

**'Cairo Compression'**

**Four Poems after the  
photography of Jason Larkin**

**by Jude Cowan Montague  
and Steve Layton**

These sound poems were created after four series of photographs by Jason Larkin and put together for 'The News Agents' on Resonance FM in early 2014. Readings were initially recorded in Montague's home studio before being sent to Layton for their acoustic treatment.

**Jason Larkin** is a British photographer, internationally recognised for his long-term social documentary projects, environmental portraiture and landscape reportage. His immersive process and slower approach to journalism allow for comprehensive bodies of work that reveal and frame important social, economic and political issues. His work is subtle and layered and often concerned with contextualising present realities through historical legacies. The work that inspired these pieces can be viewed at [www.jasonlarkin.co.uk](http://www.jasonlarkin.co.uk)

**Jude Cowan Montague** is an artist and composer living in London. She has worked for nearly 10 years as an archivist for Reuters Television international news agency and curates the hybrid news-arts show for Resonance FM, 'The News Agents'. She is an award-winning printmaker and published poet.

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**Steve Layton** is a Seattle composer who for the last 30 years has worked almost exclusively with electronic and electroacoustic instruments and sound. He is also a long-time participant in the recurring web event Sound-In.org, which brings together musicians from all over the globe to create, play and share their music. Layton is also currently editor of the well-known contemporary classical website Sequenza21.com.

His music is released on his own NiwoSound label. More information can be found at [www.niwo.com/steve](http://www.niwo.com/steve).



stuck in this unmanaged muck  
elegant geometric struts

section sky into triangles  
beyond 1 2 maybe 100 dunes  
the green grass cloth of a golf course  
keeps down the gook  
bunkers are too easy here

some houses collapse

before they are made  
slip into ecru grit  
wooden girders that shuttered  
concrete in place tip  
and land in bonfire style piles

they are the grand children of the ship builders' planks  
afloat down the Nile  
blown down the sand river

we love to move but we hate wind

for the sand becomes an aeroplane  
gathers its body  
and arabesques into djinn  
who'll smash in our faces  
their collective magic

we keep low

walls be our protectors  
walls define our manners

keep us safe

*this is your wheelbarrow and it is your job  
to shift these concrete blocks  
and pile them around my empire's edge  
we have to erect beauty in gold and white  
to show the world that we are not a land of peasants*

egypt smells oily

as america of the 1920s  
suckled on gilded urbanism  
we spit it out to pull  
its sticky strands into  
liquid city, rock-rolling,  
our destination pours a heavenly colour

billboards

we must have more of these  
for they are both  
picture and wall  
they will stop the sand  
stop the sand  
it is not our friend  
we must manage its horror  
it will overwhelm us poor people

egyptian will vanquish            sand  
egypt won't vanish                    under sand  
understand  
ladders                    stilts  
rise high above the monotonous plain  
speaking a word I heard in a dream

REEM

## Trails of Gold

I was scuffling in white dust  
under pylons  
when my city sprang into the near distance.

Whooooee  
Sun on my face,  
peeling my orange,  
I'm shining,  
standing on a billion bunkers.

I was shaking the river,  
tyre rolling, earth munching,  
dragging the largest bag I could find  
across toxic nothings.

I was growing  
thin and just about alive  
- for how long? -  
where the subcutaneous dump  
had been scooped  
- wouldn't ice-cream be nice for a change? -  
by a voracious digger.

I was sheltering under a plastic sheet  
poked up on sticks  
in the grass-fringe  
in-between  
tall, feather bird heads,  
commodity watching.

Have you spied the skyline  
from the exposed side  
of a reef burning in the afternoon?  
It hums electricity,  
streams electrons.

Our powerpumps, they're thirsty.

Kids who swing on a wire fence  
or cup dust buildings  
fingers rubbing sunklines,  
playing at gods playing with people on the tarmac  
in the empty road -  
you can always play -  
I say - at living.

Fragile lakes evaporate  
into rust pools,  
dishes discovering  
no metal

worth a good sieving.

Tired, mudspot

seekers turn up late.

Packs of thin, bare dogs

drawn nose down through outblown rockpit.

Those skinny bastards

won't stop till they hit meat.

## **Not Useless Island**

My ears grow keener in silence; land crabs clatter among wahoo, sailfish, boobies and noddies. Man made this garden, not God. No snakes, for adders would eat eggs and we'd eradicate them as swiftly as we have our other mistakes: feral cats, ship rats. We emptied out our bags of roots and seeds choosing orange blooms, twisted branches and pine aroma suggesting amorous evenings.

An island made new for beauty: creatures are born to touch. An island made new for truth: people must tell the stars what goes on in their hearts. Our species are into communication. We've poised dishes to pick up the tiny friends in the stratosphere.

In this low key jungle voices ring better. *Is that you vibrating?* I clamber among the tight-lipped rocks praising their sienna black-brown, the designer moss, cushion-tussocks, creepy carpets: our Pacific theatre. Green curtains roll back to announce the court of Ascension.

## **Past Perfidious**

An eye, a pool  
two pillars, three trees.  
The palace of cool  
intelligence leads  
two women to a panorama  
of red-jacketed warriors  
and the bloody encounter of sword  
and skin. Criss cross, burgundy  
carpets. Paintings  
on podiums, busts immobilising  
moustaches and epaulettes.  
Arms up on glass case,  
a curious body looks  
down on tiny boats floating  
on the blue channel  
above which the military mini  
aircraft hang from threads.  
Cattle keep their inquisitive heads up  
in cases on mahogany legs  
fashion once thought to display such elegant curves,  
French curves,  
the setting adding a mysterious varnish  
to the bovine horns.  
Silent cattle. They don't chew,

no lowing.

Fans don't whirr  
on the moulded door frames.

No breeze for tourists,  
hot, hot, no breeze for attendants  
merely oodles and steaks  
of faded cow-glory.

Geese fly away  
wild across glassy  
picturesque fields, reflecting windows  
behind the keeper,  
who has large hands.

One holds the walkie talkie.

He is about to speak.

Forever, encased, for  
he is as stuffed  
as the birds.

Visual delights abound:  
blood, battlefields hypereal  
as a sci fi book cover, and horns, horns,  
horns of stags,  
horns encircled in gilt,  
and guns guns ivory handles.

Horns.

Fellow relaxes  
leaning on the painted walls  
of peaceful corridors,

he quarter-dreams,  
basking in the luxury of work.  
Come. Now. Follow me.  
Hear your shoes on the parquet.  
That's right, it's softer on the runner.  
Now, through here.  
Voila!  
Yes, this is the booth  
I was telling you about.  
Where you can feel you're an exhibit.  
The afterlaugh to seriousness.  
Pose like an Egyptian.  
"We can deliver your photos  
wherever you are."

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