# Aisthesis

# Imperfect Everydays Beauty: Comfort Movies and the Healing of the Ordinary[*]

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**Abstract.** Arguing from everyday aesthetics, media studies, and visual culture, this article investigates the aesthetic and therapeutic virtuality of movies focused on everydayness' absorption in modest and mundane routines and rituals. Rather than providing alienated and solipsistic escapism or offering illusory and fanciful counter-narratives to the hyper-intensification of digital life, the examined films – Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* and Wim Wenders' *Perfect Days* – are considered as comfort movies: as homely healing practices that, through low-arousal form and narrative

predictability, sustain a sense of continuity and safety and enable processes of self-regulation and attunement with the prosaic rhythms of life. They exemplify for viewers a restorative normalcy and an embodied and embedded daily care and aesthetic labour that can be engaged in without effort or twists, but through the subtle recalibration of attention to things, places, beings, gestures, perceptions, states of mind, and moods, and through the weak artification, or imperfect "making special," of working and domestic activities and daily routines.

> Just a perfect day, drink Sangria in the park
> and then later, when it gets dark, we go home.
> Just a perfect day, feed animals in the zoo.
> Then later, a movie too and then home.
>
> Lou Reed

## 1. *Forms of absorption*

The modern Western tradition has often construed aesthetics as a domain detached from practical life, restricting its efficacy to the disinterested contemplation of artworks. Yet this detachment is historically contingent, rather than intrinsic. Ancient practices – from the Platonic notion of *pharmakon* to Aristotelian *katharsis*, and from Christian *agalma* to ritual healing images – bear witness to a longstanding belief in the transformative, even therapeutic, capacity of representation. Cultural history abounds with examples of such agencies: apotropaic images warding off harm, tragic and comic theatre reconfiguring affect, epic narration binding communities, or musical rites intensifying collective trance. In each case, the aesthetic does not merely mirror life; it intervenes in it, shaping perception, emotion, and relationality (Di Stefano [2017]; Giombini, Kvokačka [2021]; Saito [2022]).

The modern separation of art from religion, aesthetics from praxis, and the humanities from the natural sciences created an enduring epistemic regime in which images appeared incapable of acting concretely upon and with the world. The consequence was a disqualification of representation as an operative force: at best, it was seen to unify fragmented experience through symbolic mediation, but not to alter the conditions of embodied existence. Against this backdrop, the rediscovery of everyday aesthetics marks a decisive reorientation. It suggests that aesthetic experience is not confined to extraordinary artworks or events but permeates the gestures, rituals, and repetitions of daily life, characterized by normalcy, routine, habituality, and ordinariness (Saito [2007]; Leddy [2012]; Melchionne [2014]; Naukkarinen [2017]).

This reorientation has far-reaching implications. If aesthetic value can be found in practices such as cleaning, commuting, or preparing food, then the boundary

between art and life becomes porous. Everyday aesthetics thus challenges the reduction of the aesthetic to a rarefied category of judgment, proposing instead a broader ecology of sensibility where perception and valuation co-operate in all domains of living experience (Matteucci [2016]). Such a shift does not trivialize aesthetics; rather, it underscores the possibility that what appears prosaic can become "special" through forms of attention and awareness (Saito [2007]; [2017]).

In contemporary culture, this insight encounters an environment saturated with media technologies. Mobile phones, wireless infrastructures, and social platforms ensure that the ordinary is constantly mediated, recorded, and circulating (Goggin [2006]; Penz, Schupp [2022]). The everyday has become inseparable from images: a ceaseless stream of selfies, micro-videos, and snapshots configures a "hyper-ordinary" condition, where the very texture of life is both intensified and standardized by (pre- and re-) mediation. Scholars of visual culture have described this environment as postmedial or post-cinematic, even post-digital, stressing how the categories of professional versus amateur, or artistic versus vernacular, collapse into a continuum of mediated practices (Coleman, [2011]; Eugeni [2015]).

The implications for aesthetics are profound. Experiences that once unfolded silently or remained unmarked are now framed, filtered, and shared in real time. These practices are not merely expressive; they generate new forms of subjectivity, relationality and sociability, and even ethical orientation (Duncum [2002]). To theorize everyday aesthetics today is therefore to address the entanglement of embodied routines with digital regimes of visibility and circulation: the living everyday experience is embodied, embedded and situated, but also by the devices, platforms, and infrastructures that shape how perception is distributed and how significance is attributed (Lehtinen [2020]). This double articulation – embodied and mediated – places everyday aesthetics in a productive dialogue with the long history of therapeutic and transformative functions attributed to representation. As Stiegler has shown on several occasions (see Stiegler [2013]), the pharmacological model is particularly resonant: images, like drugs, can heal or harm depending on dosage, context, and mode of reception and incorporation. In the digital environment, where images of mourning, illness, ecological disaster, or intimate ritual are endlessly posted and shared, one witnesses the reactivation of ancient dynamics under new technological conditions (Hjorth, Burgess [2014]; Pardo, Morcate [2016]). Representation is not merely contemplative; it is affective, relational, and at times therapeutic, though also potentially alienating or toxic.

