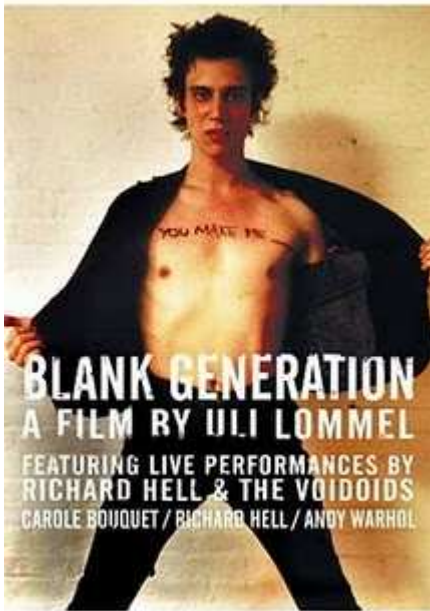


**The Metal Minute Awarded 2009 Best Personal Blog By Metal Hammer Magazine**

**Sunday, March 21, 2010**

**[DVD Review: Blank Generation](#)**

*Blank Generation*  
2010 MVD Visual  
Ray Van Horn, Jr.



The thing with punk rock, particularly in its early-on stages is there's no way to be subjective with it. Unlike metal, which applies itself fundamentally to documentarians and filmmakers because its constituents are largely outgoing in conjunction with music so damned loud, punk rock is largely apposite. Before punk became a marketable commodity in the 2000s to the point you can buy punk rocker Halloween costumes, it was the most anti-social, confrontational music scene before the Scandinavian black metal scene emerged.

It's why films like *Sid & Nancy*, *The Great Rock 'n Roll Swindle* and *Jubilee* ring with quirks instead stocks and bombs. Punk is so basic in its *fuck-you* concept filmmakers and obsessively curious historians have gone to lengths of overkill trying to sociologize it all. Honestly, *Rock and Roll High School* works because it has The Ramones to amp it up, but it's so intentionally pretentious and subversively pop-minded you forgive it at face-value. Even *The Great Rock 'n Roll Swindle* is designed to be a roast in the Sex Pistols' inimitable sludge 'n glass style. *Repo Man*, *Class of 1984* and to certain latitudes *Return of the Living Dead* are cyberpunk, cowpunk, crunkpunk, gorepunk, whatever you want to name them, but they're more about flavor capture as in the brand of iced tea in the convenience store which gets overlooked and bought last behind the more trendy Arizona

and Lipton brands.

Don Letts' *The Punk Rock Movie* is perhaps one of the finest attempts at punk time capsuling, while Penelope Spheris made her mark in punk with *The Decline of Western Civilization* before turning her camera and mike over to the hairballs and thrash masters for the more-familiar *Decline* sequel.

Despite, there's still something a little trite about a title called "The Punk Rock Movie," almost like "Smurfs On Ice." Punk rock is one of the few genres of music where seldom few can figure it out with whole accuracy, and still it doesn't *need* figuring out. Some music just *is*, whether you're talking Television, The Stooges, MC5, The Dead Boys, Generation X, Talking Heads, X-Ray Spex or The Exploited. The same applies to The Clash, albeit they were so transcendental they remain today the most important crossover influence on mainstream rock.

Richard Hell and The Voidoids may be considered a blip on the punk rock evolution map, yet their trash classic album *Blank Generation* was a sign of the times in which it was conceived in 1977. In some ways, *Blank Generation* allowed *Never Mind the Bollocks* to become an iconic classic, despite the grimy noise splugged out from The Sex Pistols, who are wrongly worshipped. Attitude aside, the Pistols were hardly heroes. Johnny Lydon might well issue one of his nefarious *fuck off* statements if you *were* to call him a hero.

So where did director Ulli Lommel find hero worship in Richard Hell for his 1978-shot film *Blank Generation*? Within the first few scenes, Hell is depicted in an upscale recording studio laying down vocals while being glorified by French journalist and utter headcase Nada (Carole Bouquet). There would've been more cred, perhaps, if Hell was seen ripping his lungs out at the mike and tearing off anal cheese in Nada's face, yet the sanitized depiction of Richard Hell calmly delivering his tracks is almost Jim Morrison-like minus one hand down his trousers, the other around a fifth.

