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[Sydney Film Festival 2010] Film Review: Ordinary People

In [Arts](#), [Film Reviews](#), [Sydney Film Festival 2010](#) on **June 6, 2010** at **8:28 pm**



[Ordinary People](#) (FRANCE-SERBIA-SWITZERLAND)

Next screening: Monday June 7 / 9.00pm / Dendy Opera Quays

Serbian writer/director **Vladimir Perisic**'s debut feature is quietly devastating; a slow-burning fuse, that ends with an implosion of the heart and mind. Its object is the everyday inhumanity of war, and its laboratory is a day in the life of fresh young army recruit Dzoni (**Relja Popovic**) – who looks like he cannot be more than 18, and carries himself with the awkward, unsure gait of 16.

The day begins routinely, with room inspection, bathing, breakfast in the canteen. Then the seven men in 'third unit' are sent on a mission – but with no idea where or why they are going, Dzoni's anxiety begins to build. On the bus trip, a radio crackles with army news bulletins about 'a state of emergency', a 'terrorist threat', and the need to avert a 'humanitarian crisis'. They arrive at an

abandoned collection of buildings in the countryside, where they escape the heat, sitting under trees, splashing themselves with water, smoking – and wondering what they are waiting for. By the end of the day, Dzoni will have transformed from an innocent to a cog in the wheel of war.

Perisic gives us plenty of room to breathe, and for the imagination to unfurl. His composition is dominated by long static shots, held interminably; the film opens with a pitch black screen, as noises fade in; a door opens, and someone yells into the pitch black room – ‘get up soldiers’; we begin to hear stirrings of men; we hold on this image, of light shining through a doorway, for exactly two minutes, before it cuts to the first shot of our protagonist.

Dialogue is at a bare minimum, and character exposition is slowly, subtly built – all we need to know is that Dzoni is young, inexperienced, basically humanitarian, and hasn’t had a good relationship with his dad. He joined the army because he couldn’t find work; when the army came calling, he thought ‘why not?’ He is one among many ‘ordinary people’ in his unit – called upon to extra-ordinary things.

Perisic’s thesis is simple, but powerfully constructed; although it is slow, there is no spare meat, and it runs only 80 minutes. The cinematography is spare but elegant, and colour palette of blues, greens and browns add to the generally glacial feeling. Economical, restrained storytelling, and with a real eye for composition – I’m so glad to have caught this filmmaker’s debut feature. [DJ]

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June 2010

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