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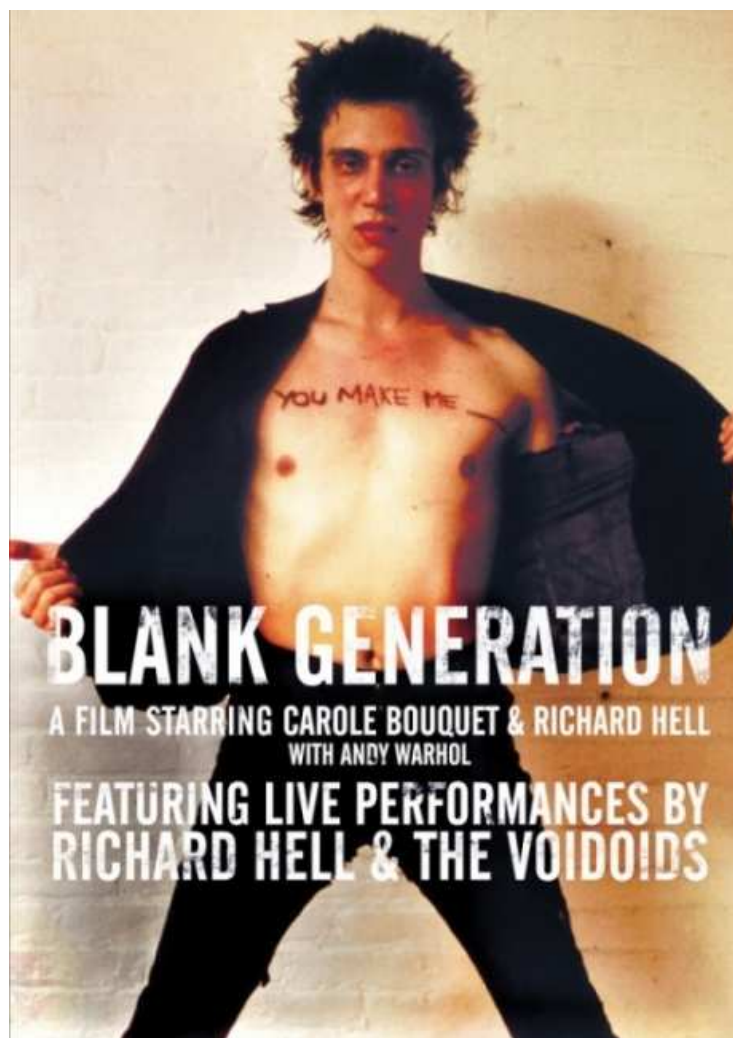
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[Blank Generation \(1980\) | Review](#)

By [Don Simpson](#) | May 17, 2010



Director: Ulli Lommel

Writers: Ulli Lommel, Richard Hell, Robert Madero

Starring: Carole Bouquet, Richard Hell, Ulli Lommel, Andy Warhol

During my teens, I feasted on a steady diet of punk rock movies, everything from *Rock 'n' Roll High School* to *Suburbia*, *The Decline of Western Civilization* to *Dogs in Space* to *Sid and Nancy* to *Rude Boy* to *Another State of Mind* to *The Blank Generation* (1976) to *Border Radio* to *Breaking Glass* to *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* to *Gleaming the Cube* to *Jubilee* to *The Last Pogo* to *Ladies and Gentlemen*, *The Fabulous Stains* to *Liquid Sky* to *The Punk Rock Movie* to *Repo Man* to *Surf Nazis Must Die* to *Thrashin'* to *Urgh! A Music War* to *Stop Making Sense*...but one film that always eluded me was Ulli Lommel's *Blank Generation* (not to be confused with Ivan Kral's 1976 documentary *The Blank Generation* on DVD. Watching it was like finalizing something – ending a quest that I unknowingly or un-purposefully began approximately 25 years ago. to – which also features Richard Hell playing with The Heartbreakers). A handful of these films are great, others I would consider mediocre, but a majority of them were not very good at all; but that is not to say that I didn't enjoy watching every one of them...over...and over...and over. Maybe I liked watching them for the music or the style or just the overall mood – I really don't know for sure. Nonetheless, I was certainly ecstatic when MVD Visual contacted me to let me know that they were releasing

