



BOX

THE SPHERES

Conny Karlsson Lundgren

12 februari–13 mars

THE SPHERES

Conny Karlsson Lundgren, 2015

“Presently we will hear Music of the Spheres, see star systems happenings of the Universe, to remind us of eternal truth, beauty, infinity.”

Den tysk-amerikanska ultra-modernisten Johanna M. Beyer (1888–1944) komponerade *Music of the Spheres* 1938, tänkt som ett interludium i hennes orealiserade politiska opera *Status Quo*. Stycket som är komponerat för ”three electrical instruments or strings” är bland de första någonsin komponerade för elektriska instrument, och det absolut första i sitt slag skrivet av en kvinna. Endast en känd

Johanna M. Beyer, the German ultra-modernist composer, composed Music of the Spheres in 1938, as an interlude in her unrealized political opera Status Quo. The piece is among the first compositions for electrical instruments and the very first of its kind composed by a woman. Only one electronic reconstruction of the piece is known to exist. The Spheres is staged by the artist Conny Karlsson Lundgren

Utgiven av Galleri BOX i samband med utställningen The Spheres av och med Conny Karlsson Lundgren.

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elektronisk rekonstruktion existerar. *The Spheres* är iscensatt av Conny Karlsson Lundgren i samarbete med en mindre holländsk stråkensemble och är den första framförda och filmade stråkversionen av den korta musikpassagen. *The Spheres* består förutom av en filmad performance, också av en serie omtolkningar och gestaltningar av det komponerade styckets ”biografi”, baserat på referens- och arkivmaterial relaterat till den politiska operans ursprung. Till sammans bildar de ett narrativ kring förgänglighet, sorg och avbrutna visionära idéer. *The Spheres* producerades under Karlsson Lundgrens vistelse vid Van Eyck Academie Studio Research Program i Maastricht, Nederländerna.

Conny Karlsson Lundgren (f. Väster-
vik) är konstnär och baserad i Stockholm. I sitt konstnärskap fascinerar han av det efemära, till synes tillfälliga spår och ögonblick som tillsammans bildar större sammanhang. Med film, text, bild och dokument fokuserar han på en ickelinjär associativ historieskrivning som utforskar gränser mellan en social, politisk och privat identitet. Karlsson Lundgren tog sin

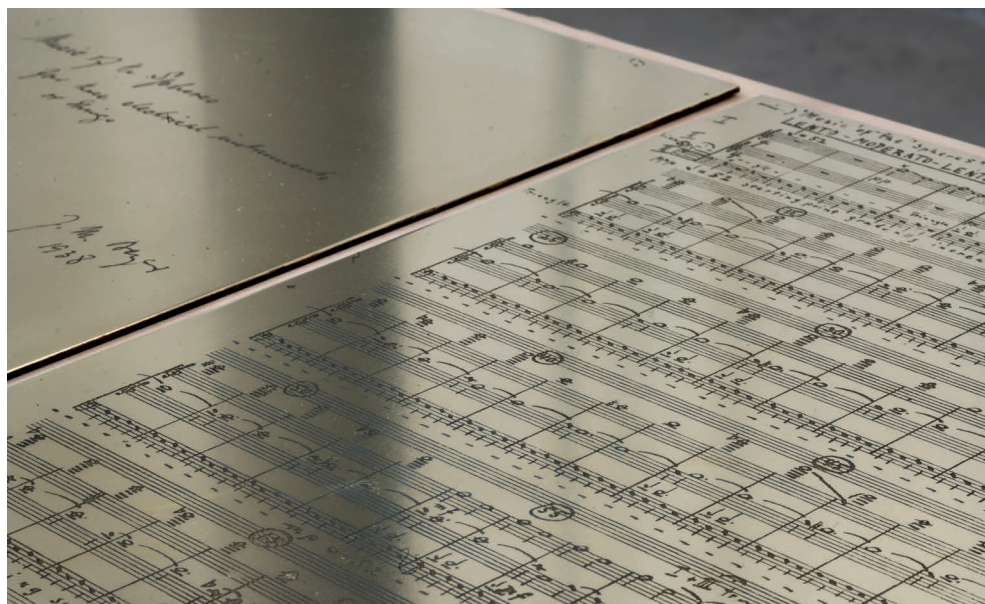
in collaboration with a small Dutch string ensemble, and serves as the first filmed and recorded string version of this musical passage. The Spheres consists not only of a filmed performance, but also by a series re-interpretations and representations of the compositions “biography”, based on reference and archival material related to the origins of the political opera. Together they form a narrative of impermanence, grief and broken visionary ideas. The Spheres was produced during Karlsson Lundgren’s residence at Van Eyck Academie Studio Research Program in Maastricht, The Netherlands.