Although not interested in new technologies, digital devices and the experiences they enable, everyday aesthetics brings to this debate a vocabulary for describing how ordinary practices – rituals of care, repetitions of labour, attentiveness to minimal variations – can acquire aesthetic and therapeutic valence

without being subsumed under the category of high art. The cleaning of a space, the preparation of a meal, or the repetition of a daily walk are not merely functional acts; they may generate a sense of fullness, presence, or consolation. When mediated through film or digital images, such acts can become communicable, sharable, and pedagogical by an informal way of learning-by-seeing, training others in modes of attention that counteract the fragmentation of contemporary experience (Highmore [2011]; Naukkarinen [2017]). In this sense, everyday aesthetics converges with the concerns about the therapeutic dimensions of images and representations, which requires precisely a focus on the ordinary, where the line between aesthetic pregnancy and practical efficacy can blur. The everyday is where *pharmakon, katharsis*, and *agalma* persist, or return in contemporary (and no less ambivalent) forms: in the aestheticization or artification (Naukkarinen and Saito [2012]) of routine, in the cathartic repetition of gesture, in the small things or artifacts and images that acquire symbolic resonance. Far from being irrelevant, these practices may reconstitute and reactivate the potentialities of perception, imagination, and relation that modern epistemologies and discourses had declared inaccessible to the aesthetic domain.

The task of contemporary aesthetics and media theory is thus to recognize the pregnancy of the everyday repetitiveness and monotony as an existential, aesthetic and ethical value for the person who engages with them. This does not entail romanticizing ordinary life, nor collapsing it into spectacle, but recognizing its ambivalent or pharmacological potential. As digital media saturate daily existence, the challenge is to discern how the representation of anonym ordinary and unassuming routines can mobilize absorptive motifs in the sphere of life, how can interest and engage us and support attention rather than distraction, relation rather than isolation – and denial of the beholder –, care rather than commodification. It is here that cinema, with its capacity to render visible the subtle textures of time, repetitions, and gestures, provides an excellent lens. By attending to the minimal and monotone, films that dwell on the everyday can reactivate attention and care and be therapeutic.

Inspiring by Michael Fried (2008) and Stanley Cavell's (1979) well know thesis about absorption, the everyday and painting, photography and cinema, and literature, we can say at some length that the ordinary world in which we live is naturally disclosed to us while we are engrossed or attentively absorbed with it during an action, a feeling, a state of mind. Even more important for the consequences on how we understand experience is what wrote Benjamin (1935-1936) in his seminal writings on the work of art and the mechanical reproduction of the images. The repetitive, flat and low-arousal everyday experience depicted produce absorption – *Sammlung, kontemplative Versenkung, Aufmersksamkeit, Einverleibun*g, namely concentration, contemplative immersion, attention, absorption, or the perceptual and physiological situation

that Benjamin linked to the experience of canonical art, particularly landscape painting or lyric poetry. Benjamin contrasts this phenomenological palette with that of the mundane experience of architecture or cinema, and Dadaist poetry, designed as *Zerstreung* and *Ablenkung,* as distraction and diversion, and as habits and casual glances too.

The switch from aesthetic absorption facing a work art to absorption by the everyday is important: the entire model of experience as hypersensitivity can be questioned. This model is the true historical signature of Modernity and Postmodernity and it is based on excitement and intensification, electrification and acceleration, on surprise, shock, trauma and disruption. What once concerned the aesthetic experience of art now engages a living aesthetic experience of the world, and repetitiveness, routines, habits, even boredom, can be special and activate absorption and attention – a variable attention multifaceted and multidirectional, neither specifically thematic nor meta-operational, at once technical and instrumental, object-oriented and environmental.

The consequences and prospects opened by this shift are significant, and we will try to follow some of them that are useful for discussing the relationship between aesthetics and therapy.

