



# MOVING CORALS

*A travelogue on movement, community, and architecture in flux*  
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“All the customary activities of the nomad lead to wandering and movement. This is the antithesis and negation of stationariness, which produces civilization.”<sup>6</sup>

# MOVING CORALS





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Colophon



“We began this book with an image, that of nomads  
on the move, appearing  
and disappearing as if they were a mirage, a people  
of mystery. But as we have  
seen, the mystery of nomadic life lies mostly in the  
imagination of the outside  
observer. For the nomad who erects her tent at the  
end of each day’s migration,  
surrounded by familiar faces and objects, listening to  
the bleat of lambs as  
she milks the ewes each evening, it’s just another  
day. In one part of the globe  
after another we have seen that the world of the  
nomad may be different from  
that of his sedentary neighbor, but only because it  
conforms to a different set of  
rules. And nomads never truly disappear, they only  
change their campsites. It  
is we sedentary folk who need to widen our own  
horizons.”

*J. Barfield (1993)*



## INTRODUCTION – ON DRIFTING AND DESIGNING

This research catalogue follows the logic of movement, of temporary attachment, of getting lost and learning from it. It drifts—through places, people, fragments, images, ideas. Just like the nomadic movement it studies.

The catalogue opens with a *personal prologue*, grounding the reader in the red camper named Bob, my mobile shell. From there, we begin a *dérive* through nine thematic chapters. Each chapter is a stop—a place of reflection, observation, or intervention. Together, they explore the architectural and social dimensions of nomadism, mobility, temporality, and belonging.

We begin with *Itineraries of Nomadism*, questioning what it means to move, to wander, to inhabit space without fixing it. This leads into *Threads of Temporality*, where architectural time meets the unpredictability of urban rhythms.

In *Arbitrary Antagonisms*, I challenge the deeply rooted opposition between sedentary and nomadic worlds. Here, I propose a different architectural ethos—one based on relational presence rather than permanence.

*Tools of the Makers* brings the research closer to practice, documenting the shells, systems, and logics of makers in reused industrial spaces. Their improvisation becomes design.

This transitions into *Field Notes from the Wetlands*, where I turn my lens to the Innovation Wetlands in Hoboken. A raw, peripheral space filled with potential—and tension.

*Coral Logics* introduces the metaphor and structural strategy behind my architectural proposal. A layered ecosystem of rock, coral and anemone becomes the foundation for spatial coexistence.

In *Places of Connection*, I zoom out—towards infrastructure, mobility, and community. The project is not an island, but part of a city-wide rhythm of arrival and interaction.

Then comes *Reflections in Fragments*: scattered thoughts, open questions, poetic doubts. Not everything fits. And that's part of the method.

The catalogue ends with *Drift Sources*, a visual bibliography of books, conversations, field images, and zines that informed this process.

Together, these chapters form a stage—an architectural theatre for nomadic lives. This catalogue does not aim to close questions, but to open space: for uncertainty, for dialogue, for rethinking what it means to design in motion.





shell /ʃɛl/ *noun*

**[countable]**

1. the hard outer covering of something, especially of an animal, nut, or egg.
2. a structure or framework, especially one that encloses or protects something.

**Etymology:** Old English *scell*, from Proto-Germanic *skaljo*.

## 0. PROLOGUE – MY SHELL ON WHEELS

### **Structural description**

Personal narrative opening that roots the catalogue in lived experience. Sets the tone for a drifting, image-heavy structure.

### **Keywords**

*red camper, shell, hermit crab, safe space, mobility, personal dérive, embodied research*

My exploration into urban nomadism began not with a theory, but with a red camper named Bob. What started as a temporary means of travel became a way of seeing, living, and relating to space. Bob is not just a vehicle; it's a shell, a mobile home, a shifting threshold between myself and the world. Living on the move forces you to redefine what "home" means. It is not walls or permanence that make a place feel safe—it is function, rhythm, and ritual. The world becomes smaller when you carry your shell with you.

I live in a red camper named Bob. It's my shell on wheels, my safe space that I carry with me wherever I go. It has shown me a different way of experiencing space—a way that isn't defined by walls or boundaries but by the freedom to move, to adapt, to change. In Bob, I have learned that space is not about size but about function, about the ability to transform and redefine the environment around me. This freedom to move, to redefine space on my own terms, has made me question the rigidity of traditional architecture and urban planning.