*Conny Karlsson Lundgren (b. Väster-
vik, Sweden) is a Swedish visual artist based in Stockholm. In his practice he is fascinated by the ephemeral, seemingly accidental traces and moments that together form a larger context. Through film, text, image and documents he focus on nonlinear associative history writing that explores the boundaries between social, political and private identities. He holds an MFA in Fine Arts from the Valand Academy in Gothenburg and has exhibited widely in both Sweden and*



MFA i Fri konst vid Valand konsthögskola och har de senaste åren ställt ut aktivt i både i Sverige och internationellt och var en av stipendiaterna vid IASPIS ateljéprogram i Stockholm under 2013. I vår är han dessutom aktuell med gruppställningen *The Image Generator* på Extra City Kunsthall i Antwerpen samt ett nyproducerat verk för *The White House* på Västerbotten Museum i Umeå. För närvarande vistas han i Köpenhamn som en del av The FAIR Residency Program på Fabrikken.

internationally and was one of the fellows at IASPIS Studio Program in Stockholm in 2013. During spring he participates in the group exhibition The Image Generator at Extra City Kunsthall in Antwerp and produces new work for The White House at Västerbotten Museum in Umeå. He currently resides in Copenhagen as part of The FAIR Residency Program at Fabrikken.



The Spheres

E. C. Feiss

The material at stake here is an interlude: a connector, a middle piece, something in between. *The Spheres* by Conny Karlsson Lundgren is a performance of *Music of the Spheres* the interlude for an unrealized political opera titled *Status Quo* by the German-American composer Johanna M. Beyer (1888–1944) This partial object is useful for two specific functions, brought together by the figure of Beyer: the historical representation of both a woman (as a subject un-representable in History) and an art form (a composition) that resists canonization. What I mean, is that both a subject like Beyer and her work present related but distinct problems for the construction of their histories. What is the difference between an artwork (here, *The Spheres*) and a historical account? Lundgren is conversant with Beyer's biographers, he has been in her archive and he presents materials from it. However it is the interlude that pivots at the center of his work, both an object of

historical import (to hear the previously unheard) and a partial object, one that disallows a “fullness” of work or biography.

Arriving via the interlude, we already run into the problem of comprehending Beyer's work: a composition for “three electrical instruments or strings.” She is sometimes claimed as a grandmother of electronic music, but this is a reference that only assures presentist sentiments – the term doesn't really describe what it is we are listening to. We might call her production “avant-garde,” or as her peers were termed “ultra modernist,” but we know that only men can be avant-garde. Or rather, that the periodizing terms “avant garde” and “ultra modernist” exclude her – she can be associated, or peripheral or “working at the same time,” but she only becomes an “ultra modernist composer” in a project of revisionist history, wherein women become included or added to an existent history. Johanna M. Beyer – a woman, a composer whose work is not yet music, an immigrant – she is an impossible subject for a history. In response, *The Spheres* presents an interlude – a connecting part – for a whole that was never finished. I see the use of this partial object – its re-performance in the present film –as a proposition for how to tell a history (or how to represent, maybe History is rejected) of Johanna M. Beyer. Further, this interlude suggests how to tell a history of an art that broke with art – which is what the term “avant-garde” wants to describe, and yet cannot, because Beyer is female. Any such labeling of her production as avant-garde, however true in ethos, form and historical period, is a retroactive inclusion, and cannot be.