## 2. *Comfort media*

Approaching comfort as an aesthetic and media category means examining the micro-ecologies of reassurance that underpin contemporary viewing. Comfort is not sentimental sedation; it is an active modulation of affect. Within the emotional spectrum, it lies between sorrow and relief-steadying what the first agitates and what the second releases. If catharsis purifies and refines perceptions and judgment, comfort restores through duration, functioning as a *pharmakon* that heals by repetition, dosage, and rhythm rather than rupture.

Aesthetically, comfort relies on patterned recurrence and recognisable rhythm – a ritournelle (Deleuze, Guattari [1980]; Grosz [2008]). Repetition here is not mechanical but musical: it transforms monotony into pulse and re-aligns perception with temporal continuity. In this perspective, repetition disciplines attention, as well as it trains perception to find balance in continuity rather than climax. Comfort, in this sense, is the art of staying more than of moving, and it is a relation category.

Media studies demonstrate how such concept operates in practice. Viewers often return to familiar films or series to regulate stress, using predictability to restore equilibrium. Re-watching well-known narratives reduces cognitive effort and produces affective rhythms that can be trusted (Grady, Eden, Wolfers [2025]), a gesture that resembles reaching for comfort food as a way to seek

reassurance (Troisi, Gabriel [2011]; Russell, Levy [2012]). Comfort viewing becomes a micro-ritual of control, adjusting emotional temperature through familiar forms and atmospheres.

Communication psychology extends this intuition by describing *comfort media* as experiential triggers intentionally chosen to reduce arousal, mitigate negative affect, and foster a perceived sense of safety (Wolfers, Schneider [2021]). Such experiences are positive in valence and low in intensity; their effect depends on coherence between viewer and environment (Kiknadze, Leary [2021]). Rather than passivity, they involve recalibration – a perceptual synchrony between external order and inner pulse (Jones, Wirtz [2006]).

Because media are accessible, inexpensive, and solitary, they have become one of the most common tools of affect regulation (Nabi *et al*. [2022]; *NECSUS* [2024]). During the pandemic, predictable series and nostalgic reruns functioned as companions that helped viewers re-create continuity amid uncertainty (Fingerman *et al*. [2021]; Yu, Alizadeh [2024]). Such turn to repetition has been described as a practice of self-care, a gesture that is less a deterritorialising escape than a ritual of maintenance, a way to re-territorialize and re-inhabit the present through predictable rhythm (Castle [2019]).

From such theoretical reflections arise a cinematic articulation of comfort: the comfort movie. The "comfort watch" (used interchangeably with comfort film or comfort movie) provides a sense of safety and security by distracting the viewer from unpleasant emotions or situations (Kaurr [2021]). Predictability and familiarity, often dismissed as anti-artistic, here gain aesthetic fitness as potential for an existential and ethical happiness. Their cyclical patterns – reconciliation, procedural closure, domestic routine (Miller [2008]; Saito [2017]) – organise feelings and moods as much as narrative. Through these repetitions, spectators experience what Stevens (2020) calls narrative homeostasis: the restoration of order through recurrence. In romantic comedies, cooking or renovation shows, or lifestyle formats, the rhythm of repetition operates like a metronome for feeling, affirming that chaos remains containable.

Comfort also explains the enduring appeal of formulaic genres. Disney romances, for example, reaffirm emotional order through predictable moral structures that offer stability in uncertain times (Chatraporn, Handrich [2012]). Holiday films rely on the same principle. Their cyclical return and moral clarity create what Rutledge (2020) describes as the *homecoming effect* – a ritual reassurance that goodness will prevail. Such predictability is not a flaw but an aesthetic feature that encodes safety and recognition.

Comfort media, however, are not confined to these genres. Their logic extends across platforms and forms: the deliberate choice of slow pacing, ambient sound, and repetition provides the low-arousal stability associated with recovery experiences (Reinecke [2016]). Puijk's (2021) study of *Slow TV* demonstrates

how minimal editing and real-time observation transform everyday actions-train rides, knitting, dishwashing-into collective rituals of attention. The pleasure derives precisely from uneventfulness: an expanded temporality that lets perception breathe.

The passage from comfort media to comfort movies marks a shift from psychological function to aesthetic and existential form, echoing Francesco Casetti's recent reflections on cinema as an environmental device that reorganises experience which implies an ambivalent concept of *comfort*: as exoneration implies a departure from an anxious or repetitive situation, compensation implies some kind of loss or deficit that must be rewarded. Both provide relief by reacting to worries and threats, namely linked to the everyday (Casetti [2023]).