With Bob, I traveled to Antwerp, to the Blikfabriek—a post-industrial site, a place in transition, neither abandoned nor fully developed. It is a place where the boundaries between public and private, permanent and temporary, are constantly shifting. Driving past rows of cars that were towed away and never picked up, through puddles of water on broken roads, I found my way to the back entrance where I was told to park for the night. There, I discovered I was not alone. I parked Bob next to a row of other campers, caravans, and self-built shelters. It was a gathering of hermit crabs, each in their own shell, each navigating their own version of nomadic life.

These were not just vehicles; they were homes, workshops, creative studios. They were expressions of identity, of adaptability, of resilience. I saw makers transforming the raw, industrial spaces of the Maakfabriek into functional and personal ateliers. They had claimed their shells, crafting a lifestyle that defies urban norms. They were building their worlds in the gaps, in the in-betweens, in spaces that were temporary by nature.

Walking through the Blikfabriek, I felt the pulse of a community that exists outside the conventional boundaries of the city. In the vibrant halls of the Maakfabriek, Stelling, and Expo, I saw spaces constantly changing, adapting to the needs of their users. But in the empty halls of the Velgenfabriek, I saw shells waiting to be defined, waiting for inhabitants who could breathe life into them.

This experience shaped my understanding of nomadic living. It showed me how urban nomads inhabit the city—not by conforming to its static structures but by navigating its fluid possibilities. It showed me how they redefine space through movement, creativity, and adaptability.

Yet, this way of living is precarious. Parking Bob in these in-between spaces, I became acutely aware of the tension between freedom and exclusion. I felt the privilege and precarity of my mobility, the freedom to move but the burden of never being fully welcome. It made me question who the city is built for and who it excludes.

This is why I chose an empty slot of land at the north of the Blikfabriek as my site. It is a place in flux, a place of potential, but also a place that currently feels uninviting, unsafe, and disconnected. It is a space that could become a vibrant community for urban nomads, a place that accommodates movement, creativity, and change. It is a space where the friction between architecture and nomadism can be explored, challenged, and redefined.

In this space, I want to create an environment that embraces mobility and adaptability—a coral reef where hermit crabs can find and build their shells, where temporary and permanent coexist, where the boundaries of home are reimagined. This is not just about designing a building; it's about designing a way of life.

This catalogue, like Bob, does not stay still. It drifts. The narrative is non-linear, moving between fragments, places, images and reflections. The process mirrors a *dérive*—Guy Debord's psychogeographic strategy of wandering through urban space without a fixed destination, letting the environment guide your route (Debord, 1956). Through this wandering, patterns emerge. Spaces become readable not by plan but by experience.

This catalogue unfolds as a journey. Each chapter marks a stop—sometimes brief, sometimes lingering—but always part of a continuous drift. It is not designed to provide definitive answers but to open questions about how we live, move, dwell and make place in a world increasingly shaped by flux.






dérive /der'ri:v/ *noun*

[countable] (*plural: dérives*)

1. a spontaneous and unstructured journey through an urban landscape, directed entirely by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters found there.

**Etymology:** French, literally 'drift', from *dériver* 'to drift'.  
Popularised by the Situationist International in the 1950s.



## 1. ITINERARIES OF NOMADISM – LOSING DIRECTION TO FIND MEANING

### **Structural description**

Conceptual framing of nomadism and the value of getting lost as research and design method.

### **Keywords**

*dérive, cultural island, threshold, in-betweenness, curiosity, directionless discovery*

“To wander is to tune into the city’s subconscious.”

To live nomadically is to embrace uncertainty—not just as a condition, but as a method. My initial dérives through Hoboken weren't about mapping or measuring, but about being lost on purpose. Getting lost is a way of paying attention. It allowed me to see cultural “islands” like the Blikfabriek as more than leftover space—they are urban anomalies, simultaneously peripheral and central, excluded and desired.

Urban nomads don't move through cities the way tourists or workers do. They follow different rhythms. Their movement is dictated by access, visibility, necessity, and sometimes resistance. Inspired by authors like Iain Sinclair and Francesco Careri, I used walking as a research tool—recording impressions, changes in light, temperature, atmosphere. Careri (2002) describes walking as an architectural act: a way of shaping space through motion.