The cast of the score in brass furnishes permanence on an object that is multiply immaterial, weighted so heavily as to clearly contrast to its near nonexistence: both a work not meant to be seen (a score for a performance) and politically overlooked. Literally obscured in plain sight, to the point that the composer Henry Cowell's recommendation to the Guggenheim foundation on Beyer's behalf ends with the endorsement of a man, and not Beyer at all. History is this blatant. The queer confusion we can read onto their relationship reverberates from the archive, with her obsessed and him in near hatred, working together against the works you see before you in Lundgren's display. Music of the Spheres

is also a reference to “universal music” the medieval Latin conception of the logic celestial movement. What harmony or universality could Beyer have believed in from her thwarted corner? If we allow it, *Music of the Spheres* is a space in which she decides the order of things, in which her system reigns.

What we know from the revisionist histories of Beyer currently taking place,¹ (their aim an intervention into the narrative of modernist music) is that she took up a post of (unpaid) support to Cowell. She is reclaimed from behind the veil of feminized administration that so often characterizes the fate of women artists prior to the invention of their history. For example, in the language of visuality, one of Beyer’s biographers is “baffled” at how she was “*disappeared*” from history despite extensive correspondence with “every major composer, conductor, or institution of the time.”² Cowell is her almost lover, her obstruction, her inevitable reference (her legibility) in historical time. Important here is the historian’s reliance on the visual in comprehending Beyer’s absence from history. As another historian, Joan Scott, critically pointed out in 1991, writing in the context of emergent gay and lesbian revisionist history amidst the AIDS crisis, non-normative histories are conceived in a language of imagery: a past becomes “transparently” applied with difference, “new vision” of the past is enabled. The arithmetic involved is a remedying of the prior “baffling” exclusion with the clear addition of the new. We can now really see. In the history of art, such revisions are desired in a context where non-subjects (not men, non-Westerners, etc.) have no access to form, and therefore to the terms of representation: Beyer materially contributed to the development of music as an aesthetic and sonic entity, as a form, and should be credited. However, Scott’s problem with the “transparency” of this additive logic, is that it leaves unturned the power relations which created the exclusion: clear vision doesn’t explain the impossibility of recognition in the first place. It is less a question of why Beyer tirelessly supported Cowell in lieu of herself, and the installment of her next to him, and rather the importance of

1 See Amy C. Beal’s essay “How Johanna Beyer spent her days” for a literature review on Beyer.

<http://music.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/BeyerEssayBeal.pdf>

2 Ibid.,9.

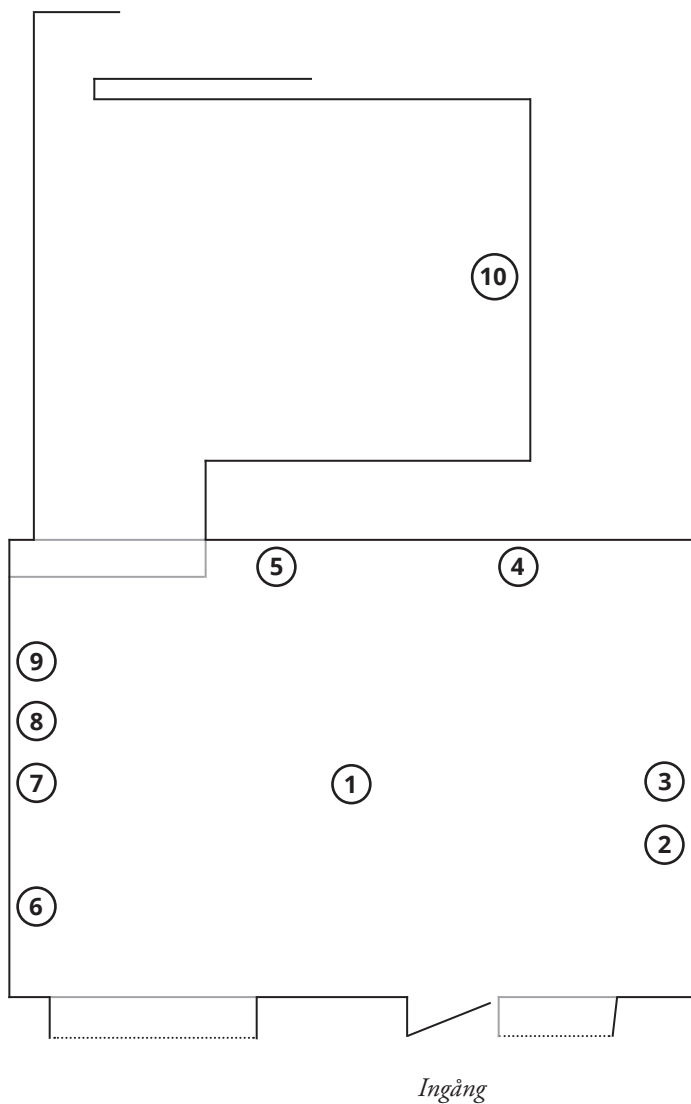
a subject like Beyer in eroding the primacy of a history as populated by whole, “major” subjects like Cowell. This is not a new political sentiment, but methodologies in the humanities seem to be turning to the question of other beings (objects, animals) rather than continuing to fail in addressing this problem.

