



BEAUTY IN THE ORDINARY: EXPLORING WABI-SABI AESTHETICS IN *PERFECT DAYS*

Iba Basar¹ & Dr. Tanushree Sarkar²

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

¹ Student, B.A. English, SRM University, Sikkim;

² Head & Assistant Professor, Department of English, SRM University, Sikkim

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Tanushree Sarkar

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the intricacies of *Perfect Days*, a film released in 2023 and masterfully directed by Wim Wenders. The analysis centres on the film's minimalist narrative approach, its distinctive visual storytelling techniques, and the broader cultural and philosophical context of Japan that underpins the narrative. At the heart of the film is the character Hirayama, a dedicated toilet cleaner in Tokyo, whose life is marked by a profound sense of simplicity, routine, and deep introspection. Through Wenders's lens, we witness Hirayama's seemingly unremarkable daily existence, which, upon closer examination, reveals a rich tapestry woven with emotional complexity and philosophical musings. Although the film *Perfect Days* utilizes a stripped-down approach characterized by limited dialogue and a straightforward plot, these very features significantly contribute to the richness of its themes. By intentionally choosing to focus on simplicity, the film invites audiences to ponder the inherent beauty found in ordinary, day-to-day experiences, as well as the deeper meanings that lie within the fabric of everyday life. The objective is not merely to dissect the artistic elements of the film itself; rather, it seeks to delve into a broader discussions surrounding the implications of the film's storytelling. We aim to contextualize these narratives within the larger framework of contemporary Japanese culture and philosophy, exploring how these cultural undercurrents influence and shape the film's representation of ordinary life. By engaging with these themes, the paper aspires to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the film.

Keywords: *Japanese Aesthetics, Minimalism, Philosophy, Culture, Simplicity*

The film *Perfect Days* by Wim Wenders, is a beautiful piece of cinema that explores the life of Hirayama, a Tokyo toilet cleaner. The title of this research work mentions the phrase 'Beauty in the Ordinary' which stands out as an important contrast towards understanding the life of our protagonist, Hirayama, and on how he spends his life as a toilet cleaner. Some emphasis has been placed on the aesthetics of Wabi-Sabi because it's functions as a core concept for understanding this work and help in further investigation for our needed objectives.

Perfect Days is a poetic, slow-burning cinematic journey into the quiet life of Hirayama, a middle-aged man working as a public toilet cleaner in Tokyo. Despite the simplicity of his occupation, Hirayama lives with immense intentionality and quiet grace. His days are filled with modest routines. He wakes up early, tends to his plants, meticulously cleans designer public toilets in the Shibuya district, listens to classic rock and soul cassettes in his van, and takes photos of sunlight filtering through leaves, a Japanese concept known as *Komorebi*. The 4:3 aspect ratio and gentle pacing of the film evoke the visual style of Yasujiro Ozu, honouring the aesthetics of Japanese cinema while grounding the story in modern-day Tokyo. Hirayama's character, brilliantly portrayed by Kōji Yakusho, who barely speaks, but his eyes and movements convey deep emotion, echoing a life shaped by memory, solitude, and small joys.

Hirayama's life is defined by ritual and reverence. Each dawn, he awakens in his modest east-Tokyo apartment, cares for his houseplants, and tidies his personal space with meticulous care. He then embarks on his rounds, servicing Shibuya's artistic public toilets, spaces whose architecture ranges from brutalist pods to translucent glass havens. Within these pristine environments, Hirayama's devotion elevates a menial job to an act of service: he inspects and polishes every surface, even the underside of toilet bowls, conveying a spiritual sense of purpose. Accompanying him are the soft strains of cassette tapes, Patti Smith, Lou Reed, Nina Simone, Van Morrison is more than just a musician; he embodies an intimate soundtrack that weaves together his personal history and significant cultural touchstones that resonate deeply with his identity. During the day, he takes a moment to pause beneath the shade of trees in a local park, where he enjoys a modest lunch, allowing himself to soak in the world around him. As he sits there, he captures fleeting moments through the lens of his analog camera, taking photographs that depict *Komorebi*, a beautiful Japanese term that refers to the enchanting sight of sunlight filtering through the leaves. This visual

element serves as an anchor for the film, embodying themes of mindfulness and a deep sense of presence in the moment. Every day, without fail, he makes his way back home, where he indulges in the written word. His reading choices reflect a diverse tapestry of literature, including works by renowned authors such as William Faulkner, Patricia Highsmith, and Aya Kōda, each bringing their own unique perspective to his understanding of the world. As the day draws to a close, he dedicates his evenings to silent introspection, engaging in quiet contemplation that allows his thoughts and dreams to unfurl in rich detail. These whispered dreams, expressed through a monochromatic lens, become like cinematic fragments that offer a glimpse into the depths of his introspective inner life, revealing the layers of reflection and emotional nuance that define his artistic journey. This intricate narrative intertwines music, literature, and visual art, showcasing his profound connection to both his own experiences and the broader cultural landscape.

