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Herausgegeben von Sean Ireton

Mit Beiträgen von Heather I. Sullivan,
Caroline Schaumann, Gundolf Graml
und Sabine Wilke



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The Poetics of Waste and Wastefulness: Fatih Akin Films Garbage in the Garden of Eden¹

In his 2012 documentary film *Müll im Garten Eden* Fatih Akin tells the story of the residents of the small village of Çamburnu and their decade-long struggle with the authorities that have turned a former copper mine into a gigantic landfill. In his documentary he engages the parameters of toxic discourse as discussed by Lawrence Buell in response to Rachel Carson's claims about the toxic nature of chemical pollutants in her seminal book *Silent Spring*.² Toxic discourse emerges in response to the destruction of the pastoral. At the same time, it speaks the language of the pastoral. Fatih Akin displaces the toxic scene into a different cultural context, thereby emphasizing the cultural dimension of toxicity and waste. Resorting to the narrative paradigm of toxic discourse allows Akin to engage the tradition of the pastoral, probing the conventions of the genre, and, at the same time, addressing a sensational and emotionally charged subject in a way that is aesthetically challenging. *Müll im Garten Eden* finds a cinematic language to configure the conflicted nature of toxic discourse and deal with the complexities of waste, society, and culture in a parable of modernity and the systemic patterns of environmental degradation. As Frederick Buell has argued in his essay on oil cultures, energy history and cultural history are intricately intertwined and the material features of oil have significantly shaped cultural production through the recurring motifs of exuberance and catastrophe.³ In my essay on Fatih Akin's documentary, I discuss the societal and cultural circumstances of this film and tie its poetic practice of exuberance to the principles of production and consumption that create waste in the first place. Sublime still lifes of waste and long takes of protesting shrill voices encourage the viewer to engage critically with the issue of waste through the performance of excess as poetic practice.

In the mid-1990s, the Turkish government finally reacted to public pressure in the northeastern province of Trabzon, where the two large urban centers of Trabzon and Rize are located, to address their garbage problem. Instead of dumping their waste straight into the Black Sea or leaving it on the local beaches, as was common practice, they promised the voters to create a landfill nearby so that the one million citizens of the region would no longer have to face the consequences of their own consumption and wastefulness on a daily basis.⁴ The authorities designated a former copper mine

- 1 The research and writing of this paper was made possible by generous funding from the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the LMU, where I held a Carson Fellowship in 2013. I thank the directors, Christof Mauch and Helmuth Trischler, for their untiring advocacy for the environmental humanities.
- 2 See Fatih Akin: *Müll im Garten Eden*. Carazón International 2012. DVD 2013; screen shots courtesy of pandorafilm.de. See Lawrence Buell: "Toxic Discourse." In: *Critical Inquiry*, 24: 3 (1998), p. 645ff.
- 3 See Frederick Buell: "A Short History of Oil Cultures. Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance." In: *Journal of American Studies*, 46: 2 (2012), p. 273-93.
- 4 For background information about this project, see Nino Klingler: "Müll im Garten Eden. Ein Filmchen mit Mission. Ziviler Ungehorsam und ein bisschen zum Himmel stinkender Umweltskandal." In: *Critic.de*; www.critic.de/film/der-muell-im-garten-eden-4110; accessed March 6, 2013. Harald Mühlbeyer: "Müll im

across from the small village of Çamburnu, a few miles northeast of Trabzon, as the location of the new landfill. As they proceeded with the illegal – i.e., violating a federal law regulating the distance of waste sites in relation to population centers – and extremely flawed construction of this site, they encountered massive protests from the local population, which was adversely affected by the environmental impact of this project, including the pervasive noxious odor, the threat of toxic groundwater, and the long-term consequences of hazardous waste.⁵ This is the point at which Fatih Akin entered the scene. He was allegedly reading the first volume of Bob Dylan's memoirs, *Chronicles* (2004), and learned that Dylan's maternal ancestors came from the same region as Akin's paternal grandparents, namely near Trabzon.⁶ Akin spontaneously traveled to the region with his father and fell in love with the lush subtropical hilly landscape of small tea plantations and bucolic villages, picturesque enough to become the site for the ending of his movie project at that time, *At the Edge of Heaven* [*Auf der anderen Seite*], from 2007. In the last scene of this film, the son, Nejat, travels to the Black Sea in order to meet up with his father, Ali Aksu, and start the difficult process of healing and forgiving him for murdering Ali's female companion. At some level, in other words, *Müll im Garten Eden* is not only a documentary about the construction of a garbage dump but also a conversation Akin is holding with his own filmmaking styles and the aesthetic regimes of his feature films.

