

## LIVING WITHOUT THE PAIN OF EXISTENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE PERFECT DAYS

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the 2023 film *Perfect Days*, directed by Wim Wenders, through its visual and thematic structure with a semiotic approach. The film presents the existential meanings and inner depth hidden behind the simple life practices through the daily routines of a character named Hirayama, who cleans public toilets in Tokyo. This life, which seems monotonous at first glance, carries important clues about the serene relationship the individual establishes with himself, his ties with nature, and his way of confronting the past. In the introduction section of the study, which is examined with a semiotic method, indirect references to Shintoism and Buddhism are examined through details such as Hirayama's morning rituals, his interest in nature, his habit of listening to analog music, and his book choices. These elements show that the character is searching for spiritual balance and tries to achieve inner peace through a simple lifestyle. The purposeful sampling technique was used in selecting the film, which was examined with the semiological method, one of the qualitative research designs, and the richness of the film's symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual elements effectively selected the technique in question. Visual symbols, spatial compositions, the character's connection with literature and music, and emotional relationships were evaluated from a semiotic perspective in the analysis process. Hirayama's encounters with people who carry traces of the past underline that there is not only peace in his life but also repressed emotions and longings. In conclusion, *Perfect Days* offers a powerful narrative that addresses the search for meaning in ordinariness, individual existence, and the aesthetic dimensions of simple life. While the film prompts us to think about the value of small moments, it offers an impressive cinema experience that reflects the inner world of the modern individual. The film skillfully handles individual serenity and existential questions, questioning the ability of modern people to find cosmic meanings in simple and repetitive life practices.

**Keywords:** *Existential pain, worldly pain, life satisfaction, inner peace, spiritual satisfaction, minimal life*

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## VAROLUŞ SANCISI DUYMADAN YAŞAMAK: PERFECT DAYS FİLMİ ÜZERİNE BİR ÇÖZÜMLEME

### Öz

Bu çalışma, Wim Wenders'in yönetmenliğini üstlendiği 2023 yapımı *Perfect Days* adlı filmini, görsel ve tematik yapısı üzerinden, göstergebilimsel bir yaklaşımla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Film, Tokyo'da umumi tuvaletleri temizleyen Hirayama isimli bir karakterin gündelik rutinleri aracılığıyla, sade yaşam pratiklerinin ardında gizlenen varoluşsal anlamları ve içsel derinliği izleyiciye sunmaktadır. İlk bakışta monoton görünen bu yaşam, aslında bireyin kendisiyle kurduğu dingin ilişkiye, doğa ile olan bağlarına ve geçmişle yüzleşme biçimine dair önemli ipuçları taşımaktadır. Göstergebilimsel bir yöntemle incelenen araştırmanın giriş bölümünde, Hirayama'nın sabah ritüelleri, doğaya olan ilgisi, analog müzik dinleme alışkanlığı ve kitap seçimleri gibi detaylar üzerinden Şintoizm ve Budizm'e yapılan dolaylı göndermeler incelenmiştir. Bu öğeler, karakterin ruhsal bir denge arayışı içinde olduğunu ve sade bir yaşam biçimi aracılığıyla içsel huzura ulaşmaya çalıştığını göstermektedir. Nitel araştırma desenlerinden semiyolojik yöntemle incelenen filmin seçiminde amaçlı örnekleme tekniği kullanılmış ve söz konusu tekniğin seçiminde filmin sembolik, felsefi ve ruhani, öğelerinin zenginliği etkili olmuştur. Analiz sürecinde görsel simgeler, mekânsal kompozisyonlar, karakterin edebiyat ve müzikle kurduğu bağ ile duygusal ilişkileri göstergebilimsel bir perspektiften değerlendirilmiştir. Hirayama'nın geçmişe dair izler taşıyan insanlarla olan karşılaşmaları, onun yaşamında sadece huzur değil, aynı zamanda bastırılmış duygular ve özlemler de bulunduğu altı çizilmiştir. Sonuç olarak *Perfect Days*, sıradanlık içinde anlam arayışını, bireysel varoluşu ve sade hayatın estetik boyutlarını ele alan güçlü bir anlatı sunmaktadır. Film, küçük anların değeri üzerine düşünmeye sevk ederken, modern bireyin içsel dünyasını yansıtan etkileyici bir sinema deneyimi sunmaktadır. Film, bireysel dinginlik ve varoluşsal sorgulamaları ustaca işleyerek, modern insanın sade ve tekrar eden hayat pratikleri içinde kozmik anlamlar bulabilme yetisini sorgulamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Varoluş sancısı, dünya ağrısı, yaşam doyumu, içsel huzur, manevi tatmin, minimal yaşam

### INTRODUCTION

Cinema has long been a powerful tool for exploring existential questions and offering profound thoughts on the meaning of life by blending universal human experience with cultural specificities. Wim Wenders's *Perfect Days* (2023), set in Tokyo and focusing on the beauty of simple life, successfully fulfills this function (Smith, 2022). The film focuses on the daily life of Hirayama, a toilet cleaner who lives a lonely and routine life while inviting the audience to reflect on themes of simplicity, mindfulness, and harmony with nature. This narrative reflects a search for meaning beyond worldly desires, shaped by the influence of Shinto and Buddhist belief systems. The film's symbols, sounds, and spatial narrative externalize the character's inner world and offer the audience a profoundly intuitive experience (Gimbel, 2019). This study aims to help understand the movie *Perfect Days* and how universal existential themes are processed in a cultural context. The main research question that guides the analysis process in the study is determined: "*How does the movie Perfect Days represent existential peace through symbols specific to Japanese culture?*"

Applying semiotic theory to *Perfect Days*, this analysis attempts to uncover how symbols and visual metaphors reflect cultural ideologies, particularly those influenced by Buddhist and Shinto philosophies (Smith, 2022; Takahashi, 2021; De Silva, 2016). Focusing on the recurring motifs of trees, water, light, and shadow and the cultural codes embodied in Hirayama's daily rituals, the study demonstrates how the film constructs a narrative that resonates with universal and culturally specific themes. The film's recurring motifs are key semiotic devices to express its philosophical and cultural messages. For example, trees represent impermanence (Buddhist-anicca) and interconnectedness, symbolizing the ephemeral nature of life and the connection between humans and their environment (Barthes, 1972; Takahashi, 2021; Johnson, 2021). Similarly, water, depicted as rain or reflections, serves as a Shinto-inspired symbol of purification and renewal (Smith, 2022; Kasulis, 2004). Hirayama's meticulous cleansing rituals align with Shinto purification practices and

Buddhist mindfulness, transcending ordinary actions and transforming his daily work into a meditative, almost sacred experience (Parkes, 2009).

An analysis of Wenders's *Perfect Days* (2023) through a semiotic lens provides a comprehensive understanding of how signs, symbols, and cultural codes communicate existential themes influenced by Buddhist and Shinto ideologies. Semiotics, as defined by Saussure, is the study of signs and their meanings, wherein a sign is composed of two components: the signifier (the physical form such as an image, sound, or word) and the signified (the concept or meaning conveyed by the sign) (Wenders, 2023; Saussure, 1983; Saussure, 1983; Barthes, 1972). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is what creates meaning, and this meaning can be denotative (literal meaning) or connotative (associative or cultural) (Barthes, 1972; Metz, 1974). Understanding these semiotic principles is essential to deciphering *The Perfect Days*' cultural, symbolic, and technical codes. In *Perfect Days*, cultural codes reflect Japanese traditions and philosophies, particularly those derived from Buddhism and Shinto (Smith, 2022; Takahashi, 2021). Technical codes, such as Wenders' minimalist cinematography, deliberate pacing, and diegetic sound, enhance the narrative's meditative nature and emphasize its existential themes.