Kōji Yakusho delivers a profoundly transformative performance in the role of Hirayama, a character whose existence is marked by an almost palpable silence and a powerful stillness that serves as the emotional anchor for the entire film. In preparation for his portrayal, Yakusho dedicated a week to working closely with actual toilet cleaners, immersing himself in their world to gain a deeper understanding of his character. This commitment is a striking reflection of the film's documentary influences and authenticity. Through his physical presence, penetrating gaze, and thoughtful gestures, Yakusho masterfully conveys a rich emotional landscape, embodying themes of dignity and introspection without the need for elaborate speeches or verbose soliloquies.

His remarkable performance did not go unnoticed; at the prestigious 2023 Cannes Film Festival, Yakusho was honoured with the Best Actor award, a fitting acknowledgement that speaks to his masterful representation of Hirayama's quiet yet steadfast resilience. What initially seems to be a portrayal of serene isolation slowly begins to unravel, exposing the subtle yet profound connections that weave through the fabrics of human relationships.

The narrative introduces several pivotal characters who serve to contrast and complicate Hirayama's solitary life. First, there is Takashi, Hirayama's younger assistant. His penchant for arriving late and his irreverent attitude frequently create tension in their working relationship, highlighting the differences in their personalities. Then, there's Niko, Hirayama's teenage niece, who arrives unexpectedly, without any sort of prior announcement to stay with him and her mother, Keiko. Her sudden presence disrupts Hirayama's carefully maintained solitude, bringing an unexpected dynamic into his life. Lastly, the character of Mama San emerges as a maternal figure, bringing warmth and kindness that further enriches the complex layers of human interaction explored in the film. Together, these characters weave a narrative that expands beyond solitary existence, illustrating the intricate tapestry of human connection and the emotional depths that bind us. These relationships subtly shift Hirayama's routine, stirring long-buried memory, family expectations, and longing. While dialogue remains sparse, emotional undercurrents are etched through action and reaction, leaving space for the audience to imagine Hirayama's past: Was he someone else before this sacred ritual of cleaning? Wenders hints that Hirayama might have been a wealthy, troubled businessman, haunted by his past and opting out of wealth for a quieter life.

The film is characterized by an extraordinary level of aesthetic precision that permeates every frame. Its choice of a 4:3 aspect ratio immediately transports viewers into a world reminiscent of classic cinema, while the use of natural light enhances the realism of the scenes depicted. The muted colour tones contribute to a contemplative atmosphere, evoking a sense of stillness that pays homage to the visual legacy of Yasujiro Ozu, an esteemed master of Japanese filmmaking whose work continues to inspire generations. In aligning the moral and spiritual essence of the character Hirayama with that of Ozu's protagonists, director Wim Wenders highlights the recurring themes of humility, domestic simplicity, and inner tranquillity that define the human experience within Ozu's narratives. These qualities are not just superficial traits, rather they are profound reflections of the characters' lives and choices. Cinematographer Franz Lustig took a distinctive approach to the film's visual storytelling. By opting for handheld photography instead of relying on intricate setups, Lustig aimed to capture a sense of authenticity that allows the audience to feel as though they are witnessing genuine moments of life as they unfold. This technique enhances the film's organic qualities, creating a seamless connection between the viewer and the characters.

Critics have shown a remarkable enthusiasm for the film, lauding its visual presentation, which they describe as "clean, sharp, and naturalistic." This praise extends particularly to the cinematography, which is recognized not just for its aesthetic qualities but for its profound honesty. The film's visual approach succeeds in conveying an authentic experience, eschewing the flashy embellishments that are often characteristic of mainstream cinema. By adhering to this commitment to visual integrity, the film manages to carve out a unique space for itself, emerging as a powerful examination of the human experience that resonates deeply with viewers. At its core, *Perfect Days* serves as an immersive meditation on themes such as mindfulness, dignity, and the unexpected grace that can be found in life's everyday moments. The critics at *TIME* have remarked on its deeply moving nature, highlighting the importance of its intimate storytelling and the emotional subtlety it offers. Additionally, notable publications like *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanity Fair* have pointed out how the film skilfully defies typical audience expectations. This is especially relevant for those who might initially regard it as merely a hobbyist or an art-house project. Instead, it invites a broader sense of empathy and introspection that transcends various demographic lines. In this way, the film not only captivates but also encourages a reflective engagement with the viewer's own experiences.