It is early 1978 in Lower East Side Manhattan and Billy (Richard Hell) is a punk rocker. A beautiful French journalist with a penchant for quoting Jean-Luc Godard (specifically one statement about cinema being "the place of a crime and a kind of magic") named Nada (Carole Bouquet) has been assigned to interview Billy. Nada and Billy promptly commence a volatile relationship in which neither of them seems even remotely interested in the other one – at times they seem to despise each other. (In an early scene, they go for a drive. Billy wants to go to the beach, then he doesn't, then he does, then he doesn't – Nada gets so frustrated with Billy's flip-flopping that she kicks him out of his own car and drives away.) Eventually Nada finds her way back to her lover (Ulli Lommel) – a German journalist trying to track down the elusive Andy Warhol (playing himself) – and Billy finds a Lower East Side version of Nada to keep himself company.

I like to think that *Blank Generation* is not about the acting or the writing or the directing or the editing – all of which is a horrible train-wreck – instead I think it is about capturing the Lower East Side and CBGB at its cultural pinnacle. No matter how horrible Ulli Lommel's film seems to be, it is still a very important time capsule of the sleazy, dirty and real Lower East Side of the late 1970s. As we watch the Voidoids perform live at CBGB again and again (frustratingly they seem to always play the same song), we realize that we are actually witnessing the end of the first wave of New York City punk rock. (Richard Hell and The Voidoids had just released their seminal 1977 debut album, *Blank Generation*.)

I also like to think that Richard Hell plays Billy fairly naturally and his wardrobe is his own – this, the very man that reportedly inspired punk rock couture (again, sadly, he often appears in the same clothes). He is no Brando or DeNiro, but I actually enjoy watching Hell's performance in *Blank Generation*. I guess I just like his take on Billy (again, I think he is just playing himself) as a pretty normal guy. Hell steers clear of the exaggerated punk rock caricatures – in fact, he's a fairly empty emotionless vessel leaving only his music and wardrobe to define him.

I previously mentioned the awful acting, writing, directing and editing; but I do have some compliments to dole out as well. Ed Lachman's cinematography is breathtaking, truly capturing the Lower East Side in all its dilapidated glory; and Elliot Goldenthal's soundtrack works in stunning contradiction to the images, romanticizing the onscreen grittiness as if the film were set in the pristine environs of a Paris romance.

The new DVD release by MVD Visual includes a meaty interview with Richard Hell by Luc Sante. Looking back on the film, Hell is not proud at all – which makes for a very illuminating and frank discussion. As if to justify his decision to essentially fall for Ulli Lommel's con, well...who would have said no to an offer to work for Lommel (a prominent figure of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's filmmaking collective – he had acted in several great Fassbinder films including *Love is Colder than Death* and *Whity*) and alongside Bouquet (a model who had just performed in a leading role in one of Luis Bunuel's late masterpieces, *That Obscure Object of Desire*) shooting a film that is named after your band's debut album?

To give writer-director Lommel some credit, he was aiming extremely high with *Blank Generation*. From what I can tell (and from Hell's interview it seems he is in agreement), Lommel was attempting to make this film in the spirit and style of Godard and Fassbinder – something many directors have tried and very few have succeeded. This failure doesn't seem to have affected Lommel in the least, having since settled into a routine of cranking out numerous straight to video horror flicks per year.

Rating: 6/10



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One Response to “Blank Generation (1980) | Review”

1. [Colin](#) Says:
[May 17th, 2010 at 3:42 pm](#)

Hey, Don, very surprised to see you mention my short 1978 film THE LAST POGO. Boners!

If you saw it prior to 2008, then you probably saw a shitty VHS bootleg; shoot me your mailing address, and I'll send you a sparkling new DVD

Cheers

Colin Brunton

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