Four Figures (low resolution) and a Technique of Extraction
by Lisa Skuret

Sonic Figures by Seth Ayyaz from *the bird ghost at the zaouia*, (2002—ongoing)

'Four Figures (low resolution) and a Technique of Extraction', Lisa Skuret, Listening Through a Beam of Intense Darkness, fig-2 at ICA and Outset, 2015, pp.72-80.

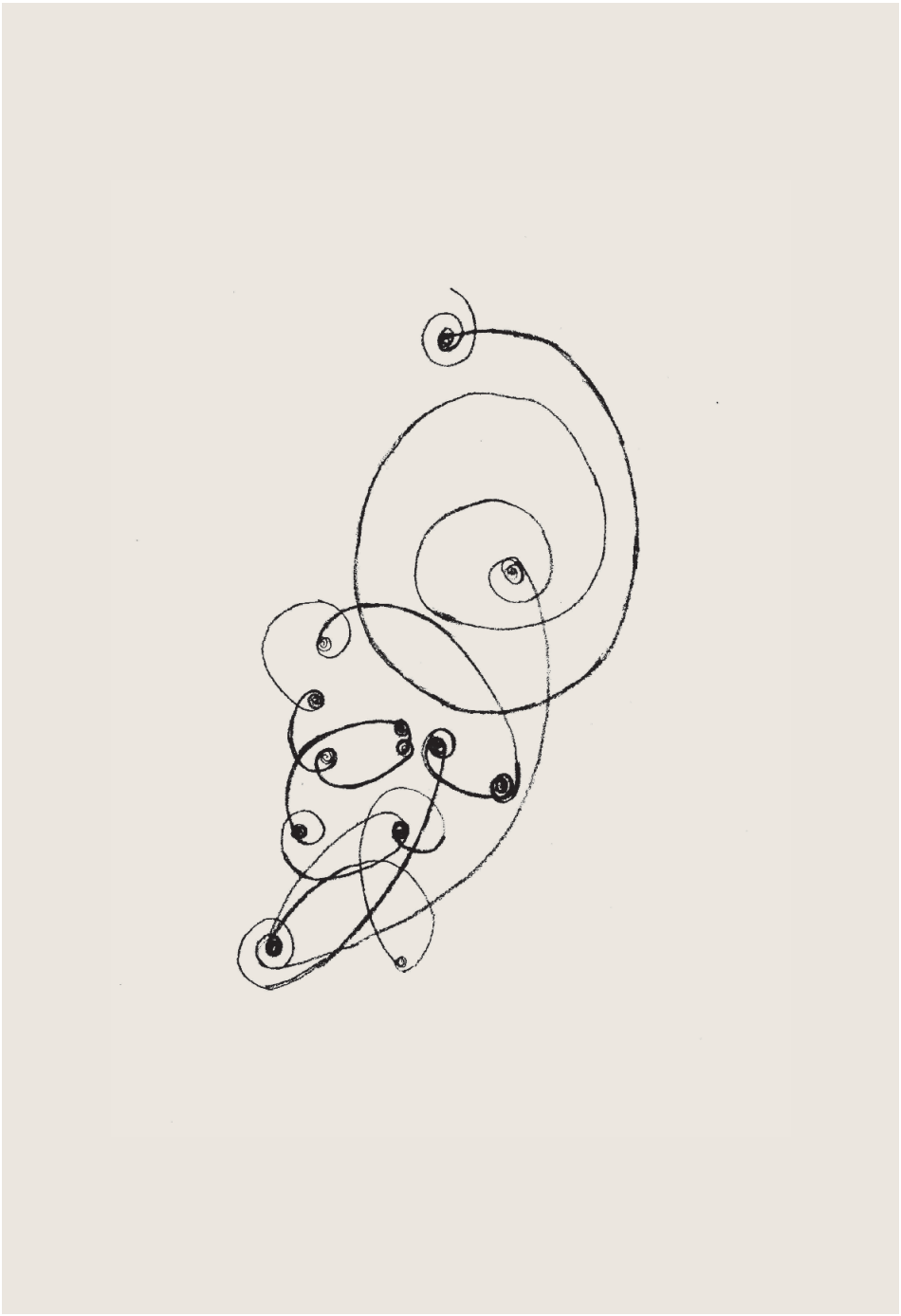


Figure 1: Lilat Vortex 31.51483 -9.76608

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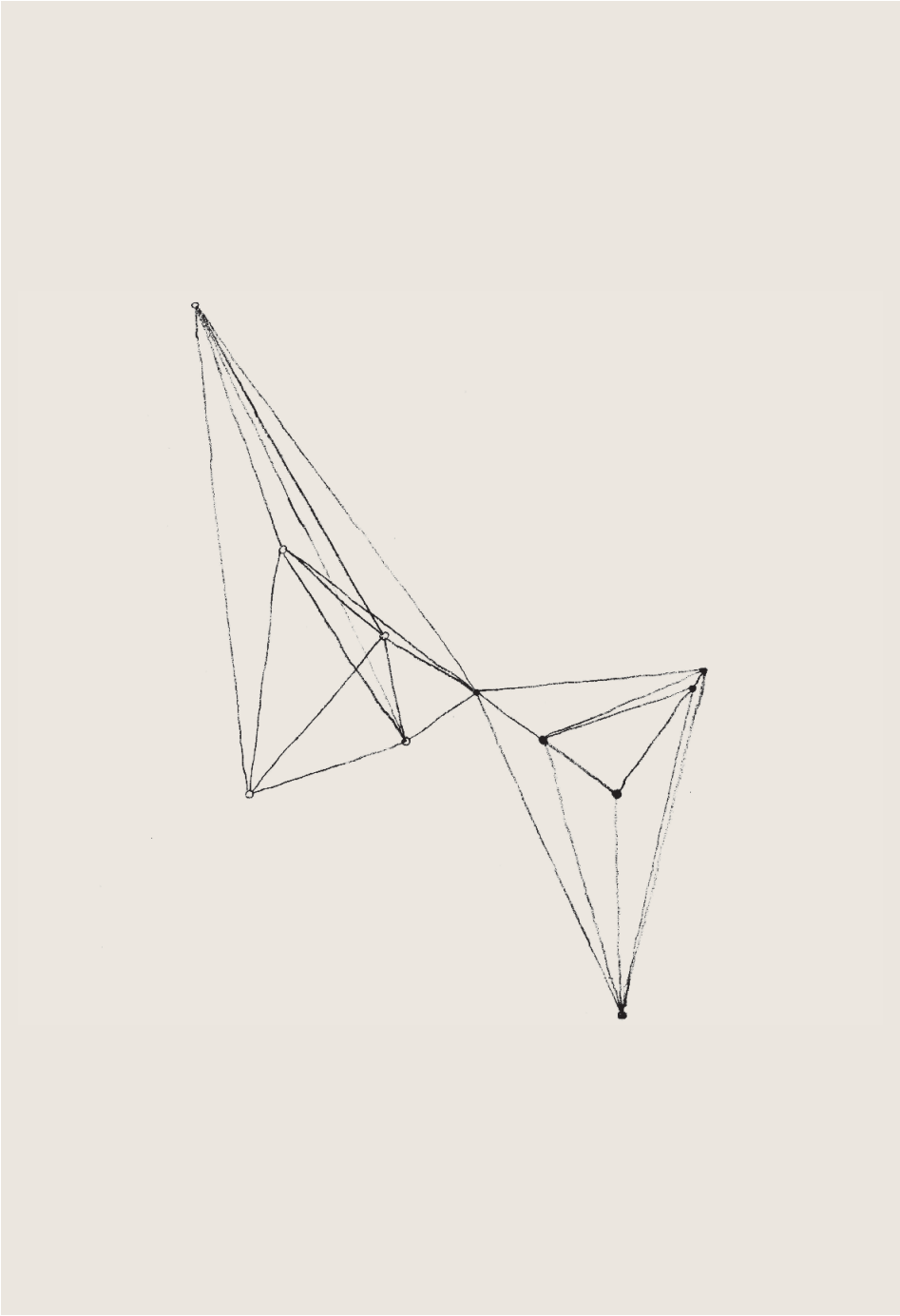