The film has garnered a remarkable array of prestigious awards, reflecting its artistic merit and cultural resonance. Among its notable achievements are the Ecumenical Jury Prize and Best Actor award received at the esteemed Cannes Film Festival in 2023. Additionally, it was honoured as Best Film at the 16th Asia Pacific Screen Awards, which took place in November 2023. Perhaps one of the film's most groundbreaking accomplishments is its nomination for Best International Feature at the 96th

Academy Awards. This nomination is particularly significant, as it marks a historic milestone: it is the first time a film directed by a non-Japanese filmmaker has received such recognition from Japan. The film's exceptional success has not only earned it critical acclaim but has also sparked substantial interest in real-world phenomena tied to its themes. For instance, in Tokyo, a unique initiative has been launched offering "toilet tours" that allow visitors to explore the city's public restrooms, which boast impressive architectural designs. This initiative demonstrates the profound cultural impact that the film has had, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond the screen and into the streets of Shibuya, where these significant public facilities have become attractions in their own right. Through its accolades and the subsequent interest, it has generated the film continues to influence both artistic and cultural landscapes, further establishing its importance in contemporary cinema. In discussions, Wenders reflects on the film's spiritual undertones: "Everything feels almost holy" in Hirayama's life, a sentiment reinforced by his choice of silent narrative and symbol-laden visuals. Comparisons to monks and artisans surface repeatedly: Wenders describes Hirayama as akin to a craftsman whose devotion is pure and rhythmic, elevating manual labour into ritualized, meditative practice. Takasaki, co-writer and producer, emphasizes the film's celebration of minimalism: "Eliminating what you don't need in life, shown very gracefully, and he's content and very happy with what he has." Thematically, *Perfect Days* confronts Western ambivalence toward routine and low-status work. Wenders argues that routine, when embraced, becomes a liberating ritual rather than drudgery, granting freedom and meaning. Hirayama lives each mundane action "as if it were the first time," infusing substance into ritual. In Japanese culture, a background Yakusho notes, the spiritual resides in every part of life, even toilets. This belief underpins Hirayama's respect for cleanliness and connection with the divine in ordinary spaces.

Perfect Days serves as an enchanting cinematic invitation, encouraging viewers to reflect deeply on their understanding of time, work, and the memories we create and cherish. The film prompts a profound question: might our lives be filled with unnoticed rituals that, if brought to our conscious awareness and attention, could be elevated to something sacred? In a style reminiscent of classic Ozu's pillow shots, alongside moments of stillness that stand in stark contrast to the fast-paced world around us, *Perfect Days* gently challenges our constant yearning for spectacle and grand experiences.

It posits the idea that perhaps the true essence of meaning in our lives does not lie solely in extraordinary events or remarkable achievements. Instead, it suggests that significance can be found in the seemingly mundane details of everyday existence. The film elegantly illustrates this notion by highlighting the beauty found in simple actions, whether it's the precise brushstroke involved in the act of cleaning, the peaceful inhalation of breath while resting under a tree's shade, or the ephemeral fragments of dreams that linger in our minds just before we drift off to sleep. In doing so, *Perfect Days* invites us to reconsider the importance of mindfulness and presence in our daily routines, revealing that the ordinary moments can hold profound meaning if we choose to pay attention to them.

Through its poignant storytelling and subtle imagery, the film encourages viewers to explore the richness of their own lives and the potential for recognition and reverence in the rituals we often overlook. It's a reminder that, amid the chaos and clamour of modern life, there is a stream of quiet beauty waiting to be discovered and appreciated in the simplest facets of our existence.

The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism and Other Japanese Aesthetics

With *Perfect Days* being a pinnacle of contemporary Japanese cinema, the influence of Zen Buddhism is also included in the film via different scenes and imageries. Zen Buddhism traces back to the school of Mahayana Buddhism that emphasizes meditation, mindfulness, and direct experience over theoretical knowledge or ritual. Originating in China as Chan Buddhism, it later flourished in Japan where it became to know as Zen. At its core, Zen encourages individuals to seek enlightenment through personal insight rather than relying solely on scriptures or religious doctrines. Zen practice often focuses on Zazen (sitting meditation), which involves quietly observing the mind and body, allowing thoughts to come and go without attachment. This simplicity reflects Zen's belief in the present moment as the key to awakening. Zen philosophy places significant importance on the everyday activities that many people might take for granted, including seemingly simple tasks like walking, eating, and cleaning. These daily actions are not merely routines to be completed; instead, they are viewed as valuable opportunities for cultivating awareness and facilitating spiritual development. By engaging mindfully in these ordinary experiences, practitioners of Zen can deepen their understanding of the present moment and foster a greater connection to their inner selves, thus enhancing their overall spiritual journey. In this way, even the most mundane tasks can become profound avenues for reflection and growth.