Roland Barthes' concept of connotation is beneficial for understanding the layered meanings in *The Perfect Days*. For example, the tree motif that recurs throughout the film signifies personal growth and life's interconnectedness (Saussure, 1983; Barthes, 1972). On a semiotic level, trees are natural elements; however, their connotations are based on Buddhist teachings of impermanence and Shinto's reverence for nature as a sacred entity (Takahashi, 2021). Similarly, water is a natural element in the film and a semiotic representation of purification, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and renewal in Shinto practices (Metz, 1974). Christian Metz's application of semiotics to film emphasizes how visual and auditory elements work together to construct meaning. In *The Perfect Days*, visual narrative codes such as the repetitive shots of Hirayama's cleaning routines, his interactions with nature, and the minimalist depiction of Tokyo's urban spaces create a meditative rhythm (Smith, 2022). Auditory signals such as water, wind, and birds contribute to the film's immersive atmosphere, reflecting the protagonist's silent attunement to his surroundings (Takahashi, 2021; Johnson, 2021). These auditory cues align with Shinto's emphasis on harmony with the natural world, reinforcing the film's spiritual underpinnings.

Intertextuality plays an important role in the semiotic richness of the film in *Perfect Days*. In addition to Buddhist texts and Shinto rituals, *The Perfect Days* demonstrates a broader contemplative cinema (Wenders, 2023; Smith, 2022). The film's minimalist aesthetics and focus on routine reflect the work of Japanese directors such as Yasujiro Ozu, whose films often explore the quiet beauty of ordinary life. With these references, *The Perfect Days* position itself within a film tradition that celebrates awareness and simplicity while offering a unique exploration of existential themes (Metz, 1974). By applying semiotic analysis to *The Perfect Days*, this study emphasizes how the film transcends its narrative and becomes a meditation on existential fulfillment (Smith, 2022). Cultural codes, such as cleanliness and nature symbolism, and technical codes, such as framing and the conscious use of sound, transform Hirayama's seemingly ordinary life into a profound exploration of living without existential pain (Takahashi, 2021; Saussure, 1983). This framework suggests that the film's meaning lies in its narrative and its ability to evoke introspection through its signs and symbols.

This study is structured to systematically explore the semiotic layers of *Perfect Days* and their connection to existential themes in the Japanese cultural context. The first part reviews the theoretical framework, detailing the semiotic principles of Saussure, Barthes, and Metz and their relationship to cinematic analysis (Saussure, 1983; Barthes, 1972; Metz, 1974). The second part examines the cultural and philosophical foundations of the film, focusing on how Shinto and Buddhist ideologies shape its narrative and symbolism (Takahashi, 2021; Kasulis, 2004). The analysis applies semiotic methods to the basic motifs (trees, water, light, and shadow) and Hirayama's rituals, deciphering their denotative and connotative meanings to reveal existential and cultural messages (Smith, 2022). The discussion synthesizes these findings and explores how the film's visual and auditory codes construct a universal yet culturally grounded meditation on the meaning of life. *The study's central research question is, "How does the film Perfect Days represent existential anxiety through symbols specific to Japanese culture?" Based on this central question of the study, the following sub-questions are attempted to be answered: (1) What specific Shinto and Buddhist symbols are embedded in Hirayama's daily routines? (2) How do the visual and auditory codes convey existential themes? (3) To what extent do the intertextual references increase the cultural and philosophical depth of the film?*

## 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

Cinema has long been a tool for exploring existential questions, combining universal human experience with cultural specificity to offer profound thoughts on the meaning of life (Smith, 2022). Wim Wenders's contemplative drama *The Perfect Days* (2023), set in Tokyo, epitomizes this interaction by depicting a life of simplicity, mindfulness, and harmony with nature. Centered on Hirayama, a lonely toilet cleaner, the film's narrative uses visual storytelling to express existential themes rooted in Buddhist and Shinto ideologies (Takahashi, 2021; Wenders, 2023). Through the lens of semiotics (the study of signs and symbols), this analysis explores how *Perfect Days* conveys cultural and ideological messages to depict a life free of existential suffering.

Semiology, theorized by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, examines how meaning is constructed through signs, symbols, and their interpretations. In film studies, semiotics examines how visual and narrative elements such as imagery, color, sound, and recurring motifs function as signs to convey deeper meanings (Saussure, 1983; Metz, 1974). Applying semiotic theory to *Perfect Days*, this analysis attempts to uncover how symbols and visual metaphors reflect cultural ideologies, particularly those influenced by Buddhist and Shinto philosophies (Smith, 2022). Focusing on the recurring motifs of trees, water, light, and shadow and the cultural codes embedded in Hirayama's daily rituals, the study demonstrates how the film constructs a narrative that resonates with universal and culturally specific themes.

The film's recurring motifs are key semiotic devices to express its philosophical and cultural messages (Barthes, 1972). For example, trees represent impermanence (Buddhist-anicca) and interconnectedness, symbolizing the transient nature of life and the interdependent relationship between humans and their environment (Takahashi, 2021). Similarly, water, depicted as rain or reflections, is a Shinto-inspired symbol of purification and renewal. Hirayama's meticulous cleansing rituals align with Shinto purification practices and Buddhist mindfulness, transcending ordinary actions and transforming his daily work into a meditative, almost sacred experience (Smith, 2022).

An analysis of Wenders's *Perfect Days* (2023) through a semiotic lens provides a comprehensive understanding of how signs, symbols, and cultural codes communicate existential themes influenced by Buddhist and Shinto ideologies (Wenders, 2023). Semiotics, as defined by Ferdinand de Saussure, is the study of signs and their meanings, wherein a sign is composed of two components: the signifier (the physical form such as an image, sound, or word) and the signified (the concept or meaning conveyed by the sign) (Saussure, 1983). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is what creates meaning, and this meaning can be denotative (literal meaning) or connotative (associative or cultural meaning) (Barthes, 1972). Understanding these semiotic principles is essential to deciphering *The Perfect Days*' cultural, symbolic, and technical codes (Metz, 1974). In the context of *Perfect Days*, cultural codes reflect Japanese traditions and philosophies, particularly those derived from Buddhism and Shinto. Technical codes such as Wenders' minimalist cinematography, deliberate pacing, and diegetic sound enhance the narrative's meditative nature and emphasize its existential themes (Takahashi, 2021).

Roland Barthes' concept of connotation is beneficial for understanding the layered meanings in *The Perfect Days* (Barthes, 1972). For example, the tree motif that recurs throughout the film symbolizes personal growth and life's interconnectedness. On a semiotic level, trees are natural elements, but their connotations are deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings of impermanence and Shinto's reverence for nature as a sacred entity (Saussure, 1983; Takahashi, 2021). Similarly, water is a natural element in the film and a semiotic representation of purification, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and renewal in Shinto practices. Christian Metz's application of semiotics to film emphasizes how visual and auditory elements work together to construct meaning (Metz, 1974). In *The Perfect Days*, visual narrative codes such as the repetitive shots of Hirayama's cleaning routines, his interactions with nature, and the minimalist depiction of Tokyo's urban spaces create a meditative rhythm. Auditory signals such as the sounds of water, wind, and birds contribute to the film's immersive atmosphere, reflecting the protagonist's silent attunement to his surroundings (Smith, 2022). These auditory cues align with Shinto's emphasis on harmony with the natural world, reinforcing the film's spiritual foundations (Takahashi, 2021).

Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, two fundamental founders of semiotic thought, developed different but complementary approaches to how sign systems produce meaning. According to Saussure, a sign consists of a "signifier" and a "signified"; meaning arises from the mental relationship between these two elements (Saussure, 1983). This approach emphasizes that language is a social contract and that meanings can change according to context. Peirce, on the other hand, proposes a three-part model: icon (visual

similarity), index (causal connection), and symbol (learned relationship) (Peirce, 1931–58). Peirce’s model is very important in analyzing meaning, especially in the visual arts, namely cinema. These two theorists paved the way for the cultural and symbolic analysis of cinematic narratives; they enabled us to understand how images function as both signifiers and symbols carrying cultural meanings in films such as *Perfect Days*.