In these itineraries, the city stops being a fixed grid and becomes a stage. The Blikfabriek appears not as a masterplanned hub, but as a living theatre—its architecture shaped by the people who occupy, modify, and care for it. This spatial performance—where tents, caravans, and tools define use—calls for a different kind of architectural attention. One that values presence over permanence.







temporality /ˌtɛmpəˈrælɪti/ *noun*

**[uncountable]**

1. the state of existing within or having some relationship with time.
2. the condition of being temporary or transitory.

**Etymology:** Late Latin *temporalitas*, from *temporalis* meaning ‘of time’.



## 2. THREADS OF TEMPORALITY – ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT FIXITY

### **Structural description**

Theoretical context on temporality in urbanism and design. Draws from literature and site observations.

### **Keywords**

*permanence, ephemerality, time-based design, unpredictability, failure as method*

“Temporary doesn’t mean throwaway—it means timely.”

What does it mean for architecture to let go of permanence? Urban development tends to value durability, control, and long-term programming. But the most vital places I encountered were those that resisted being fixed. The temporary becomes permanent, and the permanent falls into decay. Temporality is not a flaw—it's a condition.

This chapter is shaped by thinkers like Bishop and Williams (2012), who describe the power of temporary urbanism as a form of adaptive resistance. Places like the Maakfabriek, the Keilewerf, or Ruigoord exemplify this: structures that grow incrementally, adapt to their users, and always remain in motion.


Time in architecture is usually abstracted—reduced to lifecycles or phasing plans. But lived temporality is embodied. It is the knowledge of when a space feels safe, when it transforms, when it dies. My photographs capture these shifts: a door left ajar, light leaking into a workshop, a wall covered in ephemera. These are not details for documentation—they are clues to how people inhabit time.

As Koolhaas (2002) noted in *Junkspace*, architectural coherence is often at odds with lived complexity. To design for temporality is to accept mess, change, and growth. It is to design for life, not just form.

In today's rapidly changing urban landscape, the concept of home is becoming increasingly fluid. Traditional notions of permanence, stability, and ownership are being challenged by a growing community of urban nomads—individuals who move between temporary spaces to live, work, and create. They embody a lifestyle of mobility, adaptability, and freedom, navigating cities in ways that defy conventional urban planning and architectural norms. Yet, our cities are not designed for them.

Urban infrastructure is built for the static, the predictable, the permanent. It caters to those who live behind closed doors, within fixed walls, and inside designated boundaries. This rigid approach leaves little room for those who live in transition, who occupy the in-between spaces of the city. Urban nomads are often seen as temporary or out of place, leading to social exclusion and instability. They are pushed to the margins, occupying overlooked or underutilized spaces, constantly navigating the friction between belonging and being displaced.

This tension exposes a fundamental contradiction within architecture itself. Architecture has long been rooted in permanence and monumentality, in structures meant to last and endure. It is an art of defining boundaries, of making distinctions between inside and outside, private and public, owned and unowned. But in a world that is increasingly mobile, where lifestyles are fluid and identities are shaped by movement, how can architecture respond? How can it become more adaptable, flexible, and inclusive?



This design topic is urgent because the number of urban nomads is growing. Influenced by economic pressures, digital work culture, and a desire for freedom, more people are choosing—or being forced into—a lifestyle of mobility. They live in vans, campers, co-living spaces, or constantly move between short-term rentals. Yet, they face a cityscape that is unyielding, that fails to accommodate their needs or recognize their way of life.

The friction between architecture and nomadism reveals a gap in urban design. It challenges architects and planners to rethink the built environment—not as fixed, static objects, but as fluid systems that can adapt to changing uses and users. It asks us to reconsider what it means to inhabit space, to redefine the boundaries of home, and to create environments that embrace movement, flexibility, and impermanence.

This is not merely a design challenge; it is a social issue. It questions who belongs in the city and how space is shared. By exploring this nomadic alternative, this project seeks to bridge the gap between mobility and urbanity, proposing a new architectural paradigm that accommodates a lifestyle of movement, freedom, and connection.





sedentary /'sɛdən,təri/ *adjective*

1. tending to spend much time seated or inactive.
2. remaining in one place; not migratory or nomadic.
3. living in a fixed location or settled manner.

**Etymology:** Latin *sedentarius*, from *sedere* 'to sit'.

### 3. ARBITRARY ANTAGONISMS – SEDENTARY VS. NOMADIC WORLDS

#### **Structural description**

A critical exploration of how Western architectural culture prioritizes stability and ownership.