In the perspective adopted here, comfort movies are neither escapist fantasies nor austere minimalisms. They create environments of perceptual steadiness where rhythm, familiarity, and repetition generate composure. Narrative conflict is muted; continuity prevails. Long takes, stable compositions, warm or muted light, and environmental soundscapes replace dramatic crescendo with ambient presence. Time unfolds on the scale of breathing-measured, cyclical, humane. In these films, attention relaxes without losing focus; repetition becomes ritual, and ritual becomes care.

Pleasure lies not in flight but in re-entry. The predictability that once seemed banal becomes a condition of safety: it allows viewers to loosen vigilance while remaining engaged. In this state, cinematic rhythm performs a therapeutic function. Low arousal and recognisable repetition regulate perception and emotion, offering viewers a gentle rehearsal of stability in a culture that rewards overstimulation.

Comfort movies thus extend the theory of comfort media into an aesthetic practice. Their slow temporality and subdued dramaturgy create the right conditions for attentional recovery. They demonstrate that repetition can heal perception by synchronising it with the world's rhythm. At a time when speed is valorised as self-efficacy and vitality, such films teach the value of calm: an ethics of attention grounded in form. Through their quiet persistence, they recover the ancient promise of images – the capacity to act upon and with life, not through excess but through grace.

## 3. *Poetics of Attention:* Paterson

The aesthetic-therapeutic framework sketched so far finds its clearest cinematic expression in works that elevate routine to revelation. Both *Paterson* and *Perfect Days* belong to a minor, contemplative lineage of cinema that refuses spectacle and seeks embodied meaning in repetition. They are not films about events but

about continuities – about what persists when nothing happens. Through their quietly patterned rhythms, these films enact the logic of comfort cinema: they soothe not by sentimental reassurance but by rehabilitating perceptual attention, by teaching the spectator to see again, and be alive.

Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* (2016) opens with the rhythm of waking. Each morning the titular bus driver rises, kisses his partner, walks to work chewing and mulling over words to write, drives his route through the New Jersey city that shares his name and the title of the William Carlos Williams's eponym five-volume poem (1946-1958), writes-like Frank O'Hara (1964) – a few lines of his ''lunch poems'' during the pauses, and returns home. The film repeats this sequence across seven days, with only micro-variations – shifts of light, fragments of overheard dialogue, subtle changes in Laura's domestic experiments and homely techniques. The repetition is neither (too much) ironic nor oppressive; it constitutes the film's structure, its slow heartbeat.

What distinguishes *Paterson* from earlier depictions of the everyday in cinema (from Ozu's ordered domesticity to Kiarostami's meditative drives) is its refusal of transcendence (Krause [2024]). The routine does not lead to crisis or enlightenment and a consequent existential and narrative twist; it remains intact, dignified in its ordinariness. The cinematic metronome synchronising viewer and character and his viewed world is the day-by-day rhythm of working, eating, walking and writing sitting on a bench facing in a public garden-just like Hirayama, the protagonist of *Perfec Days*, using this visual *dispositif* enabling both deliberate and contemplative, or lazy and inattentive, isolation and presence in the public arena (Jakob [2017]). We should point out that the bench corresponds to the motor vehicles used by the main characters of *Paterson* and *Perfect Days*: the bus and the minivan are mobile medial prostheses that enable protected horizontal observation and contemplation, a true technological embodiment of the ancient scopic desire to immerse oneself in the viewed world (Eugeni [2023]). Jarmusch's long takes, minimal camera movement, and sparse sound design establish an ambience of attention. The bus engine, the city hum, the murmurs of passengers form a soundscape of gentle continuity. The viewer's breathing seems to match the film's tempo – a physiological correspondence at the root of comfort aesthetics.

Paterson's genius loci poetry, inspired by William Carlos Williams's poem about the New Jersey town, mirrors this form. His verses, projected on-screen in handwriting (penned by Ron Padgett, an award-winning member of the New York School), resemble mindfulness exercises: simple observations transmuted by rhythm.

«I'm in the house. / It's nice out: warm / sun on cold snow. / First day of spring / or last of winter. / My legs run down / the stairs and out / the door, my top / half here typing». The act of writing becomes an analogue to the spectator's perceptual statement and act of seeing: both are embodied and situated exercises in

patient noticing. This slow pedagogy of attention, central to the aesthetics of the everyday, functions as a therapeutic process. The film trains the mind to dwell on minimal difference – the slight deviation that keeps repetition alive. The huge recurrence and variety of the twin motif in Paterson invites viewers to recognise patterns formed by repetition and to appreciate differences between individual occurrences, becoming more skilfully slowed down and increasingly sensitive to nuances and comfortable with them. Furthermore, it displays that this phenomenological logic lies at the core of life, vision and poetry: repetition is the fundamental organising principle, from the regularities of rhythm and rhyme to structures based on recurring and unfolding perceptions, actions, images and words (Szlukovényi [2023]).