In Japanese culture, Zen has influenced art, architecture, gardening, calligraphy, and even design philosophies like Wabi-Sabi. Rather than seeking perfection or answers, Zen teaches acceptance of impermanence and the beauty of the incomplete. Its calm, reflective approach offers a way to engage with life deeply and authentically, making it not just a religion, but a way of living. Taking a glance into Zen Buddhism and its various ideologies and principles, other similar concepts that intertwines with the film in understanding the concept as a whole are the concept of Wabi-Sabi (Beauty in imperfection), Ikigai (One's reason for being), Komorebi (Sunlight filtering through trees), and Mono No Aware (A gentle awareness of impermanence). These are some example of Japanese aesthetic concepts which will further assist in understanding the film at its best.

Wabi-Sabi, a profound and richly traditional aesthetic concept rooted in Japanese culture, offers a unique perspective on beauty that challenges conventional notions of perfection. Instead of celebrating flawlessness, Wabi-Sabi advocates for the appreciation of imperfection, the transient nature of existence, and the allure of simplicity. This worldview values the rustic charm of objects and scenes that reflect the passage of time and the effects of natural wear. For instance, the beauty of a weathered surface or a piece of art that exhibits signs of aging resonates deeply with this philosophy.

At the heart of Wabi-Sabi lies a celebration of those elements that might initially be considered undesirable or incomplete. In this context, beauty emerges not from the polished and pristine but from the humble and the unadorned. This aesthetic encourages observers to recognize the intrinsic value found in everyday objects and experiences, be it a cracked teacup that tells a story of its use, a fading leaf that symbolizes the cycle of life, or the stillness of an empty room that evokes a sense of peace. Each of these elements possesses a unique beauty precisely because it embodies imperfection, impermanence, and the fleeting nature of time.

The concept of Ikigai, rooted in Japanese culture, represents an individual's sense of purpose or "reason for being." It embodies the convergence of four key elements: what you love, what you excel at, what the world needs, and what you can earn a living from. For many, Ikigai can be discovered in various forms, whether through a career, a hobby, or a simple daily routine. It doesn't necessarily involve lofty aspirations; rather, it can manifest in activities such as nurturing a garden, preparing a home-cooked meal, or caring for family members. This concept promotes a sense of balance and fulfilment, encouraging individuals to lead a life filled with intention and to find happiness in the small, meaningful moments of everyday life.

Mono No Aware can be understood as "the pathos of things" or "an understanding of impermanence." It conveys a profound emotional awareness that everything is temporary and that this very transience enhances their beauty. The imagery of cherry blossoms falling, memories fading, and seasons changing all inspire a gentle, bittersweet appreciation. Rather than resisting change, Mono No Aware welcomes it with sensitivity and elegance. It highlights the idea that sadness and beauty can exist side by side, and by acknowledging the fleeting moments of life, we deepen our connection to its emotional richness and fragile wonder.

Komorebi is a beautiful Japanese term that doesn't have a direct translation in English. It describes the way sunlight filters through the trees' leaves, creating a gentle interplay of light and shadow. This phenomenon captures a tranquil moment in nature, evoking feelings of peace and nostalgia. Beyond its visual appeal, Komorebi represents a poetic recognition of the subtle, often unnoticed elements in our environment. It serves as a reminder that beauty can be found in the simplest and most transient experiences, encouraging us to be more mindful of the world around us. Together, these four concepts reveal much about Japanese philosophy and worldview: a deep respect for nature, transience of life, the beauty of everyday, and the quiet search for purpose.

Storytelling and The Cultural Landscape of Japan

This research project is structured around three primary objectives, each designed to explore different facets of the film in question. The first objective aims to delve into the minimalist narrative style depicted in the film. The term "minimalist" is often used to describe a philosophy of doing more with less, suggesting a reduction in the quantity of elements present. This notion applies directly to the film, as viewers may gradually come to understand why this descriptor is particularly fitting. A minimalist narrative is fundamentally a storytelling technique marked by simplicity, subtlety, and a sense of restraint. In the context of film, this approach typically eschews intricate plots, elaborate backstories, or climactic moments filled with drama. Instead, it invites the audience to focus on the nuanced details found in the rhythm of everyday life.