Figure 2: After Isha'a Recedes Below the Noise Floor
31.59022 -5.59455

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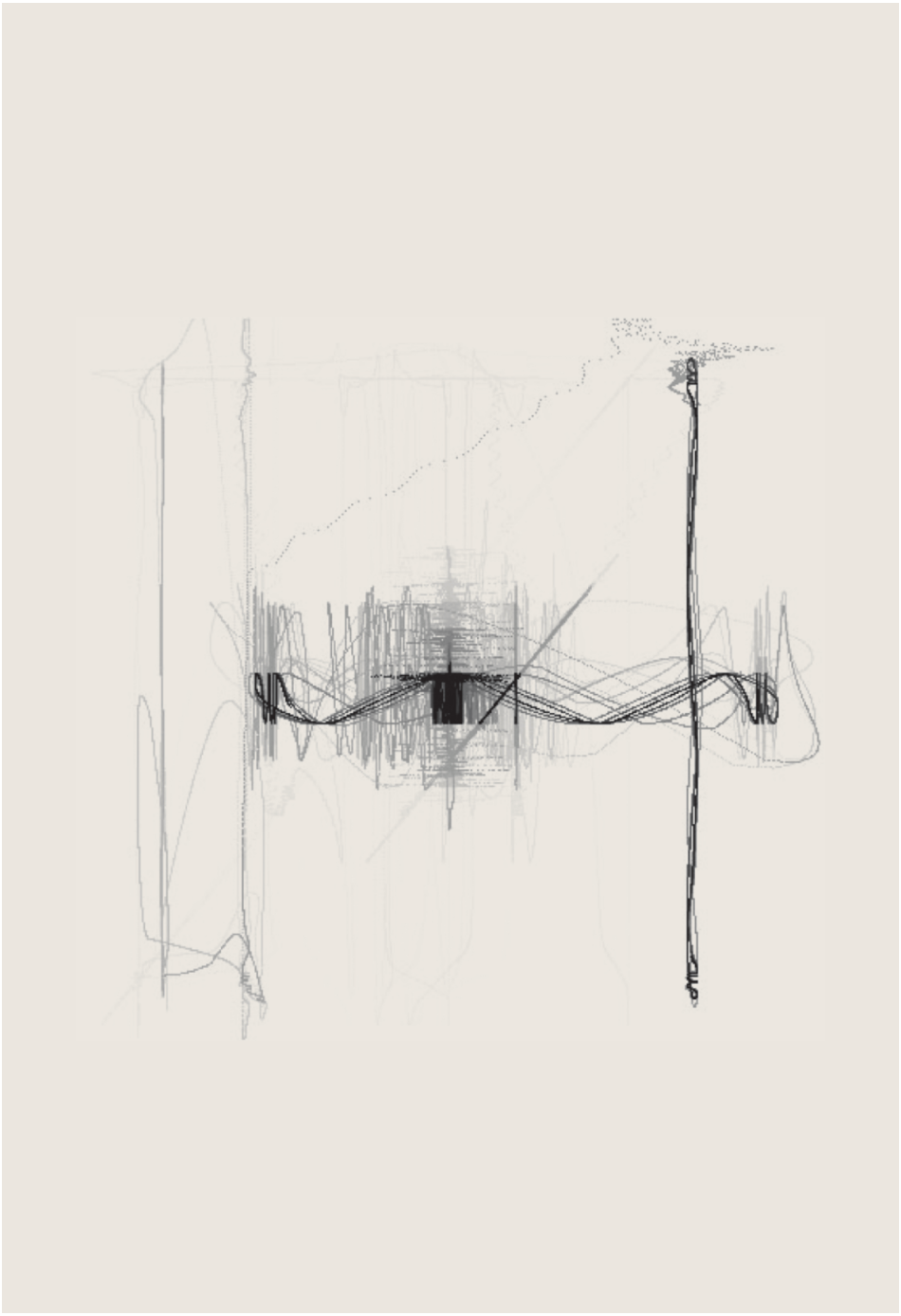