The structure of *Paterson* literalises the dynamics of comfort media outlined earlier. Predictability provides safety; micro-variation maintains interest. The daily recurrence of gestures – tying shoelaces, opening the lunchbox, walking the same streets, go the same bar – creates a comforting narrative homeostasis, the maintenance of equilibrium through patterned return. The spectator experiences reassurance not through resolution but through continuity, made up of nuances and variations.

Yet comfort here is not complacency. The film's gentleness contains vulnerability. The loss of Paterson's notebook, chewed by his dog, Marvin, momentarily shatters the fragile equilibrium – and it seems to parody the infamous song *I wanna be your dog* of Iggy Pop (*Funhouse*, 1969, described by Lester Bangs as «fairly monotonous – [but] the new monotony is so intensely sustained that you can't get bored»), evocated in the movie as the "Sexiest Man Alive" (and subject of the magnificent Jarmusch's documentary *Gimme shelter*, also from 2016), and to invert the myth recounted by Pliny the Elder about Apelles (*Nat. Hist.*, XXXV, 36, 102-104), who throws a sponge over the foaming mouth of a dog he is unable to paint, but, by chance, this gesture of anger and failure leads to completion of perfect mimetic art. Paterson's silence and subsequent acceptance recall what Burleson and Goldsmith (1996) describe as comforting reappraisal – the emotional shift that restores coherence after disruption. The following encounter with a Japanese poet, who gifts him a blank notebook, functions as narrative and affective reset. The circle closes; rhythm resumes. To put in commonplace – every ending is a new beginning.

The film's attentive care for detail and the ordinary includes neglect, dirt and muck too. The poem read by the 10-year-old little girl (written by Jarmusch himself, echoing an infamous William's poem, "Rain") to Paterson says: «Water falls, / making pools in the asphalt, / dirty mirrors with clouds / and buildings inside. / It falls on the roof of my house. / It falls on my mother, and on my hair. / Most people call it rain». The child-like poem depicts a kind of a miniature *effet-tableau* of a prosaic ontological narcissism in which humans, the natural

beauty of weather phenomenon – rain and the Great Falls – and the industrial grit of the ex-"silk city" streets coexist in a troubled surface of a natural reflecting medium, and one cannot distinguish between seeing things and being seen by them. This naïve poetic melody captures a gentle indifference between domestic and urban spaces and landscapes, and between beings and things. And it sounds like a light-hearted variation on the melancholic ending of Joyce's *The Dead*, the last terrific short story of *Dubliners* (1914): «Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. […] His soul swooned as he heard the snow falling through the universe and falling, like the descent of their end, upon all the living and the dead».

Visually, Jarmusch deploys symmetry and balance to translate comfort into form. Framing is centred; editing is minimal. Light diffuses softly across the screen, creating a visual analogue of the film's modest emotional tone. The absence of musical score emphasises the everyday acoustics of footsteps, engines, rain. This sonic minimalism – common to both *Paterson* and *Perfect Days*, which we will focus on later – embodies the shift from dramatic spectacle to sensory environment. The field sound, mixed with the ambient music created by SQÜRL (Carter Logan and Jim Jarmusch), does not illustrate emotion; it regulates it.

From this point of view, the movie presents also a poietic – from the Greek *poiein*, "to make" – of care as therapy. The protagonist's partner, Laura (Golshifteh Farahani), personifies a complementary idea of artification as craft: her way of making things special by repetitions and variations does not involve the linguistic transcoding of the poetry, as the man does, currently paying attention to small individual things – a box of matches Ohio Blue Tip, metaphoric topic of a "Love poem" – without changing them materially, and then translating and transcribing them into poetic ekphrastic miniatures of tiny epiphanies and raw materials. She, on the contrary, literally writes on the things of the world, which become supports for an expanded, invasive and parasitic decorative writing, like the polka dots and repetitive patterns of the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, which create immersive and surrounding environments and experiences of self-obliteration and mantric therapy.

