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BLANK GENERATION (1980)

Published by [David Carter](#) on 2010/4/20 (50 reads)

Directed by Ulli Lommel
Review by David Carter



Released by MVD Visual
Running Time: 78 minutes
Rating: Not Rated
Color format: Color
Audio/Subtitles: 2.0 Stereo English
Region Code: 0, NTSC
Aspect Ratio: Widescreen
16:9 Enhanced: No
Special Features: Interview with Richard Hell by Luc Sante (45 minutes)
Trailer Online: [Yes](#)



Short Version: A photo of New York City in the late seventies

Poet and author Richard Hell is considered to be one of the fathers of punk rock as his band Television began performing and recording at roughly the same time as the Ramones. Hell went on to play in other influential punk bands such as the Heartbreakers and the Voidoids and, for a few years in the 2000s, was a film critic. The fact that BLANK GENERATION is a fictionalized version of Hell's life starring him as himself and the fact that he later went on to be a film critic makes his assessment of the film invaluable. To put it bluntly, Hell doesn't think too highly of it. As he explains in the lengthy interview included as a bonus feature, there is a lot to like about BLANK GENERATION, but almost none of it has to do with the film itself.

I found myself agreeing with Hell's assessment for the most part, with the caveat that perhaps he is a little too close to the material to be fully objective. BLANK GENERATION was directed by Ulli Lommel, a filmmaker whose recent output has consisted of direct-to-DVD serial killer films that even he admitted to hating in March of this year. As a filmmaker, Lommel's gifts are limited, but if one sees enough of his films an appreciation for his style can develop. The problems with Lommel's NIGHT STALKER, ZODIAC KILLER and BTK KILLER are the same problems that plague BLANK GENERATION - a general disinterest in what is occurring. Once you accept that Lommel has little interest in plot and is more concerned with capturing fleeting images of individuals, you can begin to understand a film like BLANK GENERATION. It isn't about the characters, but about the actors playing them; how they react to one another, how they fill the environment they exist in. The issues Hell has with BLANK GENERATION are valid if you're taking it as a piece of cinema. In reality, it's far closer to a home movie of Hell - and no one likes to watch themselves in those.



The "plot" of BLANK GENERATION concerns the relationship between Billy/Hell, an up-and-coming punk musician, and Nada, the gorgeous French reporter documenting his rise to fame. Billy and Nada's relationship is rocky to say the least; most of the first half of the film concerns their relationship dissolving, with the second half showing them moving on and later trying to reconcile. A subplot sees Nada's new (and former) lover Hoffritz trying to get an interview with Andy Warhol.

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Hoffritz eventually succeeds and the Warhol section of the film – all of four minutes – is the Rosetta Stone to understanding all of BLANK GENERATION. Warhol plays himself and is shown being interviewed briefly before the film jumps to a different scene. The goal was not to have a significant part of the plot be dedicated to Warhol (which it is) but to capture Warhol on film for a brief instant. Warhol, the person, is more important to Lommel than Warhol, the character, and to that end Hell is far more important to Lommel than Billy is. The point of BLANK GENERATION, if there is one, is the handful of musical performances by Hell and the Voidoids at CBGBs. These are integrated into the story but the true value of BLANK GENERATION is that they were captured on film at all. These images are now invaluable to music history and Lommel should be commended for having the foresight to make this film, flawed as it is.

If you've seen any of Lommel's serial killer films, you'll already be prepared for the long, pointless meanderings that the film takes before returning to one of these important moments. Hell states on the DVD case that the interview with him is better than the film and I'm not inclined to disagree. Seeing Warhol and the Voidoids is more than worth the price of the DVD, however, and anyone with an affinity for punk culture or even late seventies New York City will find that BLANK GENERATION is worth their time.



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