Leaving history, Scott turns to literary abstraction. She discusses Samuel Delany’s memoir as describing “a conversion experience” reached through “distorting, refracting qualities...which produced a wavering of the visible.”³ Rather than Delany’s vibrant haze, we have the sparseness of ephemera. We have a straightforward playing out of a partial object. Lundgren stages rather than makes opaque – lays out rather than frays. Beyer of course did this for herself: writing *Music of the Spheres* in the wake of her ALS diagnosis in 1938 she sought to draw out a universal system in harmonious sense, only to produce her own further irrationality. This opacity is preserved by the careful delineation between entities in operation here. Beyer’s own ‘conversion experience’ led her into ‘shadowy’ existence, as one historian put her ghosting (her closeness but unnamed-ness) of the history of music. Brought together in the use of this interlude then is a proposition for liminal representation: a telling through an absence – if we think of the interlude as a break, a gap, etc. – which is also constitutive of it. As part of an unfinished whole, the interlude, *Music of the Spheres* (1938) can never stand as a representation “of Beyer’s work.” It will only ever be a part – it announces this in and of itself, enacting the foreclosure of which it is also evidences.

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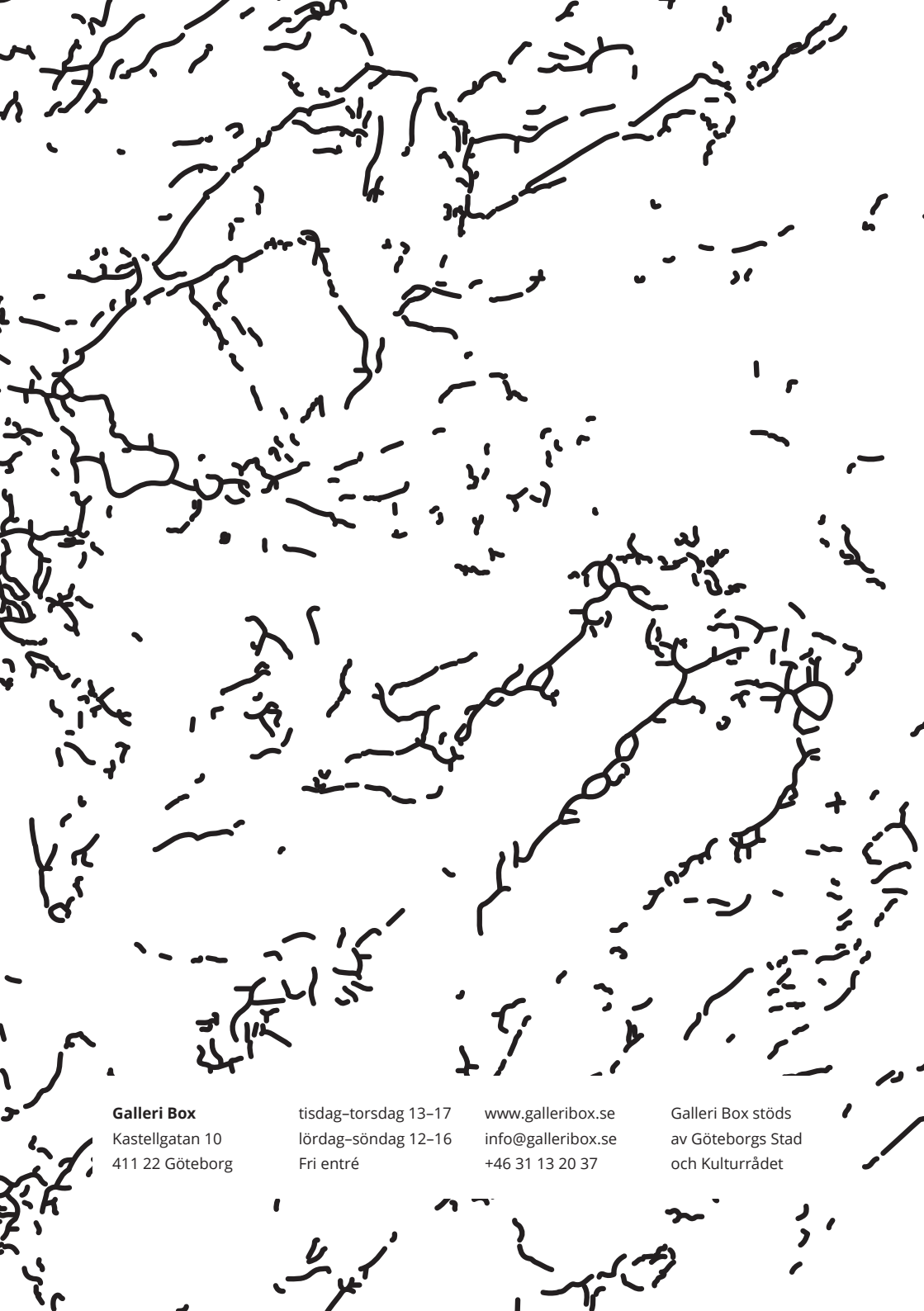