During his brief stay at the edge of heaven, Akin quickly learns from the local villagers that a huge landfill is in the process of being constructed, which seriously disrupts the pastoral nature of the valley. Akin immediately decides to aid the local population of Çamburnu in their struggle against the authorities and starts filming the construction of this landfill and the many mistakes that happened in the process, secretly hoping that the officials might back off from the project due to Akin's popularity and fame as a filmmaker in Turkey and the negative publicity that such a documentary would generate worldwide. Unfortunately, they were unimpressed by his threat and a landfill was constructed that would eventually accept six hundred tons of garbage daily. When the heavy rains came, as they do every year in that region, the retaining wall collapsed, flooding the surrounding area with raw garbage that seeped into the soil and poisoned the groundwater. Akin kept filming, or rather – since he resides in Hamburg and was in the middle of working on other projects – trained a local photographer how to shoot Akin-style documentary images, leaving him a digital camera and continuing to give detailed instructions over the phone about what to emphasize and how to shoot the evolving scenes. This material eventually made up about seventy percent of the finished film's footage. Akin himself filmed the interviews with the locals, the mayor, the farmers, the photographer, the engineer, and the government officials, and he is also responsible for the editing and post-production. He previewed the film at Cannes in

Garten Eden. Höllische Haufen." In: *Filmgazette*; www.filmgazette.de; accessed March 6, 2013. Barbara Schweizerhof: "Mit Parfüm gegen den Gestank des Dorfsees." In: *Die Welt*, December 3, 2012; www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article/111829509; accessed March 6, 2013.

5 See Cigdem Akyol/Ingo Arend: "Müll im Garten Eden (Fatih Akin)." In: *Getidan*, December 4, 2012; www.getidan.de/kritik/film; accessed March 6, 2013. Philipp Bühler: "Und dann kam der Regen." In: *Berliner Zeitung*, December 6, 2012; www.berliner-zeitung.de/film/fatih-akin-muell-im-garten-eden; accessed January 22, 2013. Ronny Dombrowski: "Müll im Garten Eden." In: *Cinetastic.de – Living in the Cinema*; www.cinetastic.de/2012/08/muell-im-garten-eden; accessed March 6, 2013.

6 See Fatih Akin: "Aspekte-Interview." November 30, 2012. You Tube; accessed April 27, 2013.

the summer of 2012, then in Istanbul to a select crowd of fans and politicians, many of whom left the theater about halfway through as they were not interested in watching a movie that dealt with waste and criticized the actions of the government. A third screening followed in Çamburnu before the film appeared in Germany in December 2012. It was released on DVD in November 2013.⁷