#### **Keywords**

*duality, Semper's tent, relational architecture, anti-ownership, cultural hegemony*

“Architecture’s origin is not the house, but the tent.”

The opposition between the sedentary and the nomadic is not neutral. It is a spatial hierarchy. By imposing an arbitrary antagonism between the sedentary and the nomad worlds, the modern West has almost eradicated the nomadic way of life. Yet this modern dualism is not universal. Elsewhere, other approaches have not found it necessary to make this disjuncture.

It is a historical error to consider that architecture has its origins only in the sedentary world. Architecture is also rooted in the nomadic world. For Gottfried Semper, for instance, the origin of architecture is the “nomadic Assyrian tent”. For Siegfried Giedion, one of the “beginnings of Architecture” is the earliest Egyptian architecture which he links to nomadic origins.

But architecture has always had nomadic roots. Semper’s theory of the origins of architecture begins not with walls, but with the tent (Mallgrave, 1996). Giedion (1941) similarly links early Egyptian architecture to nomadic encampments. These precedents challenge the idea that stability is the natural condition of built space.

In the context of the Blikfabriek, we see how nomadic and sedentary logics intersect. A maker builds a semi-permanent atelier. A caravan parks behind a steel hall. A janitor lives in a trailer. The architecture isn’t a finished object—it is a platform for inhabitation. The building is a stage, and its users become performers, set designers, caretakers.

Rather than treat nomadism as exceptional, what happens when we consider it central? What if cities were designed as drift fields, not grids?

It’s a challenge to us as architects. What if the nomadic worlds were able to challenge and propose an alternative to our ways of inhabiting? On the margins of the sedentary world, against the privatization of land and the financialization of housing, rather than monopolizing resources and dominating the environment, nomads ignore the property of land, draw an environment in which the relationships between things are more important than the things themselves and question radically what it supposes to make one’s home. Within this relational milieu, architecture is much more than a physical object. It can be defined as an experience, comprising movements, passages, liberties and interlinking all that exists, namely the people and the place.

Such an architectural project is not possible without inhabitants. Doing *with*, means reconsidering the power relationships within the architectural project. The architect is no longer the designer of objects that come out of a given program, but the guarantor of a social process required for the emergence of an inhabited environment.

Such a refoundation would allow architecture to revive the political project that it seems to have abandoned. The research, imagined as a continuous drift, will take the reader to several stopping places for nomads in Western Europe, learning with their inhabitants.







modularity /,mɒdjuˈlærɪti/ *noun*

**[uncountable]**

1. the quality or state of being composed of separate, interchangeable components.
2. the design principle that divides a system into smaller parts (modules) that can be independently created and reused.  
**Etymology:** from *module* + *-arity*, modern usage from systems theory and industrial design.

## 4. TOOLS OF THE MAKERS – HERMIT CRABS AND THEIR SHELLS

### **Structural description**

Ethnographic accounts of makers at Blikfabriek, Keilewerf, and elsewhere. Shows how spaces are adapted, shared, rebuilt.

### **Keywords**

*modularity, reuse, community-built, DIY, material knowledge*

“Each space is a shell—grown into, adapted, passed on.”

Each maker I met carried their own “shell.” Sometimes it was a van, sometimes a self-built atelier, sometimes a hybrid. These shells were functional and symbolic: they offered protection, identity, and flexibility. I began to see the site not as a map of buildings, but as a constellation of shells—each with its own ecology.

Inspired by Habraken’s (1972) concept of the “supports” system, I documented how users create their own infrastructure when given space. The typology matrix I developed charts these adaptations: which tools are used, which needs are met, and how collective rhythms emerge.

In the Maakfabriek, the boundaries between living and working blur. Electricity is shared. A pot of soup is left on the burner for whoever needs it. There is no design for this—it emerges through use. These informal systems are more resilient than most planned interventions.

Autonomy is not isolation here—it is interdependence without central control. This is the architecture of the hermit crab: not fixed, but responsive. Not private, but relational.







threshold /'θreʃəʊld/ *noun*

**[countable]**

1. the entrance or beginning point of something.
2. a level, point, or value above which something will take place or below which it will not.
3. a strip of wood, metal, or stone forming the bottom of a doorway.