*Perfect Days* reveals the inner depth of a simple life by placing Buddhist and Shinto teachings at the center of the dramatic narrative. The principle of “anicca” in Buddhism, or impermanence, is represented in the film by constantly changing lights, seasons, and images of nature (Harvey, 2013). This teaching creates a sense of awareness and acceptance through repeated actions in Hirayama’s daily rituals. In Shintoism, nature is sacred, and it is important to establish harmony with nature through rituals. In the film, this is demonstrated by Hirayama’s respect for trees, listening to nature in moments of silence, and turning his cleaning practice into almost a purification ritual (Teeuwen & Breen, 2000). These spiritual elements reinforce the character’s inner peace and balanced relationship with the outside world. Thus, the film blends the basic principles of Eastern philosophy with the cinematographic narrative, offering a universal existential message.

Intertextuality in film analysis reveals a work’s conscious or implicit relationships with other texts (Kristeva, 1980). In *Perfect Days*, the character of Hirayama is reminiscent of minimalist narratives of Japanese cinema, such as Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* (1953). The silence, rhythmic repetitions, and static camera angles are intertextual references in this context. In semiotic terms, these elements are aesthetic preferences and signs carrying cultural and philosophical codes (Barthes, 1972). For example, Hirayama’s silence is not a deficiency; on the contrary, it is a sign referring to the idea of “silent wisdom” in Zen Buddhism. Similarly, his routine movements are reminiscent of modern Japanese literature’s “mono no aware” feeling. These intertextual connections create layers of meaning that are conscious and intuitive in the viewer. Thus, semiotic analysis integrates intertextuality into producing meaning by revealing these cultural codes in the film.

Intertextuality is important in the film’s semiotic richness in *Perfect Days*. The *Perfect Days* features Buddhist texts, Shinto rituals, and a broader cinema of contemplation (Wenders, 2023). The film’s minimalist aesthetics and focus on routine echo the work of Japanese directors such as Yasujiro Ozu, whose films often explore the quiet beauty of ordinary life (Metz, 1974). With references, *The Perfect Days* positions itself within a tradition of films that celebrate awareness and simplicity while offering a unique exploration of existential themes (Smith, 2022). By applying semiotic analysis to *The Perfect Days*, this study emphasizes how the film transcends its narrative and becomes a meditation on existential fulfillment. Cultural codes, such as cleanliness and nature symbolism, and technical codes, such as framing and the conscious use of sound, transform Hirayama’s seemingly ordinary life into a profound exploration of living without existential suffering (Takahashi, 2021). This framework suggests that the film’s meaning lies in its narrative and its ability to evoke introspection through its signs and symbols (Saussure, 1983).

### 1.1.Examples of Buddhist and Shinto films in Cinema.

Cinema has long been a tool for exploring spiritual and existential questions (Smith, 2022). Cinema often draws on religious and philosophical traditions to depict human struggles and longings (Takahashi, 2021). Some films effectively combine Buddhist and Shinto elements to create narratives that reflect awareness, impermanence, and the sacredness of the everyday (Narasaki, 2015). Yasujiro Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* (1953) is a classic example of impermanence through its depiction of family relationships and the inevitability of change. Wim Wenders’ *Perfect Days* (2023) continues this tradition, blending Buddhist and Shinto elements into a story that meditates on simplicity, identity, and the search for existential peace.

Buddhist and Shinto cinema makes visible the metaphysical and ethical understandings specific to Eastern philosophy through cinematographic narrative. One of the essential characteristics of this type of cinema is the deep respect for nature; elements such as mountains, trees, water, and wind function not only as the background but also as characters. Especially in Shinto influence, nature is sacred, and the harmony between humans and nature is the central theme (Teeuwen & Breen, 2000). In Buddhist cinema, basic concepts such as “anicca” (impermanence), “dukkha” (suffering), and “anatta” (selflessness) are at the forefront. These philosophical elements are handled through themes such as loss and acceptance in the transformation processes of the characters (Harvey, 2013). Minimalist narration, long takes, moments of silence, and simplicity in dialogue are among the formal characteristics of this type of cinema. Directors such as Ozu, Kore-eda, or Wenders blend these traditions with modern narratives, aiming to create a deep intuitive awareness in the audience. Buddhist and Shinto cinema is about stopping, not movement; It is a form of cinema with spiritual depth, where silence, not speech, is meaningful.



Buddhist and Shinto-themed films, while both rooted in Eastern spiritual traditions diverge significantly in narrative focus, visual language, and philosophical grounding. Buddhist films often center on themes such as the life cycle, spiritual enlightenment, and inner transformation, conveyed through slow pacing and minimalist aesthetics. In contrast, Shinto-inspired films explore Japanese society's mythological and animistic worldview, focusing on harmony with nature, reverence for spirits (kami), and ancestral respect (Narasaki, 2015). Despite their differing origins, both genres utilize symbolic imagery to evoke emotional depth and invite introspection, showing how religious motifs can intersect with universal human experiences (Smith, 2022).

A prime example of Buddhist cinema is Kim Ki-duk's *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003), which follows a novice monk's spiritual journey across the seasons. The cyclical structure reflects samsara—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—while the calm visual style fosters a meditative engagement with the character's internal world. Similarly, *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (1989) by Bae Yong-kyun explores Buddhist concepts like impermanence (anicca) and detachment, using nature, water, and stone as recurring symbols to reflect the discipline and austerity of Zen practice (Yoshimoto, 2016). These films aim to evoke a contemplative state in the viewer, emphasizing the inner path to enlightenment through silence, repetition, and stillness.

On the other hand, Shinto-themed films tend to externalize spiritual experiences by intertwining human narratives with supernatural phenomena and natural environments. Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001), while accessible as a fantasy tale, deeply reflects Shinto values. The protagonist's journey through a spirit world introduces viewers to kami, purification rituals, and the idea of spiritual contamination and renewal (Narasaki, 2015). The setting—an abandoned amusement park—becomes a symbolic threshold between the mundane and the sacred. Similarly, Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990) presents a series of vignettes where nature, folklore, and the subconscious blend, emphasizing the spiritual agency of landscapes and the importance of living in harmony with nature's rhythms.

While there are notable differences between Buddhist and Shinto cinema, these two genres exhibit several thematic and aesthetic similarities. Both emphasize the interconnectedness between humans and nature, utilize silence and ambient natural sounds as significant narrative devices, and present a cyclical rather than linear perception of time. Nevertheless, Buddhist films often look inward, focusing on themes such as solitude, detachment from worldly attachments, and personal enlightenment. In contrast, Shinto films typically look outward, highlighting the interplay between humans and visible and invisible natural forces. Whereas Buddhist narratives frequently take place in secluded monasteries or remote locations conducive to contemplation, Shinto films typically occur in liminal spaces, such as shrines, forests, or—as exemplified in *Spirited Away*—in decaying artificial structures reclaimed by spiritual entities (Boyd & Nishimura, 2016).

In essence, Buddhist cinema invites a journey of inward purification and spiritual insight, while Shinto cinema reveals the unseen energies permeating the external world. Together, they illustrate two complementary worldviews: one that seeks transcendence through detachment, the other that honors presence through communion with the sacred. Thus, the reflection of different beliefs and cultures in cinema reminds us of the shared values of humanity and invites us to a universal field of thought. As a result, examples of Buddhist and Shintoist cinema stand out with their symbolic narrative, visual poetry, and philosophical depth, skillfully integrating religious and spiritual themes with art. This integration transforms cinema from being a mere entertainment tool to an intellectual and spiritual experience (Yoshimoto, 2016).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a semiotic approach to analyze the film *Perfect Days* (Wenders, 2023) using the framework developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is particularly effective in film analysis because it reveals how visual and auditory elements produce meaning through their interactions within the narrative (Barthes, 1972; Saussure, 1983). This method examines both the descriptive (literal) and connotative (implied) meanings of repeated signs, revealing the cultural and ideological messages embedded in the film. *Perfect Days* was chosen for analysis because of its complex integration of Buddhist and Shinto elements conveyed through visual and auditory symbols. The film's minimalist aesthetic and focus on routine make it an ideal subject for investigating how semiotic elements construct meaning beyond the surface narrative. The film's philosophical exploration of existential fulfillment aligns with the themes of awareness, impermanence, and purification central to these spiritual traditions (Keown, 2013; Picken, 2021). The analysis focuses on the central visual motifs, exploring their descriptive and

connotative meanings within the narrative structure to reveal how Wenders conveys existential peace through semiotic elements.

