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Rhetorical Analysis

Perfect Days

“Perfect Days” is a Japanese-language film directed by Wim Wenders, released in 2023. The story follows Hirayama, a janitor in Tokyo, who leads a minimalist life, finding contentment in his daily routines and the small joys of life. The film delves into themes of solitude, mindfulness, and the meaning of a fulfilled existence. As of now, it holds a commendable IMDb rating of 8.1/10, reflecting positive reception among audiences.

The film employs ethos, pathos, and logos to illustrate the value of simplicity, reflection, and the profound beauty of mundane activities. Wenders uses visual storytelling and deliberate pacing to engage the audience emotionally while challenging their perceptions of what it means to live a “perfect” life. Critics have praised the film for its ability to evoke deep emotional responses. For example, Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian* described it as “a quietly profound meditation on life,” highlighting how Wenders captures the beauty of the everyday in a manner that resonates with viewers.

As a renowned filmmaker known for exploring existential and philosophical themes (such as in *Paris, Texas*, and *Wings of Desire*), Wenders brings significant credibility to the subject matter of “Perfect Days.” His reputation for thoughtful, human-centered narratives adds to the audience’s trust in the film’s exploration of life’s deeper meaning. The film’s Tokyo setting, with its blend of modernity and tradition, lends authenticity to the exploration of solitude in urban life. Wenders’ respectful depiction of Japanese culture—especially the quiet, respectful way in which Hirayama conducts his life—establishes the film’s ethos by avoiding Western cultural impositions. The credibility of the film is reinforced by its realistic portrayal of characters, particularly Hirayama, whose reserved, introspective nature and simple lifestyle feel authentic and relatable, particularly in the context of Japanese social norms.

Hirayama’s seemingly repetitive routines—cleaning public toilets, taking photographs of trees, and reading books—are presented in a way that evokes a sense of calm and meditative reflection. The audience is invited to find beauty in the ordinary, which stirs feelings of peace and contentment. The use of natural lighting, soft colors, and lingering shots of nature and cityscapes creates an atmosphere that is both soothing and contemplative. The film often slows down to let the audience appreciate the silence and stillness, emphasizing the emotional depth of small moments. David Ehrlich from *Indiewire* noted that the film “succeeds in conveying the message that life’s greatest pleasures lie in the small, often overlooked details,” which aligns with the film’s central themes.

Hirayama's isolation evokes a bittersweet emotional response. Though he is content in his solitude, the occasional interactions he has—whether with a fellow janitor, a homeless man, or his niece—reveal his underlying humanity and desire for connection. These moments of human interaction are emotionally impactful because they stand out in contrast to his otherwise quiet, solitary existence. Hirayama's fascination with photographing trees serves as a metaphor for growth, resilience, and the passage of time. This emotional connection to nature underscores the film's themes of mindfulness and finding beauty in simplicity.

The film follows a minimalist, almost meditative plot structure that aligns with its central theme: the idea that a fulfilling life does not require drama, material success, or external validation. The logical progression of Hirayama's life—where nothing extraordinary happens—reinforces the film's philosophical argument that contentment comes from within and can be found in the everyday. Wenders uses the film's slow pacing and deliberate lack of dramatic tension to make a logical argument about life's purpose. Rather than following traditional narrative arcs with conflict and resolution, "Perfect Days" invites viewers to question societal definitions of success and happiness. Hirayama's life, devoid of traditional markers of success (no family, no career ambitions), presents a counter-argument to modern, capitalist ideals of productivity and accomplishment. Hirayama's actions are consistently aligned with his beliefs in simplicity and mindfulness. His deliberate, methodical approach to cleaning and his quiet satisfaction with small pleasures—like a cassette tape of old songs—reflect a logical, internally coherent worldview that values presence and mindfulness over external achievement.

Trees, as mentioned earlier, play a central symbolic role in the film, representing life, endurance, and the natural flow of time. The cleanliness of public restrooms, which Hirayama maintains, serves as a metaphor for his desire to bring order and beauty to the world in small, unrecognized ways. The film maintains a serene, almost Zen-like tone throughout. There's a meditative quality to the pacing, which allows viewers to slow down and reflect on the moments unfolding on screen. This tranquil mood supports the film's message about finding peace in the present moment. Wenders uses slow pacing and long, unbroken shots to create a sense of time passing quietly and peacefully. The editing reflects the contemplative nature of the film, encouraging the audience to linger in each moment, much like Hirayama does in his own life.

"Perfect Days" effectively uses ethos, pathos, and logos to craft a cinematic meditation on life's quiet moments and the importance of mindfulness. The film's visual style, pacing, and thematic focus on simplicity create a persuasive argument that a "perfect" life is not one filled with excitement or material success but rather one where peace is found in the ordinary. The film challenges the audience to reconsider what it means to lead a meaningful life. Through Hirayama's journey, the film evokes a sense of introspection, encouraging viewers to appreciate the beauty in their daily routines and small joys. Richard Brody from *The New Yorker* summarizes it well, saying that Wenders' "Perfect Days" succeeds as a reflective piece of cinema that uses its quiet,

minimalist approach to challenge modern ideas of success, urging audiences to find contentment in the present.

References:

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