**Etymology:** Old English *þrescold*, origin uncertain.

## 5. FIELD NOTES FROM THE WETLANDS – REDEFINING THE UNINVITING

### **Structural description**

Immersive documentation of the Innovation Wetlands site. Your personal and spatial impressions form the raw material.

### **Keywords**

*ecology, threshold, fear, potential, undefined zone, floodplain*

“The Wetlands weren’t designed for living—but they breathe.”

The Innovation Wetlands are a space in waiting. They are the kind of place one drives past without noticing—an unclaimed edge, muddy and fenced, caught between infrastructure and intention. But spending time there—photographing, walking, staying overnight—revealed a different reality.

This area is not empty. It is full of sounds, water movement, slow ecological activity. It is also one of the most unsafe-feeling places on site—unlit, disconnected, and overlooked. But that makes it powerful. It is precisely here that new logics of dwelling could emerge.

As de Solà-Morales (1995) wrote about “terrain vague,” such spaces resist commodification. They allow for occupation without prior definition. By choosing the Wetlands as my design site, I intentionally placed myself in the gap—between use and neglect, between infrastructure and nature.

My goal was not to impose form, but to observe flows. The Wetlands are not a void. They are a threshold. A floodplain of potential, both literal and social.







metabolism /mə'tæbəlɪzəm/ *noun*

**[uncountable]**

1. the chemical processes by which a living organism uses food to sustain life, including conversion to energy and building materials.
2. a general term for internal processes of change and renewal.  
**Etymology:** Greek *metabolē* 'change', from *meta-* 'beyond' + *ballein* 'to throw'.

## 6. CORAL LOGICS – AN ARCHITECTURE OF LAYERS

### **Structural description**

The design metaphor explained in spatial, ecological and architectural terms.

### **Keywords**

*coral reef, rock, coral, anemones, symbiosis, layered space, care ecology*

“Architecture must allow for attachment and detachment.”

A coral reef is not a structure, it is an ecosystem. It does not begin with a blueprint, but with accretion—layer upon layer of life building on what came before. This became the core metaphor for my architectural proposal. The site, the community, and the building itself are conceived as a reef, made up of three layers: the rock (permanent infrastructure), the coral (semi-permanent functions), and the anemones (temporary, mobile users).

The tram depot forms the foundation—hard, functional, and stable. Around it, a constellation of communal spaces, ateliers, and dwellings create semi-permanent rhythms. And finally, the nomadic layer: vans, tents, seasonal stalls, and visitors who make the place porous and alive.

This layered logic builds on theories of metabolism in architecture, particularly those of Kurokawa and the Japanese Metabolists, who envisioned cities as biological systems capable of growth, mutation, and decay (Lin, 2010). Unlike modernist visions of control, the coral approach allows the unexpected to happen. Spaces can be added, removed, or transformed without breaking the system.

This is not just a metaphor—it's a material and spatial strategy. Different materials express each layer's temporality. Functions are grouped not by typology but by rhythm. Architecture here is not an object, but a support system for coexistence.







intermodality /,ɪntə(,)məʊ'dælɪti/ *noun*

**[uncountable]**

1. the use of more than one mode of transport during a single journey.
2. the coordinated integration of different transport systems into a seamless network.

**Etymology:** Latin *inter-* 'between' + *modality*.

## 7. PLACES OF CONNECTION – LINES THAT MATTER

### Structural description

Zooming out to Antwerp's infrastructure and networks. How mobility and social safety connect to the project

### Keywords

tram stop, mobility justice, accessibility, anchoring, urban stitching

- “The tramline is not a boundary—it’s a beginning.”
- “Connection is not always physical—it’s also the promise of movement.”

### Visual form

User flow diagrams, mobility access maps, photo-sequences of arrival moments.

### Reflective questions embedded

- How do you reinforce community building?
- What role does mobility play in making a place socially safe?

Mobility is more than movement—it's belonging. The addition of the new tram line to Hoboken radically shifts the site's relation to the rest of Antwerp. What was once a peripheral wetland becomes a gateway. The tramline is not just a connection—it is a change of status.

This infrastructure matters because it brings presence. It enables the site to participate in the city. And yet, the design must resist becoming just another transport hub. The challenge is to create a space that remains soft, open, and communal—even while becoming more accessible.

Urban mobility theorists like Cresswell (2010) remind us that mobility is always political. Who gets to move freely? Who is visible, who is monitored? For nomadic users—whether makers, migrants, or seasonal workers—these questions are critical.