E. C. Feiss is a writer based in Berkeley, California. Her work has appeared in *Afterall*, *Open!*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and *Radical Philosophy*, amongst others. In 2014–15, she was a resident at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht and an instructor at the Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam. Her work has been presented at institutions including: CASCO Utrecht, ICA London, W149 Amsterdam, and BOZAR Center for Fine Arts, Brussels. With Karisa Senavitits, she co-organizes the research and publishing platform ‘Policy People.’ <http://policy-people.com>. She is a PhD candidate in Art History at UC Berkeley.

3 Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience” *Critical Inquiry* (Summer, 1991) 794.



Verkslista

- 1 *Status Quo: Interlude, Music of the Spheres*
Mässing, 2015
- 2 *Certificate (biography)*
Riso, oprisk lins, 2015
- 3 *Imprint (biography)*
Pigmentprint (kopia av vintage print), 2015
- 4 *After Gafurius's Practica musice, 1496*
Screenprint, glas, 2015
- 5 *After Stanley's History of Philosophy, 17th century*
Nr 14 av 27 (serie)
Blyerts, papper, 2016
- 6 *Location of Stars and Constellations: Collier's World Atlas, 1938 edition*
Vintage print, 1938
- 7 *Status Quo: Narrative Outline of the Opera*
Riso, 2015
- 8 *Status Quo: Music of The Spheres, Announcer's Voice*
Riso, 2015
- 9 *Status Quo: Act IV Geneva, Dance for Full Orchestra*
Riso, 2015
- 10 *The Spheres (string version)*
HD-video, 6.50 min, 2015



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