Amusement Park

from the O & T sketches:

a set of conversations and caprices for two characters

 *Characters*

 O: possibly a 20-30 something woman\*

 T: possibly a 20-30 something man\*

\* Or possibly not. Both roles in this sketch can be played by any adult or young adult actor: male, female, or non-binary.

 Amusement Park

 *A bench; two folded umbrellas lean against it, one at each*

 *end. A crate on a tall trashcan contains two pairs of shoes.*

 *O is alone onstage: waiting, mildly impatient. She wears bright socks but no shoes. Enter T: a bit groggy, shaking*

 *off dizziness. He wears bright socks, but no shoes.*

 O

Ha! You see?

 T, *dizzily*

Sheesh.

 O, *delighted*

I told you.

 T, *dizzily*

Yes, you did.

 O

Dizzy?

 T, *shaking it off*

Starting to come out of it. I think.

 O

It lingers, I should warn you. In a low grade kind of way.

 T

My whole life actually did flash before me.

 O, *delighted*

I told you. You said I was being dramatic.

 T, *sitting, e.g. on apron, his head between his knees*

You *were*. But yeah, mine too.

 O, *superior, vindicated, rather than sympathetic*

Thought you were going to die, didn't you?

 T, *rocking a little*

So you think we all get the same ride?

 O

Well, essentially. I'm not sure how *exactly* the same could work.

 T, *still groggily rocking*
Yeah.

 O

I think I read something about the individual nervous system. How its reactions trigger variant responses? Which probably creates different scenarios.

 T, *on automatic pilot, rather out of it*

Slightly different narrative pathways.

 O

Yeah. So essentially the same, but with variants.

 T, *still rather out of it*

Variants. You read this where?

 O

In the marketing material they sent? Special limited time opportunity, two free all-day tickets, come experience the revolutionary thrill rides, non-stop interactivity, direct linkages into the individual nervous system. Some risk of yadda yadda blah.

 T

Hence the waivers they had us sign.

 O

No biggie. A formality. They’re way past the research stage and the BETA testing and the GAMMA safety checks. Wouldn’t do to have calamities during launch week.

 T

Launch week? Where is everyone? God, my head.

 *He puts his head in his hands. He moans.*

 O

The entrance arcade was pretty jam-packed. I guess at the cafeteria, or on a ride?

 T

Yeah. There were a few dozen other folks on mine. At the start, anyway.

 O, *sitting next to him*

“Non-stop interactivity,” though? Right? Damn. Wanna compare notes?

 T, *grumpily, now: when will she shut up?*

Notes?

 *He moans. She is finally a little concerned; less bubbly.*

O

Look, are you all right?

 T, *shaking it off again*

I'm fine… It's kind of like coming out of a dream, isn't it? Except you remember better.

 O

So tell me. Your ride, what happened?

 T, *beginning to converse more normally*

Well, first, they wanted me to pay a damn deposit. For the helmet thingie. They asked for actual cash money, but I was out of it. Out of money, I mean. …So how did I pay, then?

 O

You know, I swear I remember that happening with me too. Not having the money. Only in my case they took my shoes… *Half*-remember? That first part is fuzzy… Something about my having the same size feet as the operator? So my shoes would be in lieu?

 T

Well, your shoes *are* gone.

 O

Actually, so are yours.

 T

Huh. I have no memory of how that happened.

 O

Maybe there are two operators.

 T

Wait, wasn't there a shoe-check girl? The girl who blindfolded me?

 O

Aha! Yes! Someone did me too. Maybe a shoe-check girl.

 T

Oh! And she said something about the holes! In the blindfold! How they were deliberate. A dozen itty bitty slitty holes, so you keep almost thinking you can see something…

 O, *raising him up*

Walk me through it, okay? Walk off the fog of it.

 *His hands are over his face, simulating the blindfold. As he*

 *talks, she leads him about the stage.*

 T

They led us off into this jungle. At least, it felt and sounded like a jungle. *Smelled* like a jungle. Swampy underfoot. A spongy, thick wet grass feel. And big sticky vines, or bush, or ferns we had to push through, with the leaves licking our faces. Doing spit takes of rainwater. And animal growls and birdcall, and monkeys circling overhead—some hoots, but mostly the *smell* of monkeys, *wet* monkeys. Shaking the branches as we went deeper. Jabbering… I couldn't actually see them, though. I mean, all I could kind of *see* through the blindfold slits, *maybe* see, were bits of greenery: lush, tropical. And drifts of light.

 O, *stopping him; they are now behind the bench*

Yeah. Tiny. Like if fireflies left vapor trails.

 T, *clambering blindly over it, sitting*

Yeah. Then we reach the ladder. It's fixed and vertical—like a fire escape ladder. A bit clattery. Metallic. We climb for a good twenty minutes.

