



## The Locus+ Archive

How Locus+ Twice Saved my Life (And Made Two Failed Attempts to Kill Me)  
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I was first introduced to Jon Bewley, Jonty Tarbuck and Simon Herbert in 1997. We met in the Forth pub in Newcastle upon Tyne following a talk I gave to students at the University of Newcastle. They showed me some of their publications and Jon asked if I'd be interested doing a project with them, but the rest of the evening is a bit of a blur and after copious amounts of beer, their offer slipped out of my mind.

A couple of years later the payphone in my studio rang. Jon was on the other end of the line: Locus+ was curating an 'Art in the Park' project for Compton Verney in Warwickshire and they would like to work with Anya Gallaccio and myself on two separate commissions. He reminded me that we'd met 'a few years earlier' and that we had discussed working on a project together. The present project for Compton Verney House Trust, he added, didn't exclude the possibility of our working together on a strictly Locus+ project in the future. I was delighted and agreed on the spot.

My project for Compton Verney, *Landskip* (2000), comprised a kind of daytime firework display using multi-coloured military smoke grenades. The house was built in the style of Vanburgh and beautifully landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. There is a large man-made lake in the grounds that, for a small fee, you can fish. Jon, as I subsequently discovered, is a keen angler and had brought along some fishing tackle to kill some time whilst the works by Anya and myself were being set up. Jon and Jonty invited me to have a go at fishing with them. I had never fished in my life before but was curious to give it a try, enticed by the cans of Stella beer cooling in a net in the lake and the excuse to smoke cigars in order to ward off mosquitoes. On my first attempt at casting I managed to snag the hook and float in a tall tree behind me. Jonty had a go at tugging the rod to dislodge it, but met with no success. Then Jon took the rod and gave it such a hard pull that I thought it was going to snap. Just when I thought that I'd have to climb the tree in order to free the hook and line and long sharp float, there was an almighty twang followed by what I thought must be the sonic boom. I looked around for a second and couldn't see the red and white float, so I thought that the line must have snapped, but a moment later I looked down and saw that my trousers and shoes were soaked. I thought that I must have pissed myself but then noticed a small fountain of liquid issuing from the beer can in my hand: it was only then that I realised that the float had entered and almost entirely exited the can of Stella that I was holding about an inch in front of my heart.

That was their first attempt.

A year or so later, on a pleasant, sunny day in Spring I was walking in the Tiergarten in Berlin with my partner, Patricia, when my mobile rang. It was Jon. 'Has anyone ever done a book on your work?' he asked. 'No,' I said. 'Well, we want to, how about it?' Suddenly it became a perfect day. I don't remember much about the rest of the conversation, but there was some mention of working together on a Locus+ project. In fact, I had had an idea to make a work where flight attendants performed Houdini-style magic/escapes on board an aircraft. This was later to become the Locus+ commissioned work, *Escape Routine* (2002). A little while afterwards, in London, I met up with Richard

Grayson who was curating the Sydney Biennale. He suggested that we premiere the work in Sydney. We thought it would be a good idea to take another, older work, *Manned Flight 1999* – as well. This is a 2 X 3 X 5.5m man lifting Cody War kite with the name Yuri Gagarin emblazoned on it: I put it into a large 3m tube and took it to Australia as extra luggage in the aircraft's hold. The intention was to show the work – guerrilla fashion – somewhere in Sydney, the site to be chosen later.

Once there, in classic Locus+ style Jon managed somehow to get permission from the Mayor of Sydney to install the kite, high up in the columns of the façade of Sydney City Hall. The next day at 6 am we started to assemble the kite on the balcony above the entrance from where we could see several possible positions from where we could photograph the work in situ. The best vantage point was the ten-storey Woolworth's department store directly opposite. With trademarkchutzpah, by 9am Jon had already obtained permission from the manager to allow us access to the roof.

I am not great with heights and I don't think Jon would mind me saying that he is even worse. Nevertheless he was willing to join me up on the roof. The manager warned us to take care as the railing had rusted through. I started to snap away with my camera and the next thing I remember was Jon's mobile ringing as I caught my foot in a small uncovered drainage hole. I reached out for the railing that gave way and then, with my life flashing before my eyes, it swung back with me hanging on, Harold Lloyd fashion, for dear life.

That was the second attempt.

I should add as a postscript to this incident that my partner had to leap out of the way of the Manley ferry that, unable to stop, had crashed into the dock of Sydney Harbour. That incident made the evening news on TV.