### 2.1 A Sampling Of The Study

The *Perfect Days*' symbolic and narrative structure provides important clues about identity, body, and minimal living without experiencing an existential crisis. This necessitates that the study be designed according to the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling involves selecting cases rich in information to gain deeper insights into a particular phenomenon. Purposive sampling is a qualitative sampling technique used to select participants who are rich, relevant, and most likely to provide insight into the research objectives. It targets individuals or groups with specific knowledge, experiences, or characteristics important to the study. This approach is a sampling technique compatible with the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. It is beneficial for revealing the true meaning of a contextual frame (Tutar & Erdem, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Substance exemplifies this approach because of its thematic depth and symbolic complexity. The purposeful sampling technique is particularly well-suited to the film because of its focus on a protagonist who grapples with the boundaries between humanity and artificiality as he undergoes a series of transformative experiences related to his body and identity.

### 2.2 Analysis of Data and Finding

The analysis of *The Perfect Days* focuses on how the film conveys existential themes and personal identity through symbolic visuals and minimal narrative structure. Drawing on Buddhist and Shinto concepts, the film portrays the search for inner peace within the repetitive routines of urban life. For this purpose, selected images from the film were examined as sequences to uncover how visual elements construct meaning (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Semiotic analysis involves identifying recurring signs—such as gestures, objects, or settings—and interpreting how they relate to deeper philosophical or cultural messages. In this study, each image was broken down to explore how ordinary actions reflect an internal journey. The meaning was constructed using two interacting layers: the *plane of events* and *form*. The event layer includes physical elements like gestures, costumes, landscapes, and natural light, all with narrative value. The formal layer examines visual techniques such as framing, focal length, and camera effects. These two planes work together; while the event layer presents what is shown, the form layer determines *how* it is shown, guiding the viewer's interpretation (Monaco, 2010; Rabiger, 2007).

The analysis answers the research question, "How do *Perfect Days* represent existential anxiety through symbols specific to Japanese culture?" It is understood that the director tries to overcome existential anxiety through Japanese cultural symbols to explore loneliness and the search for meaning by using Hirayama's simple life. Shinto symbols such as water seen in rain and cleaning rituals imply purification, indicating Hirayama's attempt to resolve past regrets secretly referenced through his sister's visit. Buddhist tree motifs embody *anicca* (impermanence), reflecting his anxiety about the transience of life through everyday shadow photographs. These symbols frame routine actions as meditative and alleviate existential fear.

The first sub-question of the analysis is "What specific Shinto and Buddhist symbols are embedded in Hirayama's daily routines?" The film answers this question through the imagery of Shinto and Buddhist symbols that address existential anxiety in Hirayama's routines. Water, a Shinto symbol, appears in watering plants and cleaning toilets, reflecting *misogi* purification to clear inner turmoil, possibly linked to family estrangement. Rain reinforces renewal, in line with Shinto's cyclical view. Buddhist symbols include trees, photographed for their transient shade, which suggests *anicca* and acceptance of impermanence. His disciplined cleanliness, captured in still shots, reflects Zen awareness.

The second sub-question of the analysis, "How do visual and auditory codes convey existential themes?" is answered by the visual and auditory codes that convey existential anxiety through subtle semiotics. Wide shots of Hirayama's cleaning routines depict monotony yet ritual, implying meaning through repetition. Softly filmed trees and shadows symbolize transience by reflecting the passage of time. Tokyo's quiet urban palette contrasts with the vibrant rain, emphasizing isolation. Auditory cues—drip water, birds—create a meditative soundscape, evoking Shinto harmony.

The third sub-question of the analysis is "To what extent do intertextual references enhance the film's cultural and philosophical depth?" Intertextual references deepen the cultural and philosophical layers of *Perfect Days*. Its minimalist style echoes Ozu's *Tokyo Story* and grounds Hirayama's routines in Japanese temporality. Readings of Faulkner and Highsmith introduce Western existentialism, paralleled by its isolation framed in close-ups. The musical selection contrasts contemporary Tokyo, blending global introspection with

Zen universality. Shinto and Buddhist rituals—watering plants and tending trees—are linked to sacred practices, subtly developing themes of purification and mindfulness. T

### 2.3 The Perfect Days Film and Cast

**Director:** The director of the film “The Perfect Days” is German director Wim Wenders, one of the leading names in European cinema. Wenders has gained international recognition with the films he has produced since the 1970s; he has made significant contributions to the art of modern cinema, especially with his productions such as “Paris, Texas” (1984) and “Wings of Desire” (1987). Wenders is known for his scripts focusing on human psychology, urban life, and themes of loneliness.

**Cast:** The leading role in the film is played by Kôji Yakusho, one of the master actors of Japanese cinema. Other crew and cast members are as follows:

**Screenwriter:** Wim Wenders, Takayuki Takuma

**Dialogue writer:** Wim Wenders, Takayuki Takuma

**Cast:** Reina Ueda, Koji Yakusho, Tokio Emoto, Arisa Nakano, Aoi Yamada, Yumi Asou,

Sayuri Ishikawa, Tomokazu Miura, Min Tanaka

Image 1. Contains all the important sequences of the movie The Substance.

**Image 1.**



The poster for the film “The Perfect Days” refers to the search for peace in Buddhist and Shinto philosophy with the calm expression of a single character and the visual atmosphere intertwined with nature. The character’s introspective gaze is reminiscent of the meditative state in Buddhist teachings, while the wooded area in the background reflects the idea of uniting with nature in Shinto. The simple color of the blue jumpsuit invites one to an inner journey by emphasizing the simple rituals of daily life. The poster's bright but understated use of light evokes a sense of spiritual calm. The poster foreshadows the deep existential themes in the film by skillfully bringing together the importance of the inner journey and the spiritual connection established with nature.



Image 2



Image 3.



Image 4.



**Image 2.** In Buddhism and Shintoism, trees symbolize the cycle of life and spiritual interconnectedness with the universe. In the first image, the individual, dressed in a blue robe and calm demeanor, gazes at the tree as if contemplating a sacred entity. This posture illustrates tranquility of mind and a deep appreciation for nature. In the Buddhist tradition, the tree carries special meaning, epitomized by the Bodhi tree under which Buddha achieved enlightenment (Keown, 2013; Hino, 2005). Conversely, in Shinto belief, every tree is revered as a "kami," underscoring nature's divine essence and sacred presence (Kasulis, 2004). Observing the tree signifies an inward journey toward self-awareness and spiritual peace, reinforcing human humility and respect towards the natural world.

**Image 3.** Buddhism and Shintoism emphasize comprehending existence within nature through attentive observation and serene breathing practices (Yusa, 2017). The upward gaze in the second photograph conveys a tranquil reverence, reinforcing inner awareness and a profound sense of universal unity. In Shinto belief, trees within temple gardens, termed "shinboku," signify sacred spaces and divine presence (Kasulis, 2004). Similarly, Buddhism values the shade of a tree as a conducive environment for contemplation and achieving inner tranquility (Yusa, 2017). Thus, observing a tree serves as an invitation to intuitively connect with the harmonious essence of the universe and ultimate reality.

**Image 4.** The experience of two people looking at a tree together in the third photograph reflects the love and respect for nature common to Buddhism and Shintoism. In Buddhism, joint meditation strengthens collective compassion and awareness. In Shintoism, on the other hand, sharing the same landscape by two people strengthens social harmony with the spirit of nature. The tree is important because it represents rebirth and eternal vitality. The sincerity in the gaze of these people deepens their spiritual bond. Focusing on the tree calms the mind and allows individuals to understand their place in the universe.