 O, *clambering over it, sitting beside him*

And you're barefoot?

 T

Well, I have my socks on. Everyone does. I can smell them. Swampy-jungle-smelly.

 O

Yes, now that you mention it. I can too… *[She sniffs.]* At least two dozen of us.

 T, *still with his hands over his face*

The funny thing is, it feels—once we're up the ladder, I mean—as if *now* we're in a big *city*. High outdoors. These other noises and odors sift in, till they've completely taken over. The air is, like, tangy, and I don't know, chemical? Cooking smells, on the night breezes. At one point, I just know that this must be New York City. But I'm too high up on my tenement fire escape to hear the traffic. There *is* traffic down there, I can sense it, somehow… Its fumes, or something. But then, just like that, we climb up out through a *manhole*—a *manhole!*—and we're in a wild west ghost town, in broad daylight.

 O,

A wild west ghost town… Okay! I can go with that. So how can you tell?

 T

I dunno, I just know. The light's so bright, and dusty. And we're on hard, rough ground.

 O

All crawling on our knees, to clear a space to sprawl down… When here come the horses.

 T

Aha! So you *did* get the same program.

 O

Essentially, anyway. Yes, so far.

 T

So, the horses?

 O, *now also simulating the blindfold, with hands over eyes*

Well, it seems as if they come from somewhere very far away. We’re all dog-tired, of course, after the climb up the ladder, we just sprawl in the dirt and breathe. When the wind lifts you can hear it shake the trees—*that* way—you can smell the gusts of the place. Dry earth and horse dung and sawdust. And on both sides of us there were old wooden shacks with loose doors and planking which creaked. But otherwise, until the horses, everything was really, *really*, I mean *really* *[An unnaturally long pause.]* *still.*

 T, *after savoring the stillness for another long while*

But then: the horses.

 O

Yes. From the distance. A whole herd of them, like the rattle of a rainstorm gathering into a tempest. What's eerie is that they sound—at the same time, I mean—overwhelmingly *powerful*, breakneck-fast, like a steam train, and yet…leisurely. As if the fabric of time itself is distorting around them. As if they're stampeding, but in massive slow motion.

 T

Yes. I'm thinking slow motion too. Until they get right up on us. *Aaarrggh!*

 O

*Yes!* I swear, I don't see how in *hell* they miss me! Someone grabs my sleeve, the guide, I guess, he just hurls me into this tiny gap between two buildings—

 T

*Yes!* And here I am, listening to the screams of everyone else being trampled underfoot!

 O, *with T joining in as the scream builds*

All of them! *Aaarrggh!*

 *Even as they reenact the horror of it, their eyes stay shut.*

 T

And then it's over.

 O

Silence. A stench of blood, and death. And the horses are gone.

 T

But then…

 O

But then…

 T

The ground under me begins to roll. Like I'm a piece of luggage. On an airport conveyor belt.

 O

More like those flat escalator thingies. Walkways.

 T

Right, except carrying me along, willy-nilly. Jounced like luggage. And that's when…

 O, *with T chiming in a beat later, after "finally"*

And *that's* when, *finally*, I tear the friggin' blindfold off.

 *They remove their hands from their faces; open their eyes*

 *` wide; peer out at the audience, whom they find hard to see.*

 T

Took us long enough.

 O

Not that I can see anything much. I can't even see the walkway under me.

 T, *standing, to look*

Right. It's just clouds.

 O, *standing, to look*

Clouds to the right of me, clouds to the left. Clouds wafting and parting, like curtains.

 T

Clouds rising over my ankles. The walkway still carrying me along. Awash in clouds.

 O, *feeling for the parachute*

And somehow, somewhere, at some time, someone has attached a parachute to my back.

 T, *feeling for the parachute*

Like the weight of it just materialized on me, full-blown. When the blindfold came off?

 O
I can't figure it out! A darn good job I have it, though—

 T
A *damn* good job. Because no sooner am I aware of it, of the parachute, than the belt's just *gone*, and I'm *swinging*, up, around, higher, faster, like I'm my own damn tilt-a-whirl.

 O, *tilt-a-whirling*

And all at once, the sun is setting.

 T, *tilt-a-whirling*
The clouds turn red.

 O, *tilt-a-whirling*
Turn redder. *Aaarrggh!*

 T
Until suddenly *(he stops whirling)*—they burst into *(she stops whirling)—*

BOTH

 Holy *crap*.

 T

Into these eight mile high *flames*!

 O

I am going to *die*.

 T

To *die*. *[A beat. They collapse back down on the bench.]* Man, the *heat*.

 O

And the sky fills up with these huge, jeering, demonic *faces!*

 *They fend them off with the umbrellas, nervously laughing.*

Yeah. Kind of cornball, when you think about it.

