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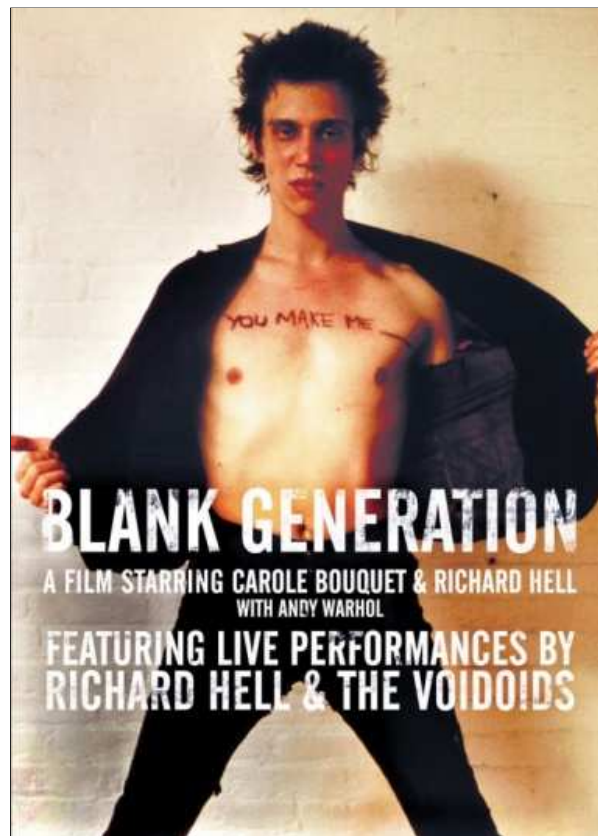
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Wednesday, April 14, 2010

Blank Generation (Review)

MDV Visual, Not Rated, 1979

By Brian Baker



More than 30 years ago, Werner Fassbinder protégé Ulli Lommel set up camp in New York and became ensconced in the city's burgeoning Punk movement. The experience inspired him to make a movie about the disaffected youth who were sneering at the music industry's status quo at top volume with only the barest concern for structure, melody and convention. The star of Lommel's docudrama was Punk icon Richard Hell, frontman for one of NYC's most magnetic Punk bands, the Voidoids, and the title of his film came from one of Hell's most famous compositions: *Blank Generation*.

MVD Visual has chosen the film's 30th anniversary to present its DVD debut, and it's a worthwhile release for a number of reasons, the least of them being the film itself. Clearly *Blank Generation* was a film about disenfranchised artists and their disjointed

personal and professional lives, so it follows that the movie would use that very quality as a storytelling device. As it turns out, it's not a very compelling storytelling device.

The plot, such as it is, doesn't help either. Hell is Billy, a New York Punk with a future, and Carole Bouquet is Nada, a French journalist who is filming interviews with Billy while having a personal relationship with him. The pair have a tempestuous on-again-off-again affair.

So what is there about *Blank Generation* that makes it worthwhile? Plenty, actually. Edward Lachman and Atze Glanert's breathtaking cinematography of a decaying New York in the late '70s, on the verge of financial and social collapse, is worth the price of admission. The all-too-brief scenes of Hell and the Voidoids playing live at CBGBs are all the more precious with the closing of the club, and the footage of Andy Warhol playing himself is absolutely compelling.

But the real draw here is the 45-minute interview with Hell, conducted by Luc Sante just last year, featuring a savagely honest critique of the film by its "star." Hell's fascinating insights into what was going on in his life and career and in the city itself make for a more compelling experience than the movie, which is far from terrible in the context of the avant cinema of the late '70s and early '80s.

Grade: B

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