In minimalist narratives, characters are frequently portrayed as everyday individuals whose experiences resonate with authenticity. The dialogue tends to be sparse, allowing the emotions of the characters to be expressed through silence, body language, and visual cues rather than through fervent verbal exchanges. This narrative style often adopts a languid yet contemplative pace, encouraging viewers to engage in observation and interpret meaning from life's smaller moments. Such storytelling prioritizes atmosphere, mood, and the internal landscape of characters over action, creating an environment ripe for introspection and fostering deeper emotional connections.

The second objective of this research emphasizes the significance of visual storytelling within the film. Visual storytelling encompasses the methods through which the narrative is conveyed primarily through visual elements. Think scenes, symbolic interpretations, the use of colour and light, framing techniques, camera angles, and a multitude of visual cues. In a cinematic context, visual storytelling enables the audience to grasp and feel the narrative instinctively, often relying on subtle hints woven into the atmosphere of the film. This approach is designed to engage viewers on a sensory level, making the experience more immersive and emotionally resonant, without the necessity of elaborating on every detail through spoken words or dialogue.

Finally, our third objective investigates the cultural backdrop of Japan, particularly highlighting the philosophy of Wabi-Sabi. Set against the vibrant tapestry of Tokyo, Japan, the film draws inspiration from a rich philosophical tradition that celebrates the beauty of nature and relies on a history steeped in artistic expression, which coexists with modern innovation. Japanese culture is deeply intertwined with the principles of Shinto and Buddhism, emphasizing harmony with the natural world, simplicity in design, and a profound respect for various rituals and customs. The cultural landscape of Japan is characterized by a captivating blend of ancient and contemporary elements; where historic shrines and temples stand in contrast to the dynamic skyline of futuristic cities. Traditional practices, such as tea ceremonies and calligraphy, share space with the forward-moving forces of pop culture and technology, all while emphasizing continuity and community mindfulness.

The Japanese way of life is marked by an attentive appreciation for the little details, allowing for a distinct perspective on human connection, nature, and the fleeting passage of time. In conjunction with the broader cultural context, concepts like Wabi-Sabi and Ikigai play pivotal roles in shaping the Japanese worldview, influencing everything from architectural styles and lifestyle choices to forms of artistic expression and social interactions. This research ultimately seeks to unravel these complex layers,

enhancing our understanding of the film through a rich exploration of its narrative structure, visual language, and cultural significance.

This research report embarks on a comprehensive journey into the cinematic world of *Perfect Days*, a film that made its debut in 2023. The primary focus of this study is centred around the film's distinctive minimalist narrative structure, which sets it apart from more conventional storytelling methods. Additionally, the investigation highlights the film's innovative approach to visual storytelling techniques, showcasing the creative ways in which imagery and composition communicate deeper themes and emotions. By engaging in this thorough exploration, the report seeks to connect the film's narrative and visual styles to various philosophical concepts rooted in Japanese culture, especially those derived from Zen Buddhism. These philosophical ideas are not merely mentioned; rather, they are intricately woven into the fabric of the film's aesthetic presentation. This analysis dives into central themes such as Wabi-Sabi, the appreciation for the beauty found in imperfection and the fleeting nature of life; Ikigai, which encapsulates the search for personal purpose and joy; Komorebi, the enchanting interplay between light and leaves as filtered sunlight dances through trees; and Mono No Aware, an acute awareness of the transitory nature of existence. Each of these themes is thoughtfully reflected through the film's rich visual tapestry and its narrative constructs, revealing how they contribute to a deeper philosophical conversation.

Importantly, this study maintains a clear focus on analysing the film itself, dedicating its efforts solely to understanding the intricate details and meanings embedded within the work. Employing both thematic and semiotic analysis methodologies, the report aims to uncover layers of meaning and interpretation that lie beneath the surface of *Perfect Days*. However, it is crucial to clarify that this research does not delve into aspects related to audience reception, viewer experiences, or the commercial performance of the film in the marketplace. Instead, its primary aim is to offer a thorough examination of how *Perfect Days* encapsulates complex philosophical ideas and conveys them masterfully through the lens of cinematic artistry. This focus allows for a richer appreciation of the film's unique qualities and its cultural significance.