If Paterson writes about ephemeral and routinary phaenomena, Laura overwrites mundane things: if the male poetic care shifts the artification from the *making of* to the *meaning about*, the female poietic manufacturing embodies a *making over* which entangle the differences between subject, objects and environment and abolishes the distinctions between monotony and creativity, self-expression and comfort, repetition and regeneration, between amateurism, vernacularism and fetishism. Marvin's portraits, cupcakes, fabrics and all everyday objects shaped and decorated by Paula are unpretentious but healing agents that affirm the functional and existential potentiality of the lack of be-

atification – a milieu hand-made where the ordinary kitsch can be a mean for care and well-being, a comfort medium for projection and protection. Focused observation of and about the world and expanded expression over it are two sides of the same coin, or rather two complemental low arousal modalities of the same prosaic and homely poetic of comfortable care.

### 4. *Care labour:* Perfect days

If *Paterson* locates comfort in routine's rhythm, *Perfect Days* (Wenders, 2023, co-written with Takuma Takasaki) radicalises it through every day's ritual. Hirayama, a Tokyo janitor who cleans public toilets, lives alone, reads Faulkner (*Wild Palms*), Highsmith (*Eleven*, and *Terrapin*, a short story of cruelty in family relationships, is evocated by his niece) and Aya Kōda (*Tree*), listens to cassette tapes (see the list on the movie's site[1]), while driving to work, eats in the same restaurant, photographs trees sitting on a bench, waters plants, washes at home or in traditional public baths, always celebrated in the classic book of Junichiro Tanizaki, *In praise of shadows* (1933).

*Perfect Days* reports and repeats the daily routines with obsessive fidelity, using the pattern itself as narrative. Wenders's camera, mostly handheld, observes Hirayama's gestures with devotional patience each movement – wringing a cloth, folding a towel, aligning a toilet brush – is executed with quiet precision. The repetition converts labour into liturgy; cleaning becomes a practice of care. Comfort here is inseparable from attention. The viewer, like Hirayama, learns to perceive subtle variations in light and sound: the reflection of the sun in a bucket, the rustle of leaves above the toilet roof. The film's rhythm aligns with the low-arousal continuum or eventlessness identified in comfort media as we have outlined them so far. Scenes unfold in near-real time; cuts are few; the score is minimal. Ambient sound – running water, sweeping, traffic background noise – provides a sonic equivalent or correlative of calm and shapes a contemplative auditory ecology. Hirayama's routine is not mechanical or alienated; it is mindful. Each repetition contains minor deviation: a smile exchanged, a new encounter, a shift in weather. These micro-changes sustain and arrange vitality within stability.

If we can say that the aesthetic quality of everyday environments – all anthropized, from his home, to the roads travelled by van, from to public toilets and gardens, from the restaurant to the second-hand bookshop, in short, to the practiced places frequented every day by the protagonist – is inseparable from the moral quality of daily life of Hirayama, we can notice too that his

1    https://www.perfectdays-movie.jp/en/collection/

ordinary engagement with the world, clarifying how the micro-perceptions of film – light, surfaces, noises – constitute a form of continuous sensory tuning and accordance. The film's title, *Perfect Days*, signals this philosophy of sufficiency.

The film was provisionally titled *Komorebi*, a Japanese term for the light that filters through trees (Müştak Sevindik [2025]). This variation of light and shadow is what Hirayama photographs during lunch breaks with a vintage and inexpensive, non-professional analogue camera (an Olympus of the iconic XA series, designed by Maitani Yoshihisa), sometimes not looking through the lens and shooting, thus relying on chance – of the embodied and situated simple technique, of the optical unconscious of the technical instrument, and of the changing subject and environment – to capture the transitory. This choice isn't a *sprezzatura* but rather a self-obliteration and it is both ethical and aesthetic: a digital device, such as a smartphone, thanks to the automatic corrective assistance of algorithms and software, would have produced better and embellished images, perhaps technically perfect, but lacking in the sense of the imperfect beauty of the ordinary situation. Every week, the amateur photographer accurately selects and stores the printed picture in b/w in boxes. Hirayama's posture, pre-digital and technologically outdated and obsolete but not nostalgic, testimonies the deep affinity between the protagonist's way of seeing and the contemplative documentary as a practice of archiving to preserve ordinary memory (Purvis [2024]), not to fetishise but potentially to re-enact it just as the audiocassettes and the second-hand handbooks.

