endangering guests and staff members. Cirque du Soleil will need to ensure the safety of its patrons and staff members with security guards and security protocols.

IV. Opportunities and Challenges for Cirque du Soleil

Opportunities for Cirque du Soleil

During the ideation and innovation process, we were given advice and insight from industry professionals from a variety of backgrounds regarding how to improve and further develop our principle idea. One noteworthy idea for our solution came from Hugh Elliot, manager of the CoLab at The Catalyst within the Faculty of Communication and Design at Ryerson University. He suggested that Cirque du Soleil could develop a website asking guests to enter a code that is unique for each set design replica. These codes will provide textual information on the visitors' mobile devices about said replica, instead of having individually made signage, freeing up space and removing the fabrication, installation and maintenance cost of the signs.

Another potential development is to create an experience outside of the front-of-site and the front-of-house to attract potential customers into buying tickets for the production through pop-up events and street exhibitions. These pop-up events would operate similarly to Cirque du Soleil's pathway built for their Las Vegas' production of *R.U.N.* The *Alegría* pop-up pathway will allow undecided potential visitors or unaware bystanders to learn about the fictional kingdom with a handful of actors on site entertaining viewers, giving them an experiential idea of the production.

Lastly, another opportunity presently available for development by Cirque du Soleil is interactive touchpoints for purchase. The idea is inspired by the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* theme park at Universal Orlando Resort where patrons can buy an interactive "magic wand" that cast "spells" throughout specialized location within the park. Patrons of *Alegría* can buy merchandise that interacts with the set design replicas. It would allow guests to elevate their

experience by gaining exclusive access to special replicas that can move, light up or dispense small souvenirs through touch-points.

Challenges for Cirque du Soleil

There were several challenges during the initial ideation process when developing a solution that was feasible to produce for Cirque du Soleil while being at the same time intriguing and user-centric for the visitors. In the beginning, the prototype contained many components that in hindsight presented many issues. Over the course of the evolution of the first proposal into our final prototype, we had a chance to simplify our approach by removing unnecessary elements such as the pamphlet. Initially, the set design replicas were going to be accompanied by speakers that would narrate each replica's significance to the storyline, as some museums have with exhibits on display. Upon reflection and revisiting the concept, it was made apparent that adding speakers would present more challenges than benefits with concerns regarding: transportation, storage, set-up, maintenance cost, limited space at various sites and adding unnecessary noise to the front-of-site and to the front-of-house experience to people who might not want to participate in the pathway experience.

The upfront costs for Cirque du Soleil to transport, store, set-up, and maintain the audio equipment, with the added cost of labour and producing the voiceover work presented reasons against investing in audio. The costs for Cirque du Soleil are likely to outbalance any potential revenue or additional revenue since the audio experience may hinder certain patrons' time spent in the front-of-site and in the front-of-house through overwhelming sounds generated by the speakers, in addition to the noisy crowds. Also, every site differs in the amount of usable square footage. By only using portable set design replicas (which they can commission or use the ones they presently possess) and an adjustable pathway, the solution is adaptable to the

differently sized sites and the possible website development previously mentioned addresses the informative aspect our solution address whether Cirque du Soleil provide posters or other informational graphs.

