



Blank Generation

Directed by Ulli Lommel - MVD Visual (reissue)

By Mark Shikuma

Filmed in the winter of 1978, the feature film *Blank Generation* makes for interesting viewing -- in spite of the movie itself. The story, such as it is, centers on the unsteady relationship between an up-and-coming punk musician (played by Richard Hell, then leader of Richard Hell and The Voidoids) and a French TV journalist (portrayed by French actress Carole Bouquet) who share an apartment in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. While New York was facing financial bankruptcy and "white flight," the collapsing inner city allowed for a burgeoning scene to thrive, where street dealers, con artists, junkies and the down-and-out collided with musicians and artists.

Directed by actor/director Ulli Lommel, best known as part of German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder's inner circle, *Blank Generation* oddly lives up to its title, which was taken from Richard Hell and The Voidoids' classic punk song of the same name. The movie is disjointed, baffling and, um, blank, failing to adequately capture this uniquely creative time period in Lower New York.

"The script didn't really exist," commented Richard Hell, in a candid interview with writer Luc Sante that provides the highlight of the reissue package. "There's actually not a

single truthful moment in the whole movie, not one," said Hell, noting that pages were literally handed to him on the day of the shoot.

Hell would go on to appear in Susan Seidelman's *Smithereens* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*. *Blank Generation* unintentionally became an early marker for a surprising number of successes for others involved in the film. Co-star Carole Bouquet would become a well-known French model and actress with credits including the James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*. Cinematographer Ed Lachman would later shoot films for Wim Wenders, Todd Haynes and Steven Soderbergh.

"I love the fucking soundtrack," praised Hell. Its composer, Elliot Goldenthal, went on to score a long list of films and theatrical productions. In 2002, he won an Academy Award for Best Original Soundtrack for *Frida*, and he was nominated for a 2007 Pulitzer Prize for his score of the theatrical production of *Grendel*, collaborating with his longtime partner, Julie Taymor.

Most significantly, *Blank Generation* serves as a document of New York City during its late '70s/early '80s creative heyday. "It's a reminder of what things were like in the Lower East Side back then," commented Hell. The streets and subways were run-down and riddled with crime, street peddlers were selling nearly anything on the sidewalk 24 hours a day, and old lofts and tenements (when the rents were cheap) were occupied by the artists, bohemians and other personalities that contributed to and frequented the art/music scene of Lower New York. It was a time before real estate prices and gentrification changed everything, leaving only a remnant of what had once flourished.