Perhaps, the production title *Komerobi* isolated the profane illumination sought by the protagonist as the heart and key event of the film and also ran the risk of emphasising aestheticisation or exoticism, even escapism. The final title clearly echoes that of infamous Lou Reed's song (*Transformer*, 1972), which, as we read in many interviews, was listened on the set during filming as all the other songs and was therefore radically diegetic. Not by chance, an instrumental piano version, "Perfect day (Komerobi version)" executed by Patrick Watson, can be heard during the closing credits; this separation (diegetic cassette music vs non-diegetic credits music) is crucial: diegetic songs create the character's intimate sonic world and then the viewers consonance and sympathy, while the closing non-diegetic piano version performs a reflective coda for the audience. However, and that's is capital, the plural form of the movie's title, *Perfect Days*, serves two purposes: it serialises the ephemeral and the non-extraordinary ordinary, always on the verge of turning into its opposite in Reed's raw and transgressive sublime and – at least for us, Western viewers (Saito [2014]) – in the aesthetized escapism of *Komerobi*, and highlights non-exceptional repetitiveness as the core of the aesthetics of comfort experienced everyday by Hirayama, driven and practised by his routine.

Perfection here is not transcendence or transgression but adequacy: the fullness of a day lived attentively. Ordinary existence isn't here project, construction or adventure; it is not seeking an expansive achievement, but it regulates a protective attitude for the reality and the rhythmical being in the world and the being with others, not only human beings but natural entities, things and technical objects.

Mobilizing Greimas's *De l'Imperfection* (1987) within the contemporary framework of comfort media theory allows for a more nuanced understanding of how Hirayama and Paterson perform what we might call a therapeutic poetics of comfort. Greimas famously argues that the sensible dimension of experience is linked with imperfection: imperfection resists closure and totality and embraces both the unfinished and the recurring and is like a springboard that projects us from insignificance to meaning. Hirayama's daily routine is not an escape from the world but a disciplined openness to micro-ruptures and variations – the unpredictable gestures of strangers, light filtering through leaves, the uneven texture of analogue photography. The comfort the film generates is therefore neither passive nor regressive, but it is active comfort, a state produced not by eliminating disturbances but by attending to them with gentleness and ethical grounding, at work in all ordinary activities. Paterson articulates a related yet distinct structure of imperfection: his life is equally repetitive and soothing, but his attuned attention to little things, creatures and events transforms the everyday imperfection into linguistic form and in the embodied meanings of the poetry. In *Perfect Days*, Hirayama's job exemplifies a practice of sustained and embodied attention, where care becomes a quotidian aesthetics of ritual maintenance rather than a teleology of efficiency. Similarly, Paterson's routine care for his environment and relationships reflects a poetics of the ordinary in which repetition generates subtle variation – an imperfect and persistent texture of life rather than a perfectible project.

Across both films, care labour is a form of agencement of the everyday repetitive incompleteness, aligning with comfort media theory's emphasis on low-intensity affect and the soothing recognition of the world's unresolved, ongoing nature. Where comfort-media theory often emphasizes predictability as its core logic, integration of Greimas' imperfection reveals a more nuanced possibility: comfort as ethical and aesthetical dwelling in the reality's minor dissonances and fissures. This shift helps think of comfort not merely as emotional management and self-regulation or a surreptitious neo-liberal subjectification (Illouz [2008]; Han [2015]), but as an aesthetic encounter with vulnerability – a quiet but resilient attention, a fragile but persistent attunement to the imperfect.

*Perfect Days* transforms maintenance into meaning, echoing feminist discussions of care labour as a form of creative attention and potential emancipation (Tronto [2013]; Puig de la Bellacasa [2017]); however, the risk of aestheticisa-

tion, which removes the social invisibility of the humble workers and marginalised people, and the difference between working time and leisure and private time, remains and has been noted (Oliveira [2025]).

Hirayama's ritualised gestures are enactments of attentional dwelling and his sanitation work is a form of maintenance phenomenology, bridging care practices, aesthetic sensibility non-art oriented and artification, understood as fabrication and application of special tools for mundane and ethical tasks concerning the public and the personal well-being. The reduction of narrative to gesture recalls the spiritual minimalism of Bresson and Ozu (the square format of the 4.3 aspect ratio is an homage to him), but inflected by the ecological consciousness of our time. The public bathrooms Hirayama cleans – designed by leading architects of the Tokyo Toilet Program, as Tadao Ando, Kengo Kuma, Shigeru Ban, Toyo Ito[2] – become places where beauty and functionality meet. And where the pharmacological ambiguity of reception and perception is renegotiated: for a citizen, they are simple apparatuses just to use, but for those who look and learn to observe and maintain them, they become assemblages unique of nature, technology, intimacy and environment, even of gaming from afar. Each surface polished to reflection affirms the film's ethics of attention: that care is itself a form of creation without a product, but a dwelling for the others (Sevgi, Özeren [2025]).