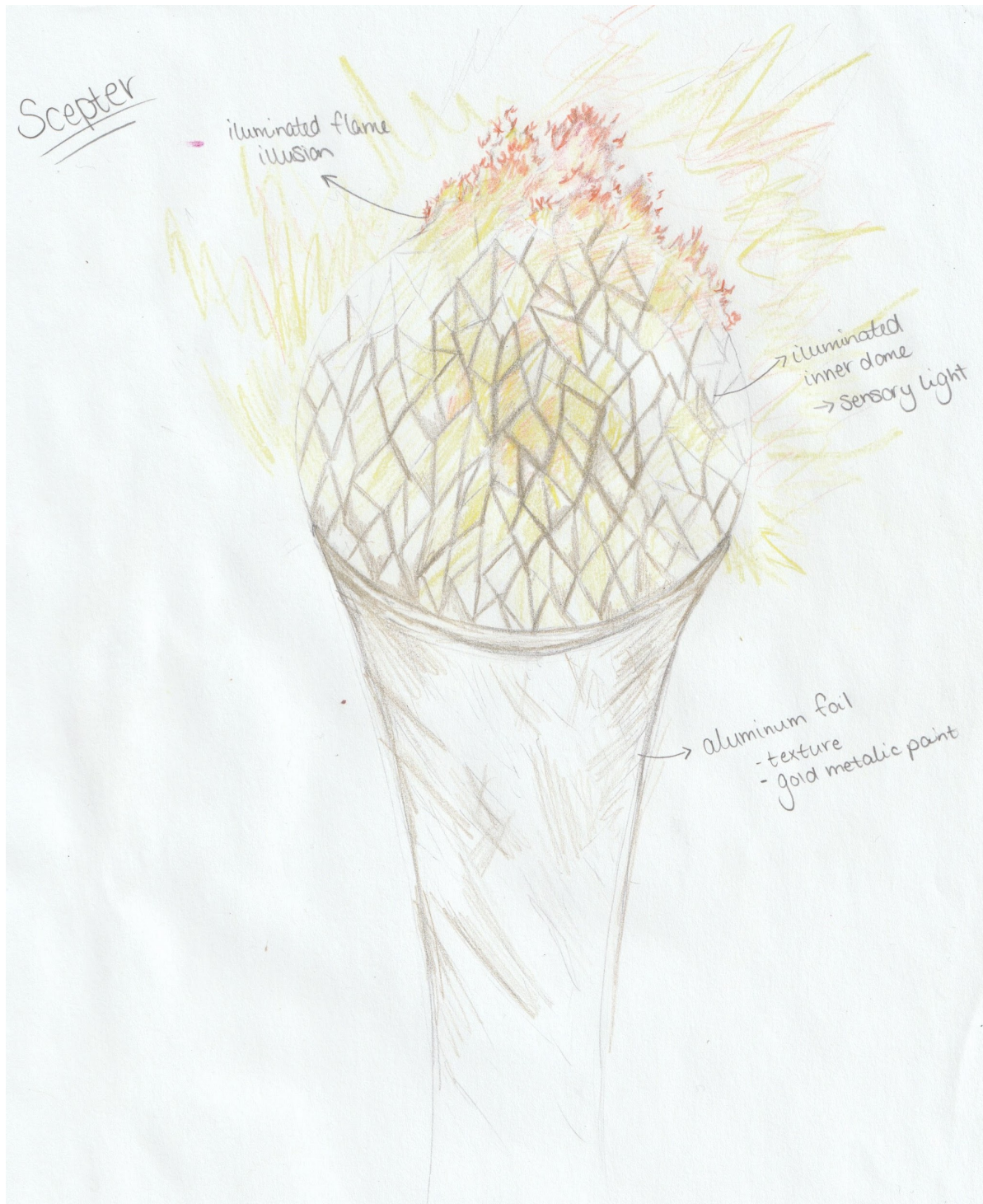
Further along the way, we thought it would be useful to have interactive tablets accompanying the set design replicas to textually narrate each of the set pieces roles in *Alegría*. Alongside the obvious costs of purchasing the interactive equipment, there is greater risk of damage through guests' forceful use with the tablets, being weather damaged and the potential risk of theft. It was through this challenging lens that led us down to the possibility of developing of a website accessible to guests through their personal device, rather than through tablets provided by Cirque du Soleil, providing the same textual narration, but through an approach that requires less on-site resources from the production company. Regardless, Cirque du Soleil will have to create signs as a reminder to guests that encourage them to be gentle with the displays and providing them with instructions to access the website if the company were to choose that route.