The “Deutsche Film- und Medienbewertung,” the German film rating agency, gave this documentary the label “besonders wertvoll” (especially valuable) for the broad and inclusive picture that it paints of modern Turkey, the excellent camera work, Akin’s alleged tasteful restraint from finger pointing, and the parabolic approach to building a global awareness about environmental issues, especially in threshold countries like Turkey, a nation that is well on its way to becoming a major economic player in the future.⁸ Akin considers himself an environmentally conscious individual and, judged from that angle, carried a German agenda to the Turkish site, which would explain the lack of reception the film had in Turkey, where it was shown in festivals but failed to attract a mass audience.⁹ *Müll im Garten Eden* can thus be regarded as a German documentary with a global agenda. To frame the discussion of Akin’s documentary in terms of his environmental engagement, I reflect on the film’s main subject and its poetic treatment, i.e., the depiction of waste and the principles of excess production, excess consumption, and separation that constitute waste in the first place. I show how the film engages cinematographically with the economic parameters of waste by flooding the cinematic space with still images of waste and other techniques of disruption and estrangement, all of which highlight the recurring motifs of exuberance and catastrophe that Frederick Buell has identified as the poetic practice of oil cultures. By engaging the aesthetic conventions of the still life in the context of waste and environmental degradation, the film articulates its environmental message by literally and metaphorically bringing back what was separated from our life cycles as garbage into the movie theaters and the video screens of our living rooms. In the process, it demands that we look at and properly face our responsibility of dealing with the waste that we produce and stop making excuses and looking for solutions elsewhere.

Before this environmental message can be articulated, however, the filmmaker evokes paradise as the starting point for the eruption of toxic rhetoric and the discourse of advocacy. *Müll im Garten Eden* is also a very personal film. In fact, Akin has called it a “Heimatfilm” (a homeland-film), which in the historical context of German cinema has specific connotations referring to films from the immediate postwar era of reconstruction that told and retold straightforward love stories reinforcing a conservative morale of bourgeois family life and placing these scenarios in a rural, usually Alpine setting.¹⁰ Akin refers to the setting in the first scenes of the film as a “Hobbit-landscape” with a decidedly Asian feel, reminding him of cinematic treatments of Southeast Asia.¹¹ He creates this effect by slowly flying over the hills and dales of bucolic tea plantations by helicopter, capturing the lush, dark-green tropical vegetation and contrasting it with the idyllic white Mediterranean-style homes that are built into the hillsides, a picture

7 For more detailed background on the process of filming in Turkey, see Mühlbeyer: “Müll im Garten Eden.”

8 See www.fbw-filmbewertung.com.

9 See Fatih Akin: “Kulturjournal-Interview.” ARD 2010. You Tube; accessed April 27, 2013.

10 See Willi Höfig: *Der deutsche Heimatfilm 1947-1969*. Stuttgart: Enke 1973, p. 15ff.

11 See Akin: “Aspekte-Interview.”

of a pastoral idyll complete with a mosque in the background. A recent article in the tourist section of a German newspaper, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, described this area on the Turkish Black-Sea coast as “Die schöne Grüne,” the beautiful green coast, emphasizing its picturesque quality and rich local history to German tourists.¹² This effect in the film is the result of a tropicalized version of a cinematic magic realism, where Romantic fog drifts over the lush flora of tea plantations and dark indigenous forests, creating expectations in the viewer of a fairy-tale like story in which one might encounter oriental goblins in enchanted woods.¹³ Akin’s cinematographic version of Paradise combines elements from the history of images of Eden – a lush outdoor space, rich in native plant and animal life, inhabited by pairs of domesticated species as one recognizes from Lucas Cranach or Hieronymus Bosch, for example – with cinematic frames of terraced subtropical Southeast Asian landscapes not unlike the flyover scenes in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) or Roland Joffé’s *The Killing Fields* (1984). This technique creates a visual space that supports the elegiac mood of the film’s beginning and emphasizes the exotic and erotic quality of indigenous nature. In fact, Akin’s enchanted Çamburnu woods signal that they are, first and foremost, nature despite the fact that they are inhabited and culturally coded.



Fatih Akin, *Müll im Garten Eden* (2012), Corazón International GMBH & CO KG@pandorafilm.de

All the more disturbing is a scene in which we encounter the first sign of environmental destruction in this tropicalized paradise: a white plastic bag that is captured in a long still. The slowly moving camera changes pace – aided by Alexander Hacke’s rhythmic musical score – and we encounter a series of zoomed still images of scenes of degradation ranging from organic to inorganic household waste. These scenes

12 See Peter Sich: “Die schöne Grüne.” In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 78, April 4, 2013, p. 35.

13 For the theoretical framework of tropicalization, see David Arnold: *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze. India, Landscape, and Science 1800-1856*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press 2006, p. 15ff.

build slowly but surely, creating an emotional base for feelings of disgust in the viewer and preparing him/her for what comes next in the film, namely expressions of shock and protest uttered by the villagers.



