



# Ordinary People

A noteworthy debut for writer-director Vladimir Perisic, an abstractly brutal take on Yugoslav conflict.

By [JORDAN MINTZER](#)



**With:** With: Relja Popovic, Boris Isakovic, Miroslav Stevanovic. (Serbian dialogue)

**A noteworthy debut for writer-director Vladimir Perisic, Serbian war pic "Ordinary People" is the latest adherent to French helmer Bruno Dumont's school of minimalist aesthetics and barbaric human behavior as it follows a squad of soldiers who spend a summer afternoon massacring hordes of unarmed men. Abstractly brutal take on Yugoslav conflict will likely turn off some viewers, while others will appreciate Perisic's unquestionable talent for finding beauty within bloodshed. Wild Bunch's landmine could attract adventurous distribs willing to take the step.**

A simple and lengthy opening shot presents 20-year-old career soldier Dzoni (Relja Popovic) waking in his dingy army barracks in the early morning hours. At once mundane and foreboding, the scene exemplifies Perisic's matter-of-fact approach to the onslaught of violence, which is always seen from his protag's naive p.o.v.



Dzoni and the rest of his platoon are soon shuttled off on a rickety bus toward an unknown destination, while a radio broadcast announces that terrorists have taken over several villages throughout the country. That's about it for plot. Who the terrorists are and what they're fighting for are deliberately omitted, as are the exact location and time setting (though the plot clearly seems inspired by the recent wars in Bosnia and Kosovo).

Arriving at an abandoned army outpost, the troops and their stone-faced commander (Boris Isakovic) sit around, take naps, smoke cigarettes and seem to be waiting for an inevitable battle with the terrorists.

But the fight never comes. Instead, they begin receiving truckloads of casually dressed prisoners, whom they go about offing in routine, cold-blooded fashion. While Dzoni is initially appalled by the events, he soon begins to kill with an almost psychotic relish.

A laureate of Cannes' Cinefondation program, Serbian-born Perisic reveals both the subtle beauties of a quiet afternoon in the country and the way in which something as horrifying as mass execution can appear, on the surface, to be completely banal. By documenting Dzoni's every last gesture, Perisic pushes the viewer to search for meaning or morality behind his character's acts. But the only conclusion seems to be that such acts are hopeless, unfathomable and beyond human control.

Perisic's staged hyperrealism also bears the mark of contemporary artists like Jeff Wall or Rineke Dijkstra. Film could play just as well, if not better, as an installation piece.

Impeccable tech package is highlighted by d.p. Simon Beaufils' crisp, superbly lit exteriors and Frederic Heinrich's richly atmospheric sound design.

Ordinary People

France-Serbia-Switzerland

PRODUCTION: A Pyramide Distribution (in France) release of a TS Prods., Arte France Cinema (France)/Trilema (Serbia)/Prince Film (Switzerland) production. (International sales: Wild Bunch, Paris.) Produced by Anthony Doncque, Milena Pylo, Gilles Sacuto. Directed by Vladimir Perisic. Screenplay, Perisic, Anne Winocour.

CREW: Camera (color), Simon Beaufils; editor, Martial Salomon; production designer, Diana Radosavljevic; costume designer, Irena Marjanov; sound (Dolby Digital), Mathieu Chatagnon, Olivier Goinard, Francois Mereu; sound designer, Frederic Heinrich; assistant director, Rajko Petrovic; casting, Boban Dedic. Reviewed at Cinematheque Francaise, Paris, May 4, 2009. (In Cannes Film Festival -- Critics' Week.) Running time: 80 MIN.

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