Image 5.



Image 6.



Image 7.



**Image 5.** The man with smiling eyes in this photo symbolizes happiness blended with the inner peace of Buddhism. The wisdom that transcends worldly combines respect for nature and gratitude for ancestors in Shinto teachings. The smile on his face reflects the indescribable satisfaction of finding peace in the present moment by understanding the transience of life. This enlightenment from the heart creates a deep acceptance that strengthens spiritual serenity.

**Image 6.** In Buddhism, it describes accepting the changeability of the world with awareness beyond self. Respect, which emphasizes the connection between nature and humans in Shinto traditions, calms the heart. The serenity in its essence, combined with a deep devotion to life and gratitude, reveals the simplicity of inner satisfaction. Each breath reinforces happiness in returning to the essence and revives freedom in the soul.

**Image 7.** Buddhism's silent observation and deep thought principle emerge in this introverted scene. Spiritual solitude blended with Shinto teachings brings a person closer to their true identity. The balance of light and shadows nourishes the consciousness of mortality; the value of each moment allows the peace felt to turn into lasting satisfaction. Deep acceptance awakens potential and opens the door to enlightenment at the core of human existence.

**Image 8.**



**Image 9.**



**Image 9.**



**Image 8.** This person lying on the bed and passionately reading a book seems caught up in the boundless magic of knowledge. The act of reading increases spiritual depth by transcending status differences in society. Even a toilet cleaner embraces books with sincere curiosity, symbolizing the democratic spirit of intellectuality. Integrating with the honor of labor, this effort opens the door to the uninterrupted nourishment of virtue. It glorifies the magic of the human mind under all circumstances. Reading invites everyone to enlightenment as the cornerstone of a developing character.

**Image 9.** This man sitting by the window reading a book reveals the functioning of the consciousness process independent of space. The love of reading, which encompasses everyone with an egalitarian approach, is the source of development regardless of profession or social position. Even someone who cleans toilets and picks up a book is a universal action that opens the doors of virtue. This action contributes to mental maturation by transcending social boundaries. The light of books inspires everyone. The passion for reading always reveals the potential of each individual.

**Image 10.** This person, who is reading while kneeling on his legs, symbolizes the devotion shown for the sake of knowledge. Texts accessible to everyone, regardless of profession, invite humanity to deep thought and continuous development. The fact that even those who clean toilets passionately embrace books reveals the dignity of universal knowledge. The consciousness that grows step by step with each page dispels social prejudices. Reading is a great window that opens to conscience and reason. This action sheds light on the person's inner world and virtue.

Image 10.



Image 11.



Image 12



**Image 11.** The relationship between the film *The Perfect Days* and Buddhist thought should be assessed not merely on a thematic basis but also within broader cultural and philosophical frameworks. Incorporating scholarly sources into such assessments enhances the credibility and validity of the analysis (Keown, 2013). For instance, the Buddhist notion of "anicca" (impermanence) manifests prominently through the repetitive daily rituals and depictions of nature within the film, reflecting fundamental philosophical principles in Buddhism (Harvey, 2013). Considering these connections provides the analytical discussion with a more robust scholarly foundation. Every bite obtained through sweat reinforces psychological peace beyond physical nourishment. The deep connection established with nature in the Shinto belief is combined with a sense of gratitude. The result achieved through labor emphasizes the value of focusing on the present moment while knowing the transience of life. This effort, which satisfies the body and the soul, leaves a permanent mark of happiness. The abundance of daily struggles provides peace to the heart and helps the person to make peace with himself.

**Image 12.** The gentle smile in this frame symbolizes the inner satisfaction brought by the gains earned through labor. According to Buddhism, conscious awareness is reinforced with gratitude at every meal. Shinto teachings emphasize respect for the nutrition ritual by strengthening the harmony between man and nature. The table provided through sweat nourishes spiritual serenity while meeting physical needs. This experience forms the basis of lasting happiness and spiritual fulfillment. Deep devotion to the cycle of life keeps man's sense of responsibility alive.

**Image 13.** We are looking at this facial expression of self-confidence and spiritual integrity born of earnings. Buddhism advises us to enjoy the labor that lies beneath every bite humbly. In this understanding, nourished by Shinto teachings, respect for nature's blessings is at the center. Income earned through sweat both meets physical needs and strengthens mental satisfaction. In this way, man experiences the profound value of his existence. Shared moments strengthen the sense of compassion and trust, turning into social solidarity.

Image 13.



Image 14





**Image 13.** This face, which carries an apparent serenity, reflects the principle of “staying in the moment” in Buddhism. The balance established with nature in the Shinto tradition facilitates purification from existential pain. Completing daily tasks with devotion opens the door to profound peace. When falling asleep with this serenity, spiritual relaxation is experienced; when waking up, the facial expression symbolizes inner satisfaction. The clarity of the mind is carried over to the morning, creating a balanced perspective in every area of life.

**Image 14.** Looking at the ceiling with clear eyes, this face reminds us of the respect felt for the concept of impermanence in Buddhism. The spiritual harmony in the Shinto belief reinforces the peace of the individual who fulfills his responsibilities. A daily life full of high work ethics reduces existential pain. A person who puts his head on the pillow with deep satisfaction wakes up in the morning with self-confidence; calm happiness is hidden in his facial expression. While the mind is filled with peace, the body is revitalized, and the life cycle is renewed. This calm expression on the bed shines with the peace of introspection in Buddhism. Shinto rituals' call to harmony with nature frees the soul from the sorrow of existence. Diligently fulfilling daily responsibilities magnifies spiritual fulfillment.

**Image 15.****Image 16****Image 17**

**Image 15.** The serenity that appears on the face, even in the stress of traffic, embodies Buddhism's teaching of staying in the moment. The harmony with nature in Shinto philosophy makes it easier for an individual to escape the burden of a stressful metropolis. A person who fulfills his daily duties with a high work ethic relieves the pains of existence. The inner peace he achieves turns into a soft smile despite the chaos of Tokyo traffic. The calmness in his mind also positively affects the outside world, and he approaches the environment with understanding. With this depth, a permanent sense of wisdom and tranquility is nourished.

**Image 16.** Shinto's respect for the flow of life is deeply felt in this second frame. Buddhism's emphasis on returning to the essence directs one to fulfill daily responsibilities with a constructive perspective. Even in a busy city like Tokyo, every moment when the spiritual balance is maintained trivializes stress. A life entirely of work ethic offers a person the privilege of being at peace with himself and his environment. Shinto's love of nature and Buddhism's discipline towards people reinforce a deep inner peace in the daily tempo (Harvey, 2013)

**Image 17.** In this last frame, the soft smile on his face reflects the peace felt after completing tasks. Buddhism's concept of impermanence relieves stress by appreciating each moment, while Shinto brings harmony in nature to the inner world. This person, who has shaken off the tiredness of the day, embraces even the tension of Tokyo traffic with a loving gaze. Responsibilities carried out with a high work ethic provide spiritual strength, relieve the pain of existence, and give a deep sense of relaxation. This balance strengthens the person's peace with himself.

## 2.4 Expression of Other Visual Elements in The Film

In Eastern spiritual traditions, flowers cultivated at home and various natural elements frequently symbolize impermanence, spiritual rebirth, and transformation (Keown, 2013). For example, Buddhist philosophy often utilizes floral imagery to depict the transient nature of existence and emphasizes mindfulness within meditative practices (Harvey, 2013). Similarly, the Shinto tradition regards flowers as embodiments of nature's sacred essence, fostering a deep reverence and gratitude toward all life forms (Kasulis, 2004). Therefore, cinematic scenes depicting characters observing flowers extend beyond mere aesthetic value, evoking profound contemplations on personal transformation and spiritual yearning (Napier, 2006). These reflective moments epitomize an introspective renewal intrinsic to Buddhist and Shinto worldviews, signifying emotional and spiritual revitalization (Kasulis, 2004; Harvey, 2013). Consequently, the depiction of floral imagery within films influenced by these traditions enhances the visual narrative by subtly representing the cyclical and ephemeral nature of human experience and emotional maturation (Napier, 2006).