My design integrates infrastructural logic with spatial generosity. The tram depot is not hidden—it is visible and shared. The stops are not just endpoints—they become meeting points. The site becomes a knot in a wider network, a place where systems intersect and people arrive not just to pass through, but to stay—even if only for a while.







fragment /'frægmənt/ *noun*

[countable]

1. a small part broken off or detached from something.
2. an incomplete or isolated portion of something written or spoken.

**Etymology:** Latin *fragmentum*, from *frangere* 'to break'.

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## 8. REFLECTIONS IN FRAGMENTS – NOTES FROM THE DRIFT

### Structural description

A non-linear chapter of questions, failed ideas, poetic thoughts, micro-reflections. An embodied *dérive*.

### Keywords

intuition, fragility, journaling, texture, drift, loose ends

- “What is the minimum structure needed for freedom?”
- “At what point does repair become design?”

### Visual form

Collages of notebook scans, sticky notes, text messages, drawings.


All remaining reflective questions embedded here, e.g.

- How can photography help in understanding architecture and people?
- What can architecture learn from movement?

Not all insights arrive neatly packaged. This chapter collects the loose threads—questions, doubts, sketches, phrases that arose in the margins of research but never quite found a chapter of their own. Together, they reflect the process of working in a drifting, layered way.

Some fragments are questions:

- What is the minimum structure needed for freedom?
- How do you rehearse permanence through impermanence?
- Can a place feel safe without being finished?



Others are images: a half-built bench, a pot of shared soup, a tent lit from within.

In *Designing Design*, Hara (2007) argues for the value of emptiness—not as lack, but as invitation. These fragments are exactly that. They are invitations to keep thinking, to resist closing the loop.

This is where the catalogue folds in on itself. The *dérive* never really ends. It loops, circles back, picks up new elements and lets others fade.

The fragments are not leftovers. They are clues to what comes next.





zine /zi:n/ *noun*

**[countable]**

1. a small-circulation, self-published magazine, typically produced by hand or digitally in a DIY format.
2. an informal publication focusing on niche, underground, or subcultural topics.

**Etymology:** abbreviation of *magazine*, coined in American English (c. 1940s–50s).

## 9. DRIFT SOURCES – BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ZINES

### Structural description

Not a formal list, but a visual, associative map of sources—books, conversations, field photos, songs, zines.

### Keywords

media ecology, visual references, photozines, lived bibliography

- “This research wasn’t built from theory alone. It drifted into me—through images, words, sound, people.”

### Visual form

Zine covers, highlighted book pages, annotated screenshots, QR links to your booklets.

This final chapter gathers the sources, influences, readings and fieldwork that shaped the catalogue. But it is not a conventional bibliography. It is a lived, visual archive.

Each source arrived at a different moment. Some were books:

Bishop & Williams (2012) *The Temporary City*

Careri (2002) *Walkscapes*

Habraken (1972) *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*

Koolhaas (2002) *Junkspace*

Others were conversations with makers, photographs taken in twilight, or booklets made after a *dérive*.

This chapter is formatted as a visual index—scans of annotated pages, zine covers, image fragments, QR codes to online content. It's messy, like the research process itself.

Each image, quote or encounter was a turn in the road. A moment where the drift shifted course.

The drift ends here, for now. But the structure remains open.









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# COLOPHON

Research Catalogue

A travelogue on movement, community, and architecture in flux

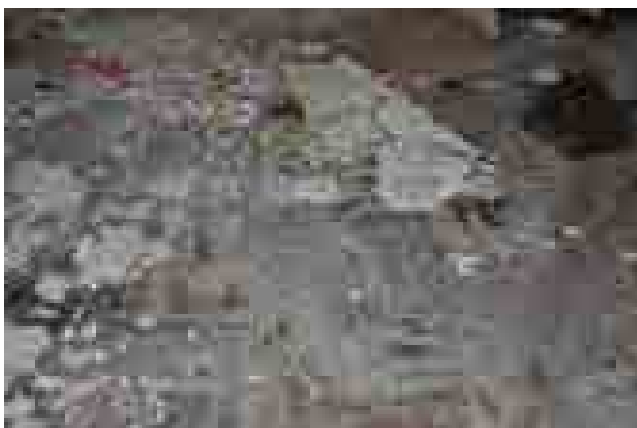
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