

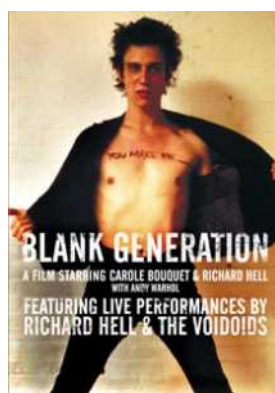


- Left of the Dial Magazine

March 24, 2010

[Blank Generation: A film by Ulli Lommel: MVD Visual](#)

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An opus of sorts by the once marginal high-art German auteur Ulli Lommel, who now has become a straight-to-video horror shtick one man factory, this fake bio of a Richard Hell-esque young wolf is a signature New York City film from 1979-1980 well worth checking out. First, no one will mistake this film as having a plot. Think of it as a meandering number of vignettes and Warholian moments, in which impressionistic gazes and raw naïve acting are far more important than well-constructed scenes or coordinated rising and falling action. Basically, the camera follows the route of an unbalanced German woman as she follows, and falls in semi-love with, a budding bohemian punk artiste, played by the rather dashing but wooden Richard Hell. Studios, bars, and streets make up the murky tableau as they navigate each other's temptations and teasing, their incompetence and their brilliance. Even Andy Warhol show up, like an icy, surreal mannequin barely morphing into human on screen, replete with skin made from alabaster, hair like a shredded Brillo pad, and dialog so awkward and painful it must be a kind of poem-bluster. Most of all the film captures the waning years of first wave punk-as-business, the end of the salad days, when business and profits mattered more than St. Marks Poetry readings and squatting on the Lower East Side. The best moments, in fact, are the incredible live footage of the Voidoids in their nimble splendor and fine-tuned wreckage, including the sizeable talent of Marky Ramone (before he jettisoned for the Ramones). The footage inside cavernous, cathedral-lit CBGBs is enthralling and actually sonically far better than their records, since it captures their true grit and verve. The storyline is paper-thin, but the lines are short bursts of improbable mean street haiku, like "New York City is such a drag on ... Fridays." Really? Wow. So much for blue Mondays. The added interview bonus material, featuring a woolly bearded Hell trying to figure out what exactly happened during those weird cinema moments when he realized he was no James Dean, is made fresh and funny by writer, historian, and cultural critic Luc Sante (his newest book is an amazing folk photography compendium). He is both informed and informal, asking questions that neither ignore the clumsiness of the film nor the merit either. In all, this is a prime celluloid cut for those looking for something outside the box.

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