*Creating Meaning in Color Schemes:* Colors evoke different connotations in psychological and cultural contexts. Pastel tones, used at the intersection of Buddhism and Shintoism in Japanese society, often represent serenity and peace. For example, earth tones emphasize the characters' journey to find inner peace, while green tones reinforce the connection established with nature (Yamamoto, 2018). In visual materials (See Photo 2), light blue tones visually relieve the stress of Tokyo traffic while at the same time strengthening inner calmness by evoking elements of the sky and water. Similarly, dark tones can portray existential pain or anxious mood, but the contrast of the bright expression on the character's face with this dark background reveals victory and inner peace.

*Costumes Communicate Character Traits or Ideological Meanings:* Costumes contain many clues, from the character's social position to their perspective on the world. For example, clothing like a worker's overalls or a simple kimono can reflect the traditional respect in Shinto culture and the modest approach of Buddhism (Yamamoto, 2018). This provides a metaphorical narrative of how traditional beliefs can be integrated into contemporary daily life (Takahashi, 2021). In addition, the fact that the costumes are in natural or pastel tones supports the character's distance from the pain of existence and a mindset that respects nature.

*The Function of Places as Symbols:* The choice of setting is fundamental in creating symbolic meaning in a film narrative. Outdoor settings—temple gardens or forests—represent Buddhism's journey to enlightenment and Shintoism's mystical connection with nature (Rots, 2017; Okuyama, 2015). Scenes surrounded by trees stand out as spiritual spaces where the individual purifies his or her inner world. In contrast, Tokyo's heavy traffic symbolizes the chaos of contemporary life. However, the character's calm facial expression reveals an inner balance against this external chaos. This contrast reflects how Japanese cinema uses spaces as visual, philosophical, and spiritual signifiers (Croteau, 2022).

*Symbolic Function of Certain Events or Characters:* The text emphasizes that "even the toilet cleaner has a passion for reading," which symbolizes the dignity of labor and the democratic nature of intellectual endeavor. Buddhism's idea that everyone is open to the potential for enlightenment is combined with Shintoism's respect for every being in nature (Takahashi, 2021). The ordinary actions of the characters - for example, reading or worshipping for inner peace - depict the search for universal wisdom. Thus, the audience is told that "everyone is valuable and open to enlightenment" (Smith, 2022). On the other hand, the expression "earned by sweat" presents a metaphor for how hard work brings spiritual and physical satisfaction.

*Binary Oppositions and Their Importance:* Binary oppositions such as "speaking and silence" or "laziness and diligence" in visual materials make Buddhism's understanding of the middle way and Shintoism's emphasis on a balanced life. In some scenes, the character becomes wholly silent and focuses on nature; in others, he is intensely involved in work or social interaction (See Photo 5). Adopting meticulous work instead of laziness is a practical step toward escaping the pains of existence. Both oppositions are important in the narrative: While one represents spiritual and physical progress, the other can represent a deviation from the wrong path or spiritual regression (Yamamoto, 2018).

The Perfect Days offers a quiet meditation on the sacredness of everyday life and presents a powerful narrative that connects with the philosophical and spiritual frameworks of Zen, Mahayana, and Theravāda Buddhism. Through symbolic imagery, music, and the panorama that integrates with these, the film embodies the idea that spiritual and aesthetic depth can emerge from even the most routine experiences, offering a perspective compatible with Buddhist thought. The film's protagonist, Hirayama, lives a straightforward life, waking up simultaneously, meticulously cleaning public toilets, and tending to his plants. These actions reflect Zen Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness (sati) and the beauty of ordinary labor. Advocating "being in the



moment,” Zen sees everyday tasks as opportunities for enlightenment when approached with full awareness (Suzuki, 2007). The symbolic use of objects (e.g., the tools Hirayama uses) and the space he is situated emphasizes the Zen ideal that spiritual fulfillment comes not from renouncing the world but from profoundly engaging with it.

Perfect Days also carries the ethical undertones of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana promotes the Bodhisattva ideal, emphasizing the enlightenment-seeking nature of beings who seek enlightenment for personal liberation and to help all sentient beings. Hirayama’s quiet, selfless interactions with others (whether through a gentle smile or a silent act of kindness) reflect the compassion in this act. According to Leighton (2012), the Bodhisattva path blends wisdom with compassion and manifests not through grand gestures but through simple, sustained, ethical living.

Hirayama’s disciplined life reflects Theravāda principles. Rooted in early Buddhist teachings, Theravāda emphasizes self-discipline, insight meditation (vipassana), and non-attachment. Hirayama does not seek material wealth or relationships. His solitude is not loneliness but a spiritual state of inner clarity, reflecting the Theravāda view of liberation through self-control and introspection (Peoples, 2013). The film’s aesthetic choices further reinforce these spiritual connections. The muted color palette and careful sound design reflect wabi-sabi, a Japanese aesthetic associated with impermanence and simple beauty—these visual choices parallel Buddhist impermanence (anicca) and non-attachment. As Green (2013) emphasizes, in Buddhist-influenced cinema, sound and space are not simply atmospheres but tools of meditative engagement.

More recent interpretations, such as Takahashi’s (2016) reading of the Heart Sutra, suggest that enlightenment is “form as emptiness,” an important Mahayana idea that finds visual echo in Perfect Days’ minimalist cinematography and sparse dialogue. In this way, the film becomes a meditative act in its own right, prompting viewers to contemplate rather than resolve. As a result, The Perfect Days constructs a narrative in which labor, gratitude, and respect for nature are spiritual practices. By blending Buddhist values with cinematic form, the film encourages viewers to rethink how the sacred can already be present within the fabric of their daily lives. In this synthesis of Zen clarity, Mahayana compassion, and Theravāda discipline, Wenders presents a film and the richness of a spiritual experience.

### 3. DISCUSSION

Wim Wenders’s *The Perfect Day* (2023) profoundly mediates existential themes such as identity, contentment, and cultural belonging through a meticulously crafted semiotic framework. Recurring signs and symbols (trees, water, sanitary implements, and urban spaces) serve as conduits to explore these themes, deeply embedding Buddhist and Shinto elements into the film’s narrative and aesthetic design. These symbols transcend their descriptive functions to weave together personal and cultural narratives that challenge traditional understandings of identity, labor, and modern life. The film’s portrayal of identity closely aligns with Buddhist teachings on impermanence (anicca) and interdependence. For example, the recurring motif of trees represents the protagonist Hirayama’s personal growth and connection to the larger ecosystem. Trees appear in various forms and contexts throughout the film, reminding viewers of life’s transient and interconnected nature. This is consistent with the Buddhist idea that individual identity cannot be understood in isolation but as part of a more extensive and ever-changing web of existence (Keown, 2013; Picken, 2021). Shintoism further reinforces this representation, as trees in Japanese culture are often considered sacred and represent the divine presence in nature. By placing Hirayama within these natural symbols, the film suggests that his identity is not rooted in societal expectations or material achievements but in his quiet harmony with the world around him.

Hirayama’s cleaning tools symbolize mindfulness and purification, reflecting the Shinto practice of maintaining physical and spiritual cleanliness. However, these rituals also critique the dehumanization of labor in industrialized societies. By transforming repetitive work into an act of spiritual and personal fulfillment, the film challenges the idea that modern labor is devoid of meaning. Instead, it suggests that meaning is found in how one approaches one’s tasks. Historically and ideologically, the film’s symbols interact with broader societal issues. The Tokyo setting—a vast urban metropolis—contrasts starkly with natural symbols such as trees and water. This contrast highlights the tension between modernity and tradition, reflecting Japan’s historical struggle to balance rapid industrialization with preserving cultural and spiritual values. Hirayama’s conscious choice to embrace simplicity and mindfulness despite the chaotic urban backdrop reflects a subtle ideological resistance to the alienating forces of modern life.