Fatih Akin, *Müll im Garten Eden* (2012), Corazón International GMBH & Co KG@pandorafilm.de

Akin's *Eden* soon unveils itself as Dante's *Inferno*, a hellish place where one can only wander in circles and where, at every turn and as if caught in a spiral, one encounters only increasing scenes of degradation. Toxic discourse arises at the site of toxicity and the interesting difference in this particular case is the fact that it speaks a different language and has a different cultural shape. In its standard form articulated by Rachel Carson, toxic rhetoric is "an interlocked set of topoi whose force derives partly from the exigencies of an anxiously industrializing culture, partly from deeper-rooted Western attitudes."¹⁴ It follows a "rude awakening from simple pastoral,"¹⁵ but it also "inverts and democratizes the pastoral ideal: a nurturing space of clean air, clean water, and pleasant uncluttered surroundings that is ours by right."¹⁶ The physical condition of toxic interpenetration, at least as found in Carson, also gives rise to a certain Gothicism, for the author painstakingly describes the horror in dramatic terms, even adding a level of urgency and melodrama to these allegations, which more often than not results in a shrill apocalypticism of antitoxic advocacy.¹⁷ This shrillness in Akin's case is compounded by the fact that the villagers in his film speak Turkish.¹⁸ In one of the interviews about this film, Akin elaborates on the emphatic passion and anger expressed

14 Lawrence Buell: "Toxic Discourse," p. 639.

15 Lawrence Buell: "Toxic Discourse," p. 647.

16 Lawrence Buell: "Toxic Discourse," p. 648.

17 Lawrence Buell: "Toxic Discourse," p. 661.

18 This may be a culturally coded reaction to the material, as one of the reviewers of the film speaks of the courageous female tea farmer, Nezihan Haslaman, and her "wonderful chatterbox accent" (see Akyol/Arend: "Müll im Garten Eden [Fatih Akin]").

in these shrill voices in terms of a necessary component of a culture of debate that has arisen in a society that is still largely dominated by feudal structures and in which the will to democratize still needs to break open these structures.¹⁹ When toxic discourse meets feudal structures in this film, its tendency toward Gothicism and melodrama is compounded into shrill chatter. The succinct German subtitles hardly convey this effect. The lack of voice-over narration, which is one of the standard elements of documentary filmmaking along with the talking-head interviews, a reliance on social actors, and on-location sound recording,²⁰ were all part of a conscious decision by Akin to let his social actors speak for themselves, without outside commentary. In the German-language subtitles the villagers demand drastic measures; they threaten to set the landfill on fire, and they courageously confront the politicians and bureaucrats. But they also seek relief from others (Allah, the government, the construction firm, the community, etc.) and demand that higher powers take care of the situation; they therefore fail to put themselves and their own habits of consumption into the equation. Even though Akin relates to his material in terms of advocacy, he nevertheless also highlights the villagers' imbrication. Many reviewers have described the film as a parable of modern Turkey insofar as it documents a rising culture of protest²¹ or focuses on the role of women in that context.²² Others have pointed out the alarming remnants of feudal society²³ or described the Turkey presented in Akin's film as a society that is undergoing the typical growing pains of a nation on the threshold of industrial modernity.²⁴ If *Müll im Garten Eden* is indeed a parable, its lessons must transcend the specific case it portrays. To be sure, the issues of waste and waste disposal transcend Çamburdu and have a global dimension. Most citizens of first-world countries have developed an approach to waste that looks at the phenomenon as a problem, definitely not something they want to encounter in their own backyard. The social historian of waste, Susan Strasser, calls trash a type of sorting and differentiating: we decide what things we no longer need and what things still have value to us.²⁵ To degrees that differ from society to society, we demand its removal, usually upholding the NIMBY (not in my backyard) principle and effectively removing ourselves from the responsibility of dealing with our own waste. On an even deeper level, we thereby fail to question the systemic causes of overproduction, overconsumption, and waste creation that inevitably arise from a global economy based on growth and with the specific manner in which our products are made. Strasser even goes as far as to claim that waste is essential to economic growth because it provides the raw material for industrial processes. Trash making thus becomes integral to accelerated growth, which depends on the continuous disposal of old things needed to make new things.²⁶ This systematic production of excess occurs according to the logic of progressive obsolescence,²⁷ i.e., a material practice that can range from waste's immediate, effective, and systematic removal