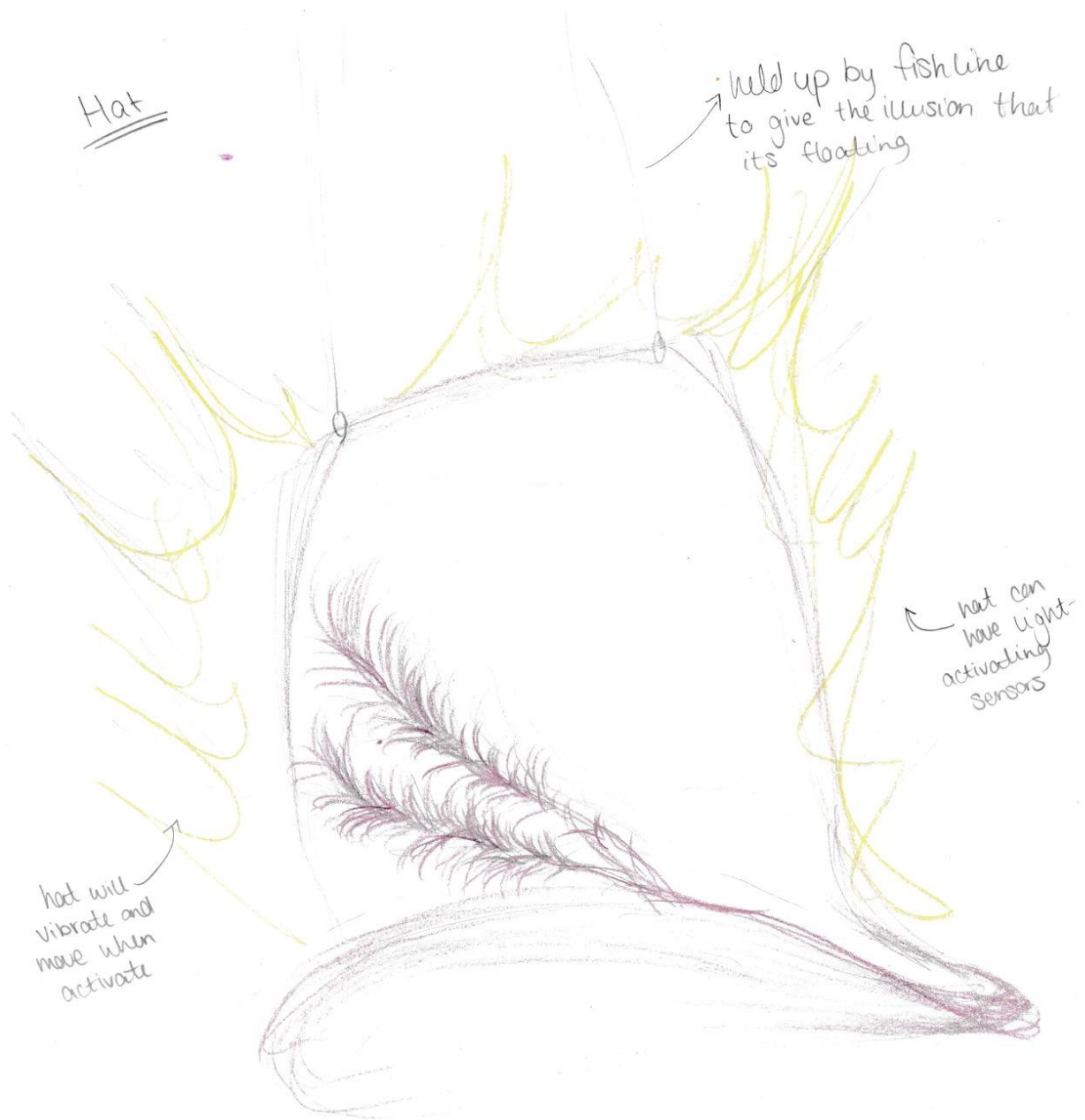
Moreover, while some guests will find interest in the replicas and the pathway, other visitors might merely want to directly head to their seats, and Cirque du Soleil will have to provide an alternative option for those patrons. The challenge can be addressed by setting up one pathway that bypasses the replicas, giving them the option to go directly to their seats through a fork in the road: one route for the informative experience and another route to the seating area.

One final issue for the proposal is the construction of the replicas. The team that creates the set design replicas must use durable and non-hazardous materials that have no sharp angles or edges to avoid personal injuries. The design team may face difficulties in building some of the set design replicas as they will require electronics and technological components to facilitate