Perfect Days’ intertextuality further enhances its semiotic depth. While Buddhist and Shinto ideologies deeply influence the film’s semiotic richness, alternative interpretations of its signs are also possible.

For example, the recurring motif of trees can be read as symbols of resilience and resistance, representing the human capacity to thrive in the face of adversity. Similarly, Hirayama's cleaning routines can be interpreted as a quiet act of rebellion against the mechanization of modern labor, transforming what might otherwise be seen as monotonous into moments of intentionality and personal initiative. Often depicted as sterile and isolating, the confined urban spaces can also symbolize the limitations of modern life, with Hirayama's small acts of mindfulness serving as a form of liberation.

In the context of global debates about sustainability, the water in *The Perfect Days* may serve as a reminder of humanity's dependence on and responsibility for natural resources. These comments demonstrate the film's semiotic openness, which invites viewers to engage with its signs in ways that resonate with their own experiences and concerns. Ultimately, *Perfect Days* transcends its narrative using semiotics to explore existential peace on a multi-layered level. The interplay between visual motifs—trees, water, cleaning tools, and urban environments—creates a tapestry of meanings that reflect personal and cultural themes. The film critiques the alienation of modern life while offering a vision of simplicity, mindfulness, and fulfillment that comes from harmony with nature. Drawing on Buddhist and Shinto philosophies and traditions of contemplative cinema, *The Perfect Days* becomes both a universal meditation on living without existential suffering and a specific commentary on modern Japan's cultural and historical context. The film's openness to multiple readings further underscores its importance as a profoundly introspective and thought-provoking work of art.

Although the semiotic analysis of the film *Perfect Days* (2023) provides important perspectives on its symbolic depth and existential themes, this analysis faces certain limitations. The analysis primarily focuses on visual symbols (trees, water, cleaning tools) and their Buddhist and Shinto connotations. It ignores other narrative elements, such as character interactions or subtle emotional cues that could further illuminate Hirayama's journey. Relying on a single methodological lens (semiotics) limits the exploration of alternative perspectives, such as psychoanalytic or sociological approaches, that could reveal additional layers of meaning, such as multi-mode critical discourse analysis. Additionally, the study does not consider audience reception across cultural contexts, as suggested in the discussion, which may influence the interpretation of the film's symbols and themes. Future research could address these gaps by conducting qualitative studies such as audience interviews to explore how global audiences perceive the film's Shinto and Buddhist symbols, thereby enriching understanding of the film's cross-cultural impact. Other studies could highlight *Perfect Days*' unique integration of minimalist aesthetics and existential inquiry. Further exploration of auditory elements (such as water sounds, urban noise, or music) could complement the visual focus, offering a holistic semiotic perspective.

#### 4-CONCLUSION

Wim Wenders's *The Perfect Day* (2023) is a cinematic meditation on existential contentment, enriched by Buddhist and Shinto ideologies' symbolic and philosophical depth. Through a semiotic analysis of visual and narrative elements, this paper has revealed how the film uses recurring symbols to convey its core themes of mindfulness, simplicity, and harmony with nature. These symbols (trees, water, cleaning tools, and urban landscape) are conduits for exploring existential contentment and cultural identity, allowing the film to transcend its narrative and resonate personally and culturally. The most important symbols in *The Perfect Days* demonstrate the film's layered meanings. Trees, a recurring motif, symbolize impermanence (anicca), interconnectedness, and personal growth. They evoke Buddhist teachings on the transient nature of existence and the Shinto reverence for nature as a sacred force (Keown, 2013; Picken, 2021). Water, often depicted as rain or reflections, signifies purification and renewal and is consistent with Shinto practices that emphasize cleansing to restore spiritual harmony. While seemingly mundane, the cleaning tools elevate protagonist Hirayama's daily routine into a spiritual practice that embodies mindfulness and ritual purification. The urban setting of Tokyo, with its confined spaces and industrial aesthetics, contrasts sharply with these natural symbols, emphasizing the tension between modern alienation and traditional spiritual values.

By incorporating Buddhist and Shinto elements into the visual and narrative structure, Wenders bridges cultural and philosophical gaps and offers a universal meditation on the human condition. The symbols and cultural codes allow viewers to engage with the protagonist's journey as a personal and collective experience, emphasizing that fulfillment can be found in life's most minor, overlooked aspects. This analysis also highlights how the film critiques the alienation of modern labor and urban life, offering mindfulness and simplicity as antidotes to existential discontent. Furthermore, a semiological approach provides a deeper appreciation of how *Perfect Days* interacts with other works of contemplative cinema. Its minimalist style and focus on the everyday draw clear parallels with the films of Yasujiro Ozu, whose narratives often explore

themes of transience and the quiet beauty of routine. Similarly, the film's naturalistic aesthetic and meditative pace reflect the influence of Japanese artistic traditions such as wabi-sabi, which celebrate imperfection and impermanence.

While this analysis provides insight into the semiotic richness of *Perfect Days*, further research could expand its scope. One avenue for exploration is how viewers perceive the film. How do viewers from different cultural backgrounds interpret their symbols and themes? Examining audience comments or conducting qualitative studies can reveal how cultural context influences the film's interpretation. Another area of interest is a comparative analysis of similar films that explore existential themes with minimalist aesthetics, such as Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* (2016) or Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Such comparisons can highlight the unique ways *Perfect Days* integrates cultural and spiritual elements into its narrative framework. In addition, examining the role of sound in the film can offer new dimensions to its semiotic analysis.

In conclusion, *Perfect Days* is a cinematic reflection on existential peace and cultural identity and a deeply rooted exploration of core Buddhist philosophies. Through its semiotic richness, the film channels Zen, Pure Land (Jōdo), and Theravāda traditions to portray life's impermanence (*anicca*) and the unavoidable nature of suffering (*dukkha*). Zen's minimalist aesthetics and focus on the present moment manifest in Hirayama's silent routines—cleaning, planting, observing light—each action becoming a form of meditation. In Zen, peace is found not in transcendence but in mindful repetition, in accepting each moment as it is. Meanwhile, the longing for beauty and emotional resonance in Hirayama's cassette tapes and memories suggests an affinity with Pure Land Buddhism, emphasizing devotion, gratitude, and hope for liberation in the Amida Buddha's Western Paradise. The film does not depict literal rebirth but echoes this Pure Land ideal—an inner state of clarity and acceptance amidst urban chaos. From a Theravāda perspective, Hirayama's self-discipline and renunciation align with the path toward *nirvana*. His detachment from material desire reflects an understanding that craving leads to *dukkha*. Instead, he embraces *anicca*, the fleeting nature of all things, finding quiet joy in the impermanence of light, sound, and memory. Ultimately, *Perfect Days* becomes a cinematic embodiment of Buddhist teachings, transforming the ordinary into the sacred. Its symbols, grounded in impermanence and compassion, invite viewers into a meditative space, urging reflection on life, loss, and liberation.

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**Çıkar Çatışması:** Herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

## Genişletilmiş Özet

Sinema, tarih boyunca varoluşsal ve manevi soruları keşfetmek için etkili bir araç olmuştur. Görsel anlatım ve estetik öğeler yoluyla insan deneyimlerinin evrenselliğini ve kültürel özgülüğünü birleştirerek hayatın anlamı üzerine derin düşünceler sunar. Wim Wenders'in *Perfect Days* (2023) filmi, bu bağlamda Budist ve Şinto ideolojilerinden beslenerek farkındalık, sadelik ve doğayla uyum içinde bir yaşam tasviri yapar. Film, Tokyo'da yalnız bir tuvalet temizleyicisi olan Hirayama'nın günlük yaşamını merkezine alarak, modern dünyanın karmaşasında bile huzuru ve varoluşsal tatmini bulmanın yollarını gösterir. Göstergebilimsel bir perspektifle ele alınan film, semboller ve kültürel kodlar aracılığıyla Budist "anicca" (geçicilik) ve Şintoist doğa ile uyum gibi felsefi kavramları estetik bir çerçevede işler. Bu çalışmada, *Perfect Days* filminin görsel ve işitsel unsurlar üzerinden Budist ve Şinto ideolojilerine dayalı varoluşsal temaları nasıl aktardığı incelenecektir. Göstergebilimsel analiz, filmin tekrar eden motiflerinin (örneğin, ağaç, su ve ışık) ve Hirayama'nın günlük ritüellerinin nasıl daha derin anlamlar taşıdığını anlamak için bir çerçeve sunar. Bu analiz, filmin hem evrensel hem de kültürel özgülüğe sahip bir anlatı oluşturduğunu göstermeyi amaçlar.