Boundaries of the Study

This research report is dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the film *Perfect Days*, which was released in 2023. It specifically investigates the film's unique minimalist narrative structure, as well as its innovative use of visual storytelling techniques. In doing so, the study delves into various Japanese philosophical concepts, particularly those rooted in Zen Buddhism, and examines how these ideas are intertwined with traditional Japanese aesthetics. Central themes such as Wabi-Sabi, which embraces the beauty of imperfection and transience, Ikigai, the concept of finding purpose and joy in life, Komorebi, the interplay of light and leaves, and Mono No Aware, the awareness of the impermanence of things, are thoughtfully reflected throughout the film's visual and narrative elements. Given its focused nature, this study is strictly confined to an analysis of the film itself. Employing both thematic and semiotic analysis methods, it aims to uncover deeper meanings and interpretations within the cinematic work. It is important to note that this research does not extend to considerations of audience reception or any commercial aspects related to the film's performance in the marketplace. Instead, it aims to present a thorough examination of how *Perfect Days* encapsulates and conveys profound philosophical ideas through its cinematic artistry.

Perfect Days Through The Idea of Zen

Perfect Days employs the idea of Zen lifestyle through Hirayama's lifestyle, which ideally brings Zen Buddhism as an important concept to look into as viewers. Zen Buddhism has traced back to China being around 6th century and it has developed major influence in its teaching process. Zen Buddhism stands strong as a major philosophy study for this research. Considering how old it is there are few minor changes that may be seen in its principles, teachings, and influence through time as Zen had spread from India, China, Japan and slowly to the rest of the world. For understanding our objectives and the overall film as a general audience, there are a total of 7 principles used as examples to bring light to this study. These 7 principles which were identified by Shin'ichi Hisamatsu in his classic text of 'Zen and Fine Arts' were "Kanso" (clarity and naturalness), "Koko" (quite), "Shizen" (free from manipulation), "Fukinsei" (beauty in imperfection), "Datsuzoku" (freedom from habit), "Yugen" (mysterious beauty), and "Sei-Jaku" (mindfulness and discipline). These concepts reflect a Zen worldview that values imperfection, emptiness, and subtlety over symmetry or elaboration (Shigeta 172).

To understand the film through applying different forms of methodologies, there are 3 specific methodologies employed in this research –

The initial methodology opted for this analysis is known as the Qualitative Study. This approach will prioritize a nuanced interpretation of symbolism, philosophical concepts, and various cinematic techniques, aiming to uncover deeper meanings within the film rather than relying solely on statistical measurements or numerical data. By adopting this qualitative perspective, we are afforded the opportunity to delve into the intricate ideas and themes that lie beneath the surface of the film, enriching our overall understanding.

Cinema, whether in the form of films, music videos, or other visual narratives, often contains layered and complex messages that can manifest as various forms of symbolism, gestures, and motifs. While some of these symbolic elements may be easily recognizable to the audience, many require the insights and interpretations of critics or informed viewers to fully appreciate their significance and intent. This exploratory aspect of film analysis aligns with the practice of Semiotic Analysis. This method is dedicated to studying the signs, symbols, and their meanings within a specific context. The foundation of semiotic analysis is

rooted in the field of semiotics, which was significantly advanced by intellectuals such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Their work delves into how meaning is constructed and conveyed through different signs and symbols.

Another essential methodology we will employ in this research is Thematic Analysis, which focuses on identifying and examining recurring themes or ideas within the film. This analytical approach allows us to uncover the deeper meanings and messages that a film conveys, extending beyond mere surface narratives, character arcs, and basic plots. For example, in Wim Wenders' *Perfect Days*, the film artfully constructs the daily life of Hirayama, a toilet cleaner in Tokyo, through a lens of understated repetition and subtle nuance. One prevalent theme that emerges from a thematic analysis of this work is the notion of solitude and routine as a form of contentment. Rather than framing Hirayama's solitary existence as a lonely or tragic circumstance, Wenders presents it as a conscious choice and a fulfilling way of life.

By integrating these various methodologies i.e. qualitative study, semiotic analysis, and thematic analysis, researchers gain a remarkable degree of flexibility in interpreting different perspectives and cultural values reflected in the film. While the qualitative approach lays the groundwork for a rich analysis, semiotic analysis aids in deciphering visual and symbolic languages, enhancing our understanding of non-verbal communication and the often-hidden cultural codes that underpin a film's narrative. Furthermore, thematic analysis allows us to spot recurring motifs, such as the themes of solitude and routine, and helps us bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and textual analysis, ultimately enriching our engagement with the cinematic work. Through this comprehensive and layered approach, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for the intricate art of filmmaking and the diverse messages it conveys.