## 5. *Play it again (or by way of conclusions)*

Both *Paterson* and *Perfect Days* translate the logic of comfort media into cinema, yet their comfort is never escapist, exotic or aestheticised and an end in itself, merely beautiful or appreciable as such: the comfort demands the spectator's patience, even discipline; it is typically well-known, safe and reliable, but it may be monotonous and square, grey, even boring (Naukkarinen [2017]). The low-arousal experience they produce is not distraction but absorption, as we discussed before with Fried (2008), and as Saito (2022) also comments on Japanese care activities for objects and places, for whom the everyday includes homework and occupational or maintenance work and what routinely and inconspicuously happens in a private or publicly available space – if Fried's exemplary case study is a lightbox by Jeff Wall, *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999, 187×351 cm. Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis), Saito evokes the documentary *Koolhaas Houselife* (directed and produced by Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, 2013) for discuss the resilient task for clean the unusual house designed by the architect for a French

2    https://tokyotoilet.jp/en

family. Both movies propose a pedagogy of perception – a comforting aesthetics where repetition becomes a method of seeing, doing and living.

Seen together, the two films articulate complementary aspects of the comfort aesthetic. *Paterson* is structured by rhythm; *Perfect Days* by ritual. The former explores internal equilibrium through creative repetition; the latter externalises it through manual care. Both stage comfort as active attention – a discipline of the senses rather than a refuge from them.

Formally, their similarities are striking. Both use long takes, soft natural lighting, subdued colour palettes, and diegetic sound. Both centre solitary men whose work connects them to anonymous others: passengers, strangers, clients – and to more-than-human beings and entities, things and environment. Both end where they begin, closing the loop without closure. The cyclical structure itself embodies the aesthetic of comfort: a return that neither resolves nor transforms but confirms.

In our opinion, Jarmusch and Wenders' movies restore to cinema the agentive capacity that modern aesthetics had exiled – the ability of images to act upon and with life. In *Paterson*, comfort arises from the steady observation of the quotidian; in *Perfect Days*, from the ethical grace of repetition. In an era of acceleration, *Paterson* and *Perfect Days* slow perception and attention to a human scale. They invite the spectator to share the measured vision and pace of their protagonists, to rediscover continuity as a form of aesthetic and existential solace. Their therapeutic power does not lie in content but in form: in the modulation of time, sound, and gesture that re-entrains and re-arrange the viewer's body to the world's rhythm. The comfort they provide is not escape but re-alignment – a cinematic re-education of absorption that transforms routine into revelation without surprises but relief and regeneration.

To speak of comfort in aesthetic terms is to return to one of the oldest intuitions of Western thought: that representation – namely here, cinematographic – can be agent of aesthetic and ethical transformation of the ways of seeing and being in the world. Yet in the contemporary mediascape – permeated by screens, algorithms and techno-habits and micro-rituals of gestural repetitions – such pharmacological function can be reframed within the linguistic and stylistic category of comfort movies.

Across everyday practices, digital media, and cinema, comfort operates as a counter-narrative to the contemporary culture of acceleration and of the attention economy. Featuring continuities and patterns rather than crises and breaks, comfort temporal agency is restorative rather than productive.

*Paterson* and *Perfect Days* offer exemplary enactments of this aesthetic ethics: routines and rituals, do not close meaning but keep it open through duration, reiteration and repetition. Jarmusch's bus driver and Wenders's janitor are not ascetics withdrawing from life; they are practitioners of artification or, in other

words, of making special by mundane attention. Their gestures – writing, cleaning, walking – model an everyday form of (self) care that operates through unexciting absorption. The viewer, drawn into these recursive actions, experiences comfort as recalibration, a form of perceptual attunement that quietly contests the overstimulation of digital culture and algorithmic life.

In this perspective, the comfort movie acquires an ethical and ecological dimension that operates through the audiovisual *dispositif*, generating safety, resonance, and rhythmic coherence. Its force lies in its resistance to fragmentation and distraction, in its modest defence of slowness and presence as forms of care. Against the background noise of endless novelty, comfort cinema teaches the radical gesture of staying-with things and beings, with images, with gestures, with places and time.

In this sense, the aesthetics of comfort converges with the ancient therapeutic paradigm of the *pharmakon*. Images soothe not by removing discrepancy or discomfort but by giving it rhythm, not by fixing the ontological and existential imperfection but by rendering it bearable and significant. The comforted spectator emerges neither distracted nor purified, but re-attuned – an absorbed subject capable of attention and presence in and with the world.

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