19 See Akin: "Aspekte-Interview."

20 See Bill Nichols: *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2001, p. 26.

21 See Schweizerhof: "Mit Parfüm gegen den Gestank des Dorfsees."

22 See Akyol/Arend: "Müll im Garten Eden (Fatih Akin)."

23 See Mühlbeyer: "Müll im Garten Eden."

24 See Bühler: "Und dann kam der Regen."

25 See Susan Strasser: *Waste and Want. A Social History of Trash*. New York: Holt 1999, p. 5.

26 See Strasser: *Waste and Want*, p. 15.

27 See Strasser: *Waste and Want*, p. 274ff.

in many first-world cities to less effective practices elsewhere and a principle that is expressed culturally in the trope of exuberance. Through progressive obsolescence, society absolves the individual consumer from dealing with his/her trash making.

The citizens of the modern Turkish cities of Trabzon and Rize are no different in that respect. They have come to the conclusion that dumping their trash into the Black Sea is not the solution to their waste problem because of the adverse impact on the local fishing industry and other unintended environmental and economic consequences. But they are not questioning the root causes of the creation of waste in the first place. Waste is the other side of wealth. In fact, "convenience and leisure on the one hand and concern about the environment (and garbage) on the other are inextricably linked."²⁸ Akin's film illustrates this connection between waste creation and the wish to have it removed from one's backyard and to that extent it transcends its Turkish context and addresses a central problem of modern industrial societies. It portrays a modern Turkey where the emphatic anger and shrill rage is directed at the symptoms, not at the causes. The documentary questions the causes of the problem of waste creation by holding the shots of individual pieces of garbage and arranged scenes of horrendous waste, forcing us to look at them and in a literal sense encouraging the viewer to study waste by putting it in a cinematic context set up as tropicalized Paradise. But the Garden of Eden is littered with garbage. Garbologists have suggested that the only viable strategy in addressing the problem of waste creation is source reduction: buying and consuming less, and buying and consuming differently. This means buying products only in reusable, refillable, and crushable containers or, ideally, products that use a cradle-to-cradle design – so that we generate less garbage in the first place.²⁹ Ruthje and Murphy argue that "the solid-waste stream would become at once smaller and safer if we could find ways to minimize the amount of material used in products, extend the useful life of products, and minimize the volume of toxic substances used in products."³⁰

The perfume that the Turkish officials spray at the waste site to cover its foul odor is metonymic for our mechanisms of dealing with environmental degradation. On a metaphorical level, the sprayers highlight the Kafkaesque cover-up schemes of politicians all over the world who lie to their citizens and are only interested in the perpetuation of their own power. But metonymically, they refer to a society that is green-washing its problem with waste by transporting it somewhere else, where it is allowed to cause discomfort to the local communities and eventually seep back into our life cycles as toxic waste. The parabolic meaning of Akin's film lies in his portrayal of a society in denial, one that demands waste removal from its own backyard but is not willing to pay for it adequately and stubbornly refuses to question the patterns of production and consumption that created the problem at the outset. Akin's long stills with individual pieces of rotting garbage and the zooms of black bubbly soups of toxins force us to look at the problem in classic documentary fashion.

28 William Ruthje/Cullen Murphy: *Rubbish. The Archaeology of Garbage*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press 2001, p. 167.