As Richard Hell is seen in a retrospective interview on this reissue of *Blank Generation*, the man calls Lommel out for many things. On the one hand, *Blank Generation* is a genuine artifact for music and industrial civilization buffs. Lommel takes his cameras deep into the bowels of CBGB's during its gutter posh era to capture live footage of The Voidoids, one of the best treasures to watching this flick. Unfortunately, Lommel milks the hell out (pun intended) of the title track with different cuts to the point it's a hack job. Richard of course slags Lommel for this and many other reasons, namely its lack of credibility.

Two different live sequences feature audiences at tables with a pair of knuckleheads throwing money-like confetti at the band. Subversive commentary about punk rock's destiny to sell out, or a jibe at gobbing and bottle hurling? You be the judge, while Richard Hell scoffs at the entire matter altogether. In fact, there's much Hell takes exception to, which interviewer Luc Sante gently coaxes out of him as a CB's frequenter himself in the day. As the CD box quotes Hell, it is a "bonus feature which is better than

the movie itself."

And he's right. The photography by Ed Lachman is outstanding and he captures a Manhattan which once suffered the toilet-flushed scorn of the rest of the country. Not everything was Broadway and Studio 54, and the only genuinely compelling measure *Blank Generation* offers its viewers is presenting the filth and squalor in which Richard Hell lives and breathes in. His character Billy is presented as a foppish ratboy whose unbelievable forced entry into Nada's world exposes his vulnerability to the point he walks off stage in the middle of a show just because he can't cope. He can't cope with his new record deal, he can't cope with his own songs which he offers to sell the rights to, and most of all, he can't cope with a flighty bounce-about girlfriend who's already cheating on her German lover Hoffritz, played by director Lommel himself.

Well, Nada can't cope, Hoffritz can't cope, nobody can cope, and here is the supposed premise Lommel wanted to convey in his *Blank Generation*. The fact Nada gets into a pointless argument with Billy about whether to go to Coney Island or not erupts into a stupid resolution where she steals his car and leaves him behind, only to patch fences shortly thereafter...say what? Are we to believe Richard Hell's character is so wimpy he takes all of this at face value, considering the masculine floor-pinning and camera-turning upon Nada exhibited in the early scenes? I personally love characters with duality and fallacies, but *come on...*

What's most annoying is watching Nada's indecisiveness. One frame she's throwing Billy's belongings to the front door and demanding he leave. The next frame she's halting an interview to call Billy and beg forgiveness. Shortly after taking him back into her grungy flat, she dumps him once Hoffritz emerges in New York City to cover an interview with Andy Warhol, which offers the only real comedy relief of the film--still, you get the feeling it wasn't intentional humor. The agitated romance between Nada and Billy isn't even neurotic as it is a ping pong match prompting clock watching until The Voidoids start playing again, or at least until you see the graffiti of the bathroom stairwell in CBGB's. Aside from Andy Warhol's short but endearing cameo, also be on the lookout for a quick appearance by Marky Ramone, appearing by his real name Mark Bell.

Another highlight of *Blank Generation* is Elliot Goldenthal's superb scoring. However bohemian it may sound in this film, *Blank Generation* is *not* the platform for Goldenthal's tender, romantic and sometimes aloof soundtrack. This is supposed to be a punk rock anecdote about a stupefied society, is it not?

*Blank Generation* has its merits, namely its willingness to dwell in the shards, the garbage and street bonfires as much as it does briefly in Times Square and the Staten Island Ferry. At times the movie becomes claustrophobic for the right reasons, while too often side characters slow the pace down and try to make *Blank Generation* more esoteric than it comes across, dated or not.

Then again, very little about punk rock from its infancy stages when *Blank Generation* was filmed could *hardly* be considered estoeiric...

**Rating: \*\*1/2**

Posted by Ray Van Horn, Jr. at [12:17 AM](#) 

Labels: [DVD Reviews](#)