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Action

(ITALIAN-COLOR)

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Rome, Feb. 4.

Released by CIDIF for Ars Cinematografica production. Stars Luc Merenda. Directed by Giovanni Tinto Brass. Screenplay, Giancarlo Fusco. Roberto Lerici. Tinto Brass; camera (Eastmancolor). Silvano Ippoliti; art director. Claudio Cinini; editor. Tinto Brass; music, Riccardo Giovannini. Reviewed at Quirinale Cinema, Rome, Feb. 3, 1980. Running time: 123 MINS.

Bruno Martel Luc Merenda
Gas station owner Adriana Asti
"Ophelia" Susanna Javicoli
"Garibaldi" Alberto Sorrentino

An offensive, grating, but occasionally vital and provocative film by Giovanni Tinto Brass, whose hallucinatory movie career stretches from the wonderful New Wave "Who Works Is Lost" to the inferno of last year's "Caligula." Brass puts a gloss of soft-core porn (lots of frontal nudity of both sexes but no grotesque couplings) over a disconnected story that tries to say everything and isn't too clear. The film succeeds when the characters' rage and disgust is so great it dominates the filth, violence and general evil on the screen.

Playing on the double sense of its title, "Action" starts by taking us behind the sordid scenes of the skin flick trade with a down-on-his-luck actor. Luc Merenda is handsome but rather cold in the difficult role of the idealist in doubt about the meaning of life. In a series of violent episodes hung together by editing alone he travels through a surrealistic England. He spends a night in jail, rescues the charming Ophelia (Susanna Javicoli in a good, multi-layered performance) from being forced to evacuate for the camera on the porno set, is raped in a garbage dump by maddened punk rockers, saves an old man who thinks he's Garibaldi (good character acting here too by Alberto Sorrentino), watches helplessly as Susanna jumps from the window of a nightmarish madhouse and ends up pumping gas for Adriana Asti in the middle of nowhere.

The film overflows with film references and Freudian fantasies (some clever) which give it a feeling of belonging to the angry, experimental pictures of '68; in 1980, it seems dated and indulgent. Doing his own editing, Brass crafts a rough but extremely personal picture that could do well at film festivals. It seems too bizarre and incoherent for the usual porn-goer.

The photography, shot in 16m and blown up, is so painfully grainy some of the characters are unrecognizable. It certainly is not kind to excellent veteran actress Adriana Asti, who romps naked through the wheatfields like a pasty, lumpish ghost of the exuberant young 60s cinema. Camera-work, on the other hand, is often elegant in its framing and long shots.

"Action" might be taken as Brass's self-critique as porn-purveyor, taking a compassionate attitude toward mistreated and exploited actors who, for all their prostituted - all - my - life exterior, are really wistful Ophelias underneath, mad dreamers in a destructive world. —Yung.