29 See Michael Braungart/William McDonough: *Cradle to Cradle. Remaking the Way We Make Things*. New York: North Point Press 2002, p. 15ff.

30 Ruthje/Murphy: *Rubbish*, p. 214. See also Vivian E. Thomson: *Garbage In, Garbage Out. Solving the Problems with Long-Distance Trash Transport*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2009, p. 15ff.



Fatih Akin, *Müll im Garten Eden* (2012), Corazón International GMBH & CO KG@pandorafilm.de

That is the transcending moment of the film and the location of its environmental message but, because of its Turkish setting, this will be a hard lesson to sell. Its German viewers can safely watch the film, go home and applaud the achievements their towns have made in dealing with waste by separating it from recyclables and by shipping its garbage to a place out of sight – and then point to the lack of efficiency in threshold countries like Turkey. Its Turkish viewers have already voted with their feet and left the movie theaters halfway through the show. The broader masses in Turkey have no interest in questioning the path toward industrial modernity and a better lifestyle that rests on environmental destruction of which waste is simply a symptom. Asked about the environmental angle of his project, Akin laments that the people in Turkey only think from the wall to the wallpaper and that long-term and more costly solutions to waste removal are not politically feasible at this point in the country's development.³¹ In his long takes of protesting villagers, Akin frames the voices of his social actors in terms of shrill chatter while attributing aesthetic value to scenes of waste in the stills – a courageous goal and surprising outcome, considering Akin's emotional investment in the place and its people at the beginning of the project. In one of his interviews, Akin calls waste the code of society.³² Others have conceptualized waste as society's mirror,³³ as a "measure of an organism's ability to renew itself by excluding whatever it does not require for its own, immediate purposes,"³⁴ or as a behavior in psychological

31 See Axel Schock: "Fatih Akin. Sein neuer Film stinkt zum Himmel." In: *Hamburger Morgenpost*; www/mopo.de; accessed March 6, 2013.

32 See Akin: "Kulturjournal."

33 Ruthje/Murphey: *Rubbish*, p. 11.

34 David Trotter: *Cooking with Mud. The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, p. 20.

terms, a perspective favored by scholars and activists from the global South who are interested in effecting change in their cluttered and filthy metropolitan environments.³⁵ Among the list of effective intervention strategies range the insufficient availability of garbage cans, an indifference to anti-littering campaigns and flagrant disregard for anti-littering signs, as well as psychological skill empowerment and a cognitive solution to environmental education.³⁶

Sociological and historical research that addresses the problem of waste tends to conceptualize it in terms of looping and/or the difference between closed and open systems. Strasser reminds us that "households and cities have become open systems rather than closed ones over the course of the twentieth century."³⁷ Within a sustainable biological ecosystem waste becomes a resource for someone else. But industrialization broke that cycle and waste became necessary for growth and industrial production. Other scholars have described how waste that ends up in our landfills eventually returns to our food supply in the form of toxins and that everything we discard will, after various transformations and in different material states, enter our body again.³⁸ Waste cannot simply be discarded and transported away without any consequences: "Ecological thinking strives to understand how waste dumped into the sea or the atmosphere does not conveniently disappear but sets off an unpredictable sequence of consequences."³⁹ All these approaches to thinking about waste eventually come together in a consensus about the need for waste reduction, either in terms of an ethical plea vis-à-vis the individual citizen's responsibility and the role of environmental education;⁴⁰ or a more systematic analysis and critique of the structural reasons for waste creation resulting from industrialized forms of production; or, turning the discourse of restraint on its head, emphasizing the gain in quality of life when one buys fewer products and produces less waste.⁴¹

In *Müll im Garten Eden* Akin stages the parameters of an ecological thinking about waste and society by confronting viewers with sublime still lifes made up of pollution and highlighting the lack of responsibility individuals and societies display in addressing waste reduction. The citizens of Trabzon are not putting the waste they generate back into the loop effectively; they remain unaware that they may suffer the consequences of waste returning to their food supply as toxins at some later point. Akin paints a parable of modern industrial society that is confined to the garden (a closed system) but that is polluting it from the inside by breaking open a closed system and systematically generating the excessive waste that is needed for further growth and production. And this logic becomes part of the reading process configured in Akin's film. The visual regime of a tropicalized Paradise that frames the film at the beginning

35 See Carlos Micilio: "Poverty Is No Excuse. The Psychology behind Littering." In: *Waste Management World*, 2011; www.waste-management-world.com/articles/2011/08/poverty; accessed March 7, 2013.