Zen Buddhism, particularly its seven fundamental principles, serves as a critical lens through which to analyse and interpret the primary themes and messages found within the film. Alongside this, various other Japanese aesthetic concepts such as Wabi-Sabi, Ikigai, Komorebi, and Mono no Aware significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the narrative and its multifaceted interpretations. To fully appreciate how these concepts influence the film, it is essential to explore the interconnectedness of these ideas and how they are woven into the cinematic experience. The roots of Zen Buddhism trace back to the notable Indian monk Bodhidharma. His teachings eventually made their way to China, where they evolved into what came to be known as the Chan School of Buddhism. This school of thought then travelled to Japan, where it took on a distinct identity and continued to spread its influence globally. At its core, Zen Buddhism emphasizes essential values like simplicity, mindfulness, inner peace, and the direct exploration of reality, often facilitated through meditation and daily practices. This exploration of Zen philosophy is particularly relevant in the context of this research because it closely aligns with the character and lifestyle of the main protagonist, Hirayama. Throughout the film, Hirayama personifies the tenets of Zen Buddhism through his deliberate and thoughtful way of living.

Hirayama's life is depicted as one that follows a strict, tranquil, and repetitive routine filled with seemingly mundane activities, cleaning public restrooms, caring for potted plants, capturing moments through photography, reading books, and listening to cassette tapes. However, what might initially appear as monotony is, in fact, approached with mindfulness and care rather than indifference. These actions reflect a Zen-inspired belief that meaning can be derived from the mundane, transforming ordinary tasks into forms of meditation. His living space is notably minimalistic, and his affinity for nature is evident in the small plants he nurtures. This connection to nature is poignantly illustrated in his practice of photographing the sunlight streaming through the trees, a phenomenon known as Komorebi, which symbolizes a profound spiritual relationship with the natural world and emphasizes themes of transience and impermanence.

The film's overall pacing further embodies the Zen principles of Kanso (simplicity) and Shizen (naturalness). The cinematic experience is characterized by extended shots and a deliberate scarcity of dialogue, echoing the ideas of Koko (quiet and solitary). Hirayama's presence throughout the film radiates a sense of peace and acceptance that is palpable. Moreover, he displays a remarkable lack of attachment to both his relationships and his possessions. Hirayama allows people in his life, a niece, a co-worker, and a sister, to come and go without emotional turmoil. This calm detachment reflects the Zen principle of Shizen, showcasing a life free from the burdens of attachment or manipulation. Although the philosophy of Zen Buddhism is not overtly preached in *Perfect Days*, it is intricately embedded in the film's visual storytelling, emotional undertones, and overall rhythm. Through Hirayama's quiet and serene lifestyle, the film emerges as a beautiful cinematic meditation, one that honours the present moment, celebrates simplicity, and reveals the beauty found within the fleeting and imperfect aspects of life.

Exploring Japanese Aesthetics

In exploring Zen Buddhism as a foundational concept for understanding the film, this research also delves into various other Japanese aesthetic principles to provide a more comprehensive analysis. By examining these additional concepts, we can uncover further layers of meaning and connection, enriching our interpretation of the film and its artistic intentions. This multifaceted approach allows for a deeper appreciation of the narrative and the profound philosophical themes that resonate throughout the cinematic experience. With the philosophy of Zen Buddhism serving as a core concept of understanding the film through a complete framework, some other Japanese aesthetics are also emphasized on this research to help in interpreting additional details for analysing the film in depth with more connections.

Wabi-Sabi

Wabi-Sabi is an intriguing Japanese aesthetic that appreciates and discovers beauty in imperfection, as well as in the transient nature of existence. The character Hirayama embodies this philosophy, living a life characterized by both routine and simplicity,

yet each moment he experiences is filled with a profound sense of quiet dignity. His meticulous care in the seemingly mundane task of cleaning toilets, alongside his admiration for the ephemeral beauty found in the natural world, demonstrates a deep acceptance of the impermanence that defines life. The film artfully employs a deliberate pacing and pays close attention to everyday details, which together showcase the inherent beauty that exists within the ordinary. This focus invites viewers to embrace life's imperfections rather than shy away from them.

Ikigai

Within this narrative, Hirayama's way of life serves as a strong representation of the Japanese concept of Ikigai, which revolves around discovering one's purpose in life. Despite the humble nature of his work, Hirayama approaches it with both dedication and pride, signifying a profound sense of purpose that shapes his existence. Moreover, the film illustrates how immersing oneself wholeheartedly in daily tasks and responsibilities can pave the way to a fulfilling life, often without the need for grand ambitions or lofty dreams.