Figure 3: Often Contains a Pool, and Sometimes a Fountain
33.51184 36.30664

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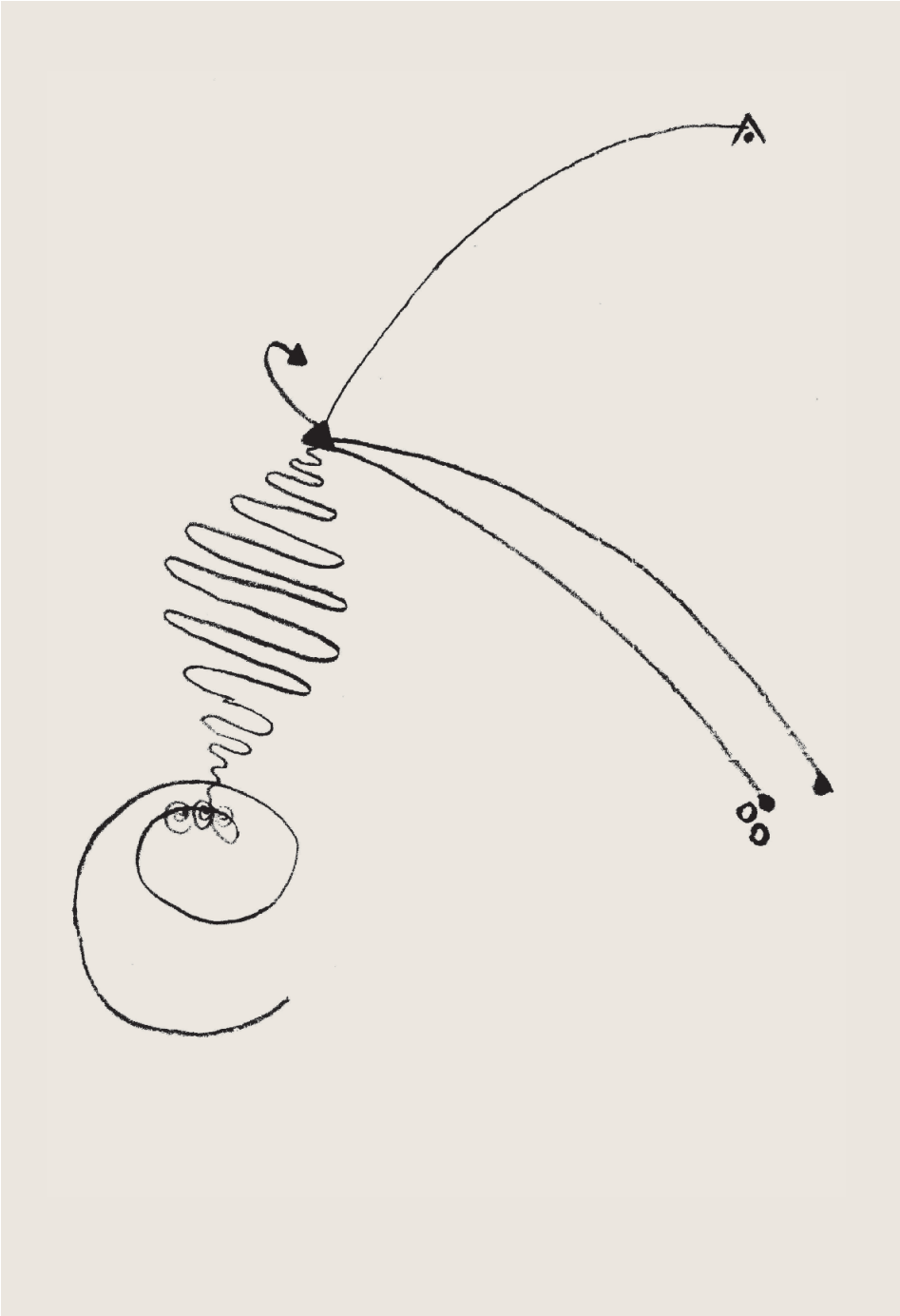


Figure 4: Uses and Abuses of Sound through a Ceiling of Alabaster 51.556711 -0.08334

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Excerpt: Spectral Smearing

the bird ghost at the zaouia (2002—ongoing) begins as it continues, with a combination of procedures, or techniques of extraction. Seth Ayyaz set his sound piece in motion through a process of field recordings, which he refers to as 'sonic-social documents'. From these he subsequently removed all sounds culturally designated as music according to particular Islamic debates. Ambiguously functioning both as 'playback engine' as well as 'machine for listening', the piece uses as source materials the sounds which remain after the extraction of all music, and continuously reconfigures itself according to 'investigations made by ear' — both human and machine listening, processing and transformations.