36 See Oluyinka Ojedokun/S. K. Balogun: "Self-Monitoring and Responsible Environmental Behaviour. The Mediating Role of Attitude towards Littering." In: *Review of Psychology*, 2: 1 (2013), p. 32ff.

37 Strasser: *Waste and Want*, p. 14.

38 See Frithjof Hager (ed.): *Müll und Verantwortung*. Munich: oekom 2004, p. 14.

39 Timothy Clark, as cited in Roy Sellars: "Waste and Welter. Derrida's Environment." In: *The Oxford Literary Review* 32: 1 (2010), p. 37.

40 See Stefan Kreuzberger/Valentin Thurn: *Die Essensvernichter. Warum die Hälfte aller Lebensmittel im Müll landet und wer dafür verantwortlich ist*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 2011, p. 189.

41 See Hager: *Müll und Verantwortung*, p. 8ff.

sets into motion a reading practice that mimics the excessiveness of the separation of the waste products that have been discarded. Akin achieves this effect visually by insisting on the principle of proximity and inverting the intention of waste removal with his zooms and long stills. We are forced to study the objects as an archaeologist would. Through his camera work, these objects and scenes of degradation become environments, i.e., staged elements in a cinematic essay on waste as a parable of modern industrial society. Akin's cinematography is wasteful, excessive, and it invites excessive readings.

This principle of wasteful images of garbage surrounded by shrill chatter connects Akin to the cinematic tradition of the melodrama. It sets itself apart from the documentary tradition, especially compared with other eco-documentaries that deal with the subject of waste such as the Almega Projects & O2 Films Production of *Wasteland* from 2011 which shows Vik Muniz's journey from his home base in Brooklyn back to his native Brazil and the world's largest garbage dump, the Jardim Gramacho at the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.⁴² In this film, the *catadores* are picking and recycling materials, reusing fresh ingredients in their food, reselling valuable scrap metal and recyclable materials, and making art or reimagining their lives in other creative ways. These *catadores* do not speak in a shrill chatter like the protesting villagers in Turkey; they sing, tell stories that come out of trash, cook their chicken stew, hug their children, and are shown living their lives and having fun. *Wasteland* paints an ethnographic portrait of lives based on waste. It is more a celebration of waste than a critical reflection on the industrial processes and consumer patterns that produced it.

The eco-documentary is per se a hybrid genre that, on the one hand, proposes to document an alleged reality and is generally categorized as nonfiction. At the same time, it also filters and constructs a cinematic reality that presents a particular moral or political perspective that may be accentuated in the post-production process through editing, re-sequencing, and other means of framing.⁴³ Michael Renov has identified the four fundamental tendencies of documentary as to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or interrogate; and to express.⁴⁴ The tendency in documentary to fix a moment and hang on to it for posterity is problematized in Akin's film since its intention is to remove the situation that is being revealed. We leave the film in the hope that the gap between the image and reality has widened or will soon be so. The advocacy function of the film is also problematized through its narrative insofar as Akin starts out as the village's advocate but over the course of the filming of the documentary turns more and more into an advocate for the environment. The tendency to interrogate evolves from questioning the politicians and officials responsible for the horrendous site of toxic waste to interrogating the people who speak toxic discourse and the many who do not speak and raise their voice for the environment at all. Finally, Akin plays with the tendency of the documentary to express by giving scenes of environmental destruction an aesthetic value in his still lifes.