Komorebi

Hirayama finds contentment through his commitment to his work, his passions for music and literature, as well as his deep connection with the natural environment around him. This connection is beautifully represented by the concept of Komorebi, a Japanese term that speaks to the phenomenon of sunlight filtering through the leaves of trees, which serves as a recurring visual motif throughout the film. Hirayama's daily ritual of capturing photographs of these captivating light patterns symbolizes his bond with nature and the present moment, emphasizing the beauty found in simple acts of appreciation.

Mono No Aware

Additionally, the idea of Mono No Aware, which translates to "the pathos of life," poignantly encapsulates the transient nature of experiences we encounter in our lives. This sense of gentle sadness arises from an understanding of life's impermanence. One particularly touching aspect of the film is Hirayama's relationship with his niece, Niko. Their brief encounter, laden with unspoken emotions, poignantly illustrates the ephemerality of human connections, highlighting the bittersweet essence of these relationships.

Through the exploration of these various Japanese concepts, the film ultimately portrays a life that discovers its richness in pure simplicity and presence. Through Hirayama's daily routines and intimate interactions, it invites viewers to reflect upon their own lives and encourages a recognition of the inherent beauty that exists within us all, waiting to be acknowledged amidst the complexities of life.

Conclusion

Perfect Days is a mesmerizing film that delves into the rich tapestry of profound Japanese aesthetics and philosophical ideas, revealing their enduring significance in our modern lives. The narrative centres around Hirayama, whose calm and methodical daily routine invites viewers to transcend the surface-level depiction of his character. Instead, it offers a thoughtful meditation on the essence of the human experience. With its deliberate pacing and keen observational cinematography, particularly highlighted by the recurring visual motif of Komorebi, the interplay of sunlight filtering through leaves, the film immerses the audience in a realm where the delicate beauty found in imperfections is not only recognized but celebrated. This appreciation embodies the Japanese concept of Wabi-Sabi, which finds richness in the transient and the flawed. Hirayama's unwavering dedication to his role as a public toilet cleaner serves as a poignant illustration of the Japanese philosophical idea of Ikigai, which emphasizes the importance of having a clear purpose in life. Through his humble profession, the film reveals how a genuine sense of fulfilment can emerge not from grand accolades or societal status, but from finding meaning in even the simplest of tasks. This perspective gradually enhances one's appreciation for existence itself. Furthermore, Hirayama's tranquil acceptance of life's ebb and flow, along with his tender recognition of fleeting moments, resonates with the concept of Mono No Aware, which speaks to the beauty of impermanence. The film serves as a visual representation of Zen Buddhist principles, illustrating that living in the present moment, practicing mindfulness, and cultivating a detachment from materialistic desires can lead to a profound sense of inner peace and self-contentment. Ultimately, the film asserts that genuine fulfilment does not lie in external accomplishments meant for display or the validation from society but rather in cultivating an inner landscape characterized by acceptance and gratitude. By portraying Hirayama's life as a gentle symphony of simple joys and meaningful routines, *Perfect Days* encourages audiences to reflect on their own relationship with the mundane aspects of life, presenting a compelling and understated framework for living with grace and purpose.

Perfect Days features a non-linear, episodic structure that prioritizes daily routines over traditional plot development. Embracing minimalism, the film reflects the Zen notion of 'Ku', highlighting the quiet beauty of simply being. Instead of dramatic events, it encourages viewers to appreciate the grace of ordinary life through the use of soft natural light and static shots. Mundane tasks, like cleaning toilets or watering plants, are captured in close-ups that exemplify Kanso, the Zen principle of simplicity. These actions convey mindfulness and intentionality. Cultural elements, such as cassette tapes and bento boxes, add a nostalgic touch amid Japan's rapid modernization. The film shifts away from bustling Tokyo, focusing instead on serene, overlooked spaces like parks and laundromats. This choice emphasizes internal experience over external action and explores themes of time, presence, and contentment. Ultimately, *Perfect Days* reflects on living intentionally in each moment, showcasing the beauty of everyday life through a unique Japanese lens.

It is this subtle yet pervasive connection to rich Japanese philosophies that elevates *Perfect Days* beyond mere entertainment, positioning it as a significant contribution to the ongoing cinematic discourse surrounding mindfulness, the beauty of cultural aesthetics, and the universal quest for deeper meaning in life. The film invites viewers not only to engage with its narrative but also to ponder their own existence in a world filled with complexity, urging a return to the basics of appreciating life's simple and often overlooked moments.

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