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**Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: the three R's of Paul Verhoeven's no-nonsense social
commentary in *Turkish Delight* (1973).**

The final image we see in Paul Verhoeven's 1973 iconic movie *Turkish Delight* is that of a hat box containing the wig of Olga, who has just died from a brain tumor, put out with the garbage by Erik, her bohemian artist ex-lover. The box is unceremoniously picked up by garbage collectors and tossed into the gaping mouth of a waiting garbage truck, causing the box to spill the red wig, which we then see being compacted with the rest of the garbage by a large packer blade that pushes the waste out of view. (see cover)

Although *Turkish Delight* is primarily a love story, its ending is thoroughly unsentimental. Along with its nudity and sexual explicitness, the movie is full of startling images of the abject,¹ of waste products, human waste, animal waste, as well as worms and death and decay. Their shock value is intentionally subversive, but not gratuitous as they are intimately linked to the movie's protagonist as a man, a lover, and an artist. Although Erik (Rutger Hauer) is an iconoclast, we are not quite sure whether he is a rebel with a cause or without one,² since the movie divulges very little about his social background, whereas that of his lover Olga (Monique van de Ven) is developed in considerable detail. All we know is that he is anti-establishment, anti-bourgeois, anti-war, anti-government, and determined to expose bourgeois hypocrisy and pretentiousness. In other words, he is a product of the counter-culture of his time. As an artist and bohemian he stands outside of society. He is a free spirit, lives for the moment

and possesses a zest for life in all its forms. But these qualities are always undercut with hints of death. This suggests that the big themes are love and death or Eros and Thanatos, the life (sexual) instinct and the death instinct. Whereas the life or sexual instinct is a preservative instinct, as Freud has taught us, the death instinct is to lead organic life back into an inanimate state. The final image of the red wig may well be emblematic of this.

Admittedly, the title of this paper is a somewhat coy reference to the three components of the waste management hierarchy, even though it is not my intention to suggest that Verhoeven's aim is to espouse the virtues of being "green." A form of recycling is, however, at the heart of his film. The fact that it is an adaptation of Jan Wolkers' 1969 erotic novel of the same name is itself a form of recycling,³ but there is more. We actually see Erik scour a landfill site for waste materials that he can reuse and recycle for his installation art, for example. In the opening frames, we also see him collect mementos of his sexual conquests for his scrapbooks, just as he used Olga as a model for his photographs and sculptures. What I would like to do is to connect some of these images of recycling, along with images and motifs of the abject that suggest that life is not always neat but often messy, with the artistic vision of the central character and ultimately the social message of the film. My main argument is that these images underpin and inform an artistic world view and