42 See Lucy Walter Karen Harley (co-dir.): *Wasteland*. Almega Projects & O2 Films Production, 2011. DVD.

43 See Nichols: *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 26ff.

44 See Michael Renov: "Toward a Poetics of Documentary." In: *Theorizing Documentary*. Ed. Michael Renov. New York: Routledge 1993, p. 12ff.

Müll im Garten Eden also invites reflection on Akin's own filmmaking. Akin was working on *The Edge of Heaven* when he stumbled on the scene of environmental degradation in Çamburnu. In *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin negotiates the contact zone between German and Turkish society. *Soul Kitchen* from 2009, on the other hand, is a comedy based in Akin's native Hamburg. Both of these feature films are "Heimatfilme" in the sense that they feature family and friends and promote advocacy for one's home as a place of orientation in an increasingly disorienting global world. *Müll im Garten Eden* occupies a middle position between the melancholic mood in *The Edge of Heaven* and the comical treatment of the topic of home in *Soul Kitchen* insofar as it opens with a cinematic evocation of home, i.e., an orientalized fantasy of the village of Akin's grandfather as the place where his "genetic code" is being polluted.⁴⁵ Over the course of the film, however, Akin works through his attachment to this home, which becomes the site of environmental degradation, and arrives at an ever more comical treatment of the subject. Refocusing from advocacy for the villagers to advocacy for the environment helps him arrive at a more playful and detached approach to filming home.

Müll im Garten Eden has received mixed reviews as a film. It has been called a crime fiction,⁴⁶ a documentary without facts,⁴⁷ a film without a dramaturgy,⁴⁸ an ambitious documentary,⁴⁹ a Kafkaesque treatment of government bureaucracy,⁵⁰ a film without narrative rhythms,⁵¹ and a documentary devoid of any ambition.⁵² Others have emphasized the burlesque and the proximity to the genre of the melodrama.⁵³ In fact, Schlöning reads the film as an homage to John Ford, with specific reference to the Western *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), an iconic treatment of the lost idyll that received ten Oscar nominations.⁵⁴ The green hills of the Turkish Black Sea coast become the site of environmental degradation and the location of toxic discourse, but Akin turns the tables on the producers of waste and creates a cinematic document that stages the logic of waste and waste creation in his aestheticized stills and shrill audio. Akin eventually arrives at a devastating accusation of the destructive principles of modern industrial society sustained by industry and people. *Müll im Garten Eden* practices environmental advocacy by performing the principles of excess on a cinematographic level and reflecting critically on the toxic discourse spoken by its actors, which is revealed for what it is: a strategy to avoid painful analysis of our imbrication in a system of production that destroys the environment and its human inhabitants at the same time.

45 See Akin, "Aspekte-Interview."

46 See Peter Claus: "Müll im Garten Eden (Fatih Akin). In: *Getidan*; www.getidan.de/kritik/film/; accessed March 6, 2013.

47 See Christian Gertz: "Müll im Garten Eden von Fatih Akin." In: *Mehrfilm*, December 17, 2013; www.mehrfilm.de/blog/muell-im-garten-eden-von-fatih-akin/; accessed March 6, 2013.

48 See Dombrowski: "Müll im Garten Eden."

49 See Rainer Gansera: "Warum liegt hier eigentlich Müll?" In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 8, 2012; www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/muell-im-garten-eden/; accessed March 6, 2013.

50 See Katharina Granzin: "Müll im Garten Eden." In: *Kunst und Film*, December 3, 2012; www.kunstundfilm.de/2012/muell-im-garten-eden/; accessed March 6, 2013.

51 See Thomas Engel: "Müll im Garten Eden." In: *Programm kino.de*; www.programmkino.de/cms/links/; accessed March 6, 2013.

52 See Akyol/Arend: "Müll im Garten Eden (Fatih Akin)."

53 See Schweizerhof: "Mit Parfüm gegen den Gestank des Dorfsees."

54 See Jörg Schlöning: "Akin-Doku *Der Müll im Garten Eden*. Der parfümierte Alptraum." In: *Spiegel Online*; www.spiegel.de, December 5, 2013; accessed March 6, 2013.