 T

Yeah. Still. *[A beat.]* My whole life flashed before me.

 O

Oh, when that beltway opened under me, no kidding! *[A beat.]* Like a friggin' trapdoor.

 T

You know something I remembered? You! Maybe six or seven years ago.

 O
Yes! Me and you! There was a conversation we had—

 T

Yes! About umbrellas!

 *Both realize they are holding umbrellas.*

 O
How do they *do* this shit?

 T

Huh. Umbrellas for shoes.

 O
And suddenly, here I am plunging through the bottom layer of the clouds!

 T
I can see the ground. Just barely! Oh, a long way down!

 O, *struggling with her umbrella*
So I'm struggling to pull the cord of my parachute.

 T, *struggling with his umbrella*

But it won't open!

 O, *struggling with her umbrella*

It won't open.

 T, *struggling with his umbrella*

The damn thing won't open!

 O, *struggling with her umbrella*
The goddamn thing won't goddamn open!

 T, *opening it*
Then it opens!

 O, *struggling with her umbrella*

No, it doesn't!

 T

Yes, it does.

 O, *struggling with her umbrella*

No, it doesn't, it doesn't!

 T, *pointing serenely over his head*

Mine does.

 O
It does? Yeah? So what happens next?

 T, *back in panic mode*

The cords start snapping! One! Another one! All of them…except…just…one!

 O

Oh, I get it. A refinement of the program. Nice touch.

 T, *still in panic mode*

Then the last one snaps! And I'm plunging straight at a field of giant, spiky cactus!

 O
*One* cactus?

 T, *still in panic mode*
Of giant, spiky cacti!

 O

I like mine better. Mine was these week-old dead fish. Sprawled out on black tarpaulin with their dead eyes staring.

 T

Was that scary, or just icky?

 O

Scary, actually… A few of them still half-alive; wriggling… I blacked out.

 T
Me too. Just before I hit.

 O

And I came to way over there somewhere, in that field of buttercups.

 *T. nods. There is a pause.*

 T

So we don't ever get our *shoes* back? We get *umbrellas*?

 O

Maybe it's a message of some kind. A metaphor?

 T

God, I hope not.

 O

Or maybe someone's a shoe fetishist.

 T, *a bit dizzily again*

I need my shoes! You *loved* your shoes! We should go demand them back.

 *But first, a weary pause. O fishes out her cell phone.*

 O, *paying more attention to the phone*

I'm worn out… And that was just the first ride.

 T

Really, though, where is everybody? It’s like I’m still frigging on it. The ride?

 O, *paying more attention to the phone*

All dead, then. The others. The horses got them.

 T*, shaking off the dizziness as best he can*
Or the sky dive did.

 O, *paying more attention to the phone*

So now’s the calm before part two. Any minute now, there'll be a storm of zombies.

 T

Dropping down out of the trees. Clambering up out of the trash cans.

 O, *paying more attention to the phone*

And all we'll have to defend ourselves with are our umbrellas.

 *A sudden clatter. It's the crate of shoes, falling off the trash*

 *can. It slides towards and by them, drawing all their focus. The two arms that have dislodged and shoved it wave about*

*in the air before withdrawing. Gaping wildly around them, O & T see the trash can but not the arm. They eye the crate.*

 T

Huh. Our shoes.

O, *warily*

I dunno, though. I kind of wish we'd just gone to Disneyland.

 T, *scoping out the area, picking up the umbrella*
Yeah? The rides here are better, though.

 O, *putting away her phone, picking up the umbrella*

Oh, yeah, the rides here are fantastic.

 *T points at the crate of shoes. O signals* No. *They exit,*

 *very quietly, on tiptoe, as the lights fade to black-out.*

O, T, *from off stage, the moment the applause starts*

*Aaaarrgghhh!*

 *Lights up. Scene.*

*Production Notes*

Some of the scripted stage directions are essential to the play's action. Others are merely suggestions, to be followed, ignored, adapted, or re-imagined according to the needs of the particular production.

No sound effect directions are offered; the use of sound effects (for the jungle, NYC, the death stampede, etc, etc) is entirely discretionary.

Should *Amusement Park* be produced in audio only, as a play for voices, it is requested that a third actor perform the role of narrator, presenting the essential stage directions—as an idiosyncratic character, rather than a discreet, neutral announcer.

At the other extreme, *Amusement Park* may be tried as full-blown spectacle, with its rides shown (or abstractly suggested) on a projection screen, or conveyed by live action effects of light and choreography, perhaps staged behind a scrim.

Or else, parts of it may be so presented, as it builds to its climax.

Or else, of course, it may be staged (as I imagined it) with only the essential effects, as naturally acted dialogue.