Bu analiz, Ferdinand de Saussure ve Charles Sanders Peirce tarafından geliştirilmiş göstergebilimsel teoriye dayanmaktadır. Saussure, bir göstergenin iki bileşenden oluştuğunu öne sürer: "gösteren" (fiziksel biçim, örneğin bir görüntü veya ses) ve "gösterilen" (bu biçimin aktardığı kavram veya anlam). Peirce ise göstergeleri ikonlar, göstergeler ve semboller olarak üç kategoriye ayırır. Film analizinde, gösteren ve gösterilen arasındaki ilişki ile kültürel ve teknik kodların anlam yaratma süreçlerindeki rolü incelenmiştir. Wenders'in minimalist sinematografisi, tekrarlayan ritüelleri ve doğa ile insan arasındaki etkileşimi görsel metaforlar yoluyla işlediği bu filmde, renkler, mekânlar, ses tasarımı ve sembolik nesneler gibi unsurlar detaylı olarak analiz edilmiştir. Filmden seçilen sahneler ve motifler üzerinden, Budist ve Şintoist temaların modern şehir yaşamındaki yansımaları değerlendirilmiştir.

**Görsel Sembolizm ve Tekrar Eden Motifler:** Filmde tekrarlayan ağaç, su, ışık ve gölge motifleri, Budist ve Şintoist değerleri güçlü bir şekilde ifade etmektedir. Örneğin, Hirayama'nın sıkça ağaçlara bakarak düşüncelere daldığı sahneler, Budizm'in geçicilik kavramını (anicca) ve insan-doğa bağlantısını yansıtır. Ağaçlar, kökleriyle toprağa bağlılık ve dallarıyla gökyüzüne ulaşma sembolizmiyle, bireyin hem dünya hem de ruhani düzlemdeki yolculuğunu temsil eder. Şintoist geleneklerde ise ağaçlar, doğanın kutsallığını ve insan yaşamının doğal dünyayla uyumunu ifade eder. Benzer şekilde, filmde suyun sürekli bir arınma ve yenilenme unsuru olarak öne çıktığı görülür. Şintoist ritüellerde su, saflık ve temizliği simgelerken, filmde yağmur ve yansımalar üzerinden estetik bir anlatım sunar. Hirayama'nın yağmur altında sessizce yürüdüğü sahneler, modern yaşamın karmaşasına rağmen arınmanın ve dinginliğin mümkün olduğunu gösterir. Su, aynı zamanda yaşamın döngüsel doğasını ve sürekli değişimini hatırlatır.

**Kültürel Kodlar ve Günlük Ritüeller:** Hirayama'nın titiz temizlik ritüelleri, Şintoist arınma ve Budist farkındalık pratikleriyle uyumlu bir şekilde sunulmaktadır. Günlük görevlerini yerine getirirken sergilediği dikkat ve özen, sıradan işlerin bile bir tür meditasyona dönüşebileceğini gösterir. Budist düşünce, bireyin her anı bilinçli bir şekilde yaşaması gerektiğini savunur; Hirayama'nın işini yaparken tamamen "an"da kalışı, bu öğretinin somut bir örneğidir. Ayrıca, bu ritüellerin tekrarı, hayatın sadeliğinde anlam ve huzur bulmayı temsil eder. Filmde kullanılan mekânlar da kültürel kodların aktarılmasında önemli bir rol oynar. Tokyo'nun yoğun trafiği ve kaotik atmosferi, modern yaşamın karmaşıklığını simgelerken, Hirayama'nın doğayla çevrili sahnelerdeki dinginliği bu karmaşaya tezat oluşturur. Tapınak bahçeleri veya ağaçlarla çevrili yollar, Budist ve Şintoist öğretilerin aydınlanma ve doğayla uyum temalarını yansıtır.

**Renkler ve Kostümler:** Filmde kullanılan renk şemaları, karakterin içsel dünyasını ve filmin felsefi derinliğini görselleştirir. Pastel tonlar, özellikle açık mavi ve yeşil, dinginliği ve huzuru temsil eder. Tokyo'nun kaotik kent dokusuna rağmen bu renkler, Hirayama'nın sakin ve uyumlu karakterini vurgular. Kıyafetlerdeki sadelik ise Budist alçakgönüllülüğünü ve Şintoist doğaya saygının bir göstergesidir. Hirayama'nın işçi kıyafetleri, onun toplumsal statüsünden bağımsız olarak ruhsal bir dengeyi temsil ettiğini göstermektedir.

**Ses Tasarımı ve Müzik:** Filmde kullanılan doğal sesler, Budist ve Şintoist değerlerin aktarımında önemli bir role sahiptir. Rüzgârın sesi, kuş cıvıltıları ve suyun akışı, izleyiciyi doğanın dinginliğine ve ritmine bağlar. Bu işitsel unsurlar, modern dünyanın karmaşasına rağmen insanın doğayla uyum içinde bir yaşam sürebileceği fikrini pekiştirir. Hirayama'nın dinlediği müzikler de filmde bir meditasyon atmosferi yaratır. Sessizlik ise karakterin içsel huzurunu ve farkındalığını vurgulamak için ustaca kullanılmıştır.

**İkili Karşıtlıklar:** Filmde yer alan "konuşmak ve susmak", "modernite ve doğa" veya "tembellik ve çalışkanlık" gibi ikili karşıtlıklar, Budist ve Şintoist düşüncelerin dengeli yaşam anlayışını ortaya koyar. Hirayama'nın sessizliği, hem içsel huzurunu hem de modern dünyanın gürültüsüne karşı bir duruşu temsil eder. Çalışkanlığı ise hem fiziksel hem de ruhsal arınmanın bir yolu olarak sunulmaktadır.

*Perfect Days*, gündelik yaşamın sıradan eylemlerinde bile derin bir anlam bulmanın mümkün olduğunu gösterir. Hirayama'nın basit yaşam tarzı, modern dünyanın stresine rağmen huzurlu bir varoluşun nasıl sürdürülebileceğine dair güçlü bir mesaj verir. Budist "anicca" kavramı ve Şintoist doğa ile uyum temaları, karakterin günlük ritüelleri ve çevresiyle olan etkileşimi üzerinden izleyiciye aktarılır. Film, semboller ve kültürel kodları kullanarak bireyin varoluşsal sancılardan kurtulabileceği bir yaşam biçimini görselleştirir. Wim Wenders, minimalist sinematografi ve detaylı ses tasarımıyla modern sinemada sıkça rastlanmayan bir meditasyon alanı yaratır. Film, izleyiciye yalnızca estetik bir deneyim sunmakla kalmaz; aynı zamanda manevi ve felsefi bir yolculuğa çıkma fırsatı verir. Bu yönüyle *Perfect Days*, yalnızca Japon kültürüne özgü olmaktan çıkarak evrensel bir anlatıya dönüşür.

*Perfect Days*, hem estetik hem de felsefi bir derinlik sunarak izleyiciyi yaşamın anlamı üzerine düşünmeye davet eder. Film, Budist ve Şintoist değerlerin modern dünyadaki yansımalarını göstergebilimsel bir çerçevede işler. Hirayama'nın sıradan görünen hayatı, bireyin varoluşsal huzuru bulma çabasına dair güçlü bir metafor sunar. Görsel ve işitsel unsurlar, hayatın küçük ayrıntılarında bile anlam ve tatmin bulmanın mümkün olduğunu hatırlatır.