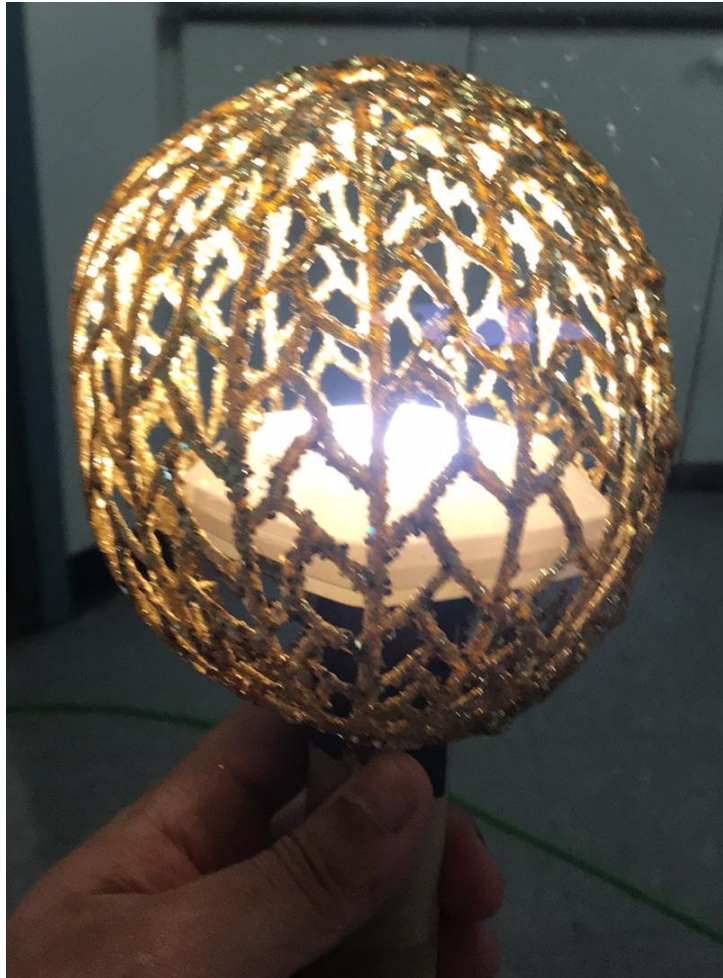
various sensory and motion capabilities such lighting the sceptre through motion sensors and projecting a backdrop when someone sits on the throne. Cirque du Soleil's team can outsource fabricators, set designers and engineers to construct the replicas, but the team is relying on the collaborative efforts of workers outside of their control, which may cause production, budgeting and scheduling issues during the pre-production, production and post-production phases of development and maintenance. The technology that would have to be included are sensory lights, motion/touch sensors, floor lights, projectors/screen, fog machines, tablets, connectivity devices, wi-fi networks, and remote controls.

Appendix 1: Creative Process









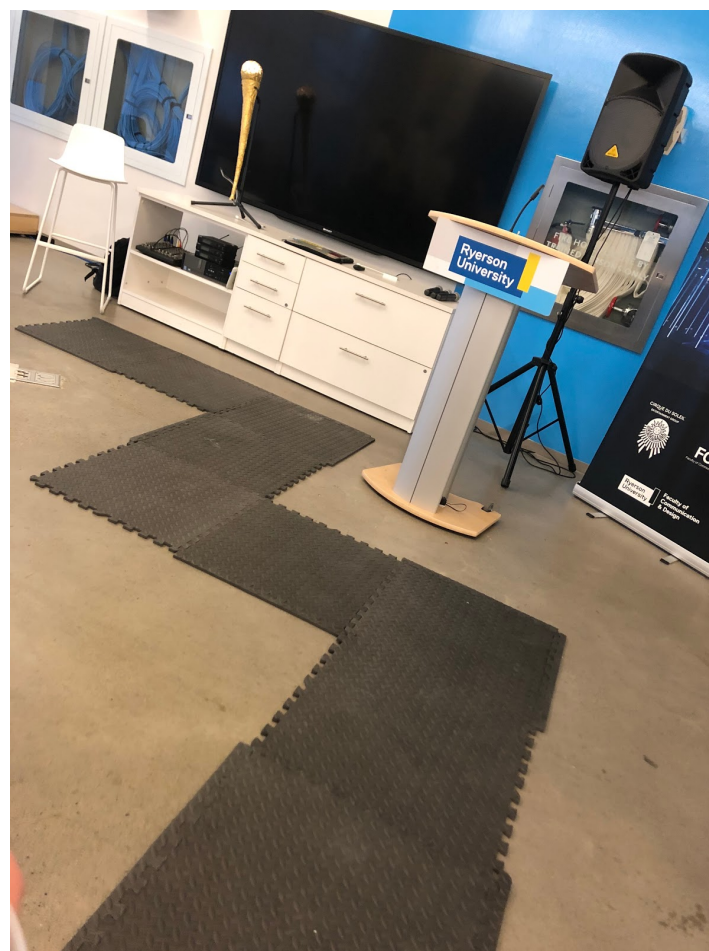




Appendix 2: The Final Prototype







Work Cited

Universal Orlando Resort. (n.d.). Ollivander's Hogsmeade [ecommerce website]. Retrieved from <https://www.universalorlando.com/web/en/us/things-to-do/shopping/ollivanders-hogsmeade>