Immersed recently in my own investigations during a multi-channel installation of *the bird ghost at the zaouia*[17], I have the sense that I am located in what appears to be a type of aural drawing process from which it is difficult to detect any master narrative. Rather, spiralling in many directions, multiple tangential fragments seem to be set into play. While I am aware that no sound repeats literally, I experience an illusory sense of (linear) progression in response to an ever-fluctuating soundscape. During a few moments, I feel dizzy; overlaid and distorted objects spin slowly clockwise as I close my eyes. Again and again I come back to find myself looking for meaning, as abstracted and active 'lines' perform as tendrils, shoots and whips.

Engaging the piece in terms of what is now highlighted: the perceptual background or the local sounds that one may not have been consciously aware of at the time of lis-

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tening or recording — a question is produced through my listening: Can one cleanly extract what has been perceptually foregrounded, or designated as the initial object of attention, from its field of relation? Rather than examining these musical or rhythmic extractions, perhaps now contained within some disregarded folder, in terms of lost objects operating like essentialist background hauntings, does their 'removal' result in a different type of trail? True, associations hang around the sounds whether they are shared or purely personal, but perhaps it is a less meaning-full trail, a blurring, functioning in a way more similar to the technique of 'local scrubbing' which Deleuze (after Bacon) explored in *The Logic of Sensation*. By smearing with the local field of forms, what has been erased, rather than necessarily existing as disappearance, takes on a more diagrammatic function — in that it acts rather than illustrates. Perhaps, the bird ghost referred to in the title of the piece is not a ghosting as a presence in absence, but acts in the piece more as an 'asignifying trait' with a performative function.

In *the bird ghost at the zaouia*, the 'performance' of the piece is compositional. Form and function here similarly blurred, there is little distinction between the acts of making the piece and performing the piece. Both perform a similar function. Acting as both the machine for listening as well as the playback engine, the composition is ephemeral. It performs as a poly-referential and at times non-referential, continuously shifting diagram, which through its performance, forces (of power) are harnessed and fleetingly made manifest, enabling new flows to be set into operation.

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In the case of the erasure of all that has been culturally designated as music (musicking being a particularly human endeavor, which also requires a cognising or cognisant listener for it to be categorised as such), what remains of the human and of human agency? What has been 'designated (and regulated) as music' may be the (human) figure, whose representation is similarly prohibited in Islamic aesthetics. If in the preparation for the piece all documentation of the acts of making music have been scrubbed, are the sonic extractions which act to smear the local field (recordings) figurative, or are they nonhuman? What is clear is that the sounds, whether consciously heard or not, are local and *do something* locally. The scrubbed sections continue to perform but not from a (transcendental) distance. The sounds act on, and with, various (non)human listening machines in real-time while at the same time informing, forming and unforming future listening machines in the present. This process activates a different type of figure more akin to a temporal rather than spatial diagram — active listening, as a type of *live diagramming* process.

Locating myself again as listener, I am struck by the sensation that the piece feels like a call. As poly-vocal elements assembled and re-assembled through various processes of listening, the provisional sonic bodies whether naturalistic or artificial seem to function as a call. The voice? Whose voice? Who is calling? Who is being called? I am not suggesting here a self-other pairing as in a musical call-and-response, but perhaps referring to a fictional voice calling itself fleetingly into being in the process of calling. This would not be

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a voice as a repetitive loop, knot, or disembodied echo, but functioning to squeeze the meaning out of things, perhaps a voice as non-referent sound. Is this voice human?

If the piece then functions as a call, it is a call as an aggregation of multiple yet undefined voices. Constantly reconfiguring, there does not appear to be a set figure attached to or behind the sonic manifestations of the piece. Not speaking through words (or as erasures of 'music', the language of music), the scrubbed sections too, operate as voices unattached to pre-defined cultural figures.

Within the temporalities of active listenings of the piece, I feel as if I, in a quiet and excerpted way, have become implicated. One of many voices diagrammatically working to re-plot configurations to which associations, perhaps previously alien to them, might temporarily attach. It is these calls, now functioning as types of local yet fictional figures, which suggest to me a process in which fiction is not just a product of the imagination; the calls evoke the sensation that fiction is, as well as functions as, a technique of extraction.

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