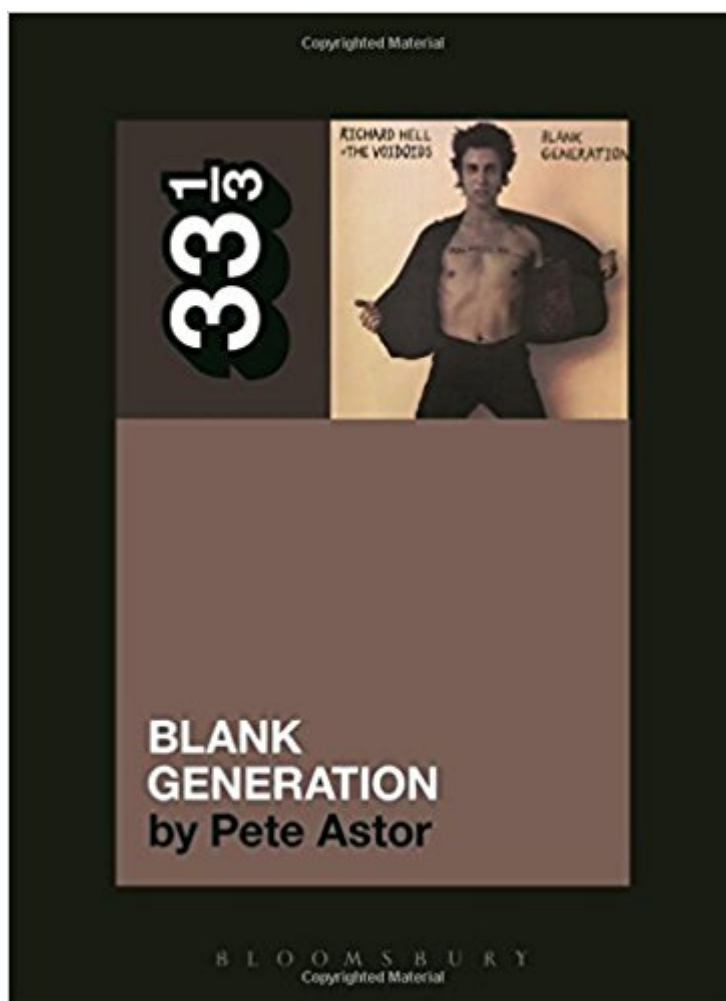


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Richard Hell And The Voidoids' Blank Generation (33 1/3)



Synopsis

To wander the streets of a bankrupt, often lawless, New York City in the early 1970s wearing a T-shirt with PLEASE KILL ME written on it was an act of determined nihilism, and one often recounted in the first reports of Richard Hell filtering into the pre-punk UK. Pete Astor, an archly nihilistic teenager himself at the time, was most impressed. The fact that it emerged (after many years) that Hell himself had not worn the T-shirt but had convinced junior band member Richard Lloyd to do so, actually fitted very well with Astor's older, wiser self looking back at Blank Generation. Richard Hell was an artist who could not only embody but also frame the punk urge; having seeded and developed the essential look and character of punk since his arrival in New York in the late 1960s, he had just what was needed to make one of the defining records of the era. This study combines objective, academic perspectives along with culturally centred subjectivities to understand the meanings and resonances of Richard Hell and the Voidoids' Blank Generation.

Book Information

Series: 33 1/3

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic (April 10, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1623561221

ISBN-13: 978-1623561222

Product Dimensions: 4.7 x 0.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #700,272 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #240 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Punk](#) #433 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Recording & Sound](#) #1854 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Popular](#)

Customer Reviews

“The 33 1/3 book series started in 2003, analyzing ‘seminal’ rock albums in the manner of great literature novels – but also adding the personal insights that only the true rock n’ roll fan can deliver. #92 looks at Richard Hell and the Voidoids’ Blank Generation (1977). On the heels of #91, on Gang of Four’s Entertainment (1979) the releases really are two of a pair – the arch ‘art punk’ statements of the ‘70s – although Gang of Four is

more political and Richard Hell thoroughly nihilistic. The analytical approach can have its pitfalls: Astor is so intent on the importance of listening on vinyl that he traces the history of recording technology back to Edison, to make the point that the album has to be heard on that medium. But Astor brilliantly places Blank Generation in the 70's lower East Side New York art world, with all the squalor evoked by Richard Hell's songs, as well as depicting Hell as a poet with a comprehensive artistic vision. In his own way, Hell was the voice of a generation. **SLUG Magazine**

Pete Astor is Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster, UK. He also writes songs, sings and plays the guitar.

****Review originally posted at <https://midnighttosix.wordpress.com>** You may know the name Pete Astor as the singer for The Loft and Weather Prophets, two rather likable bands from the early years of Creation Records. Well, in addition to his credentials as a performer, he also gives lectures on Musicology at the University of Westminster, so he understands rock from an academic perspective as well as a visceral one. This makes him just about the perfect person to write the book on Blank Generation, an album that brilliantly combined the intelligence of Hell's poetry with the rebellious force of rock music. Astor comes through big time here, combining personal stories regarding Hell and the album, with an explanation of the wide range of influences that, when combined, made Blank Generation such a powerful statement, musically, lyrically and aesthetically. Personally I've loved the album ever since I first heard it about 15 years ago, and even though I've read Hell's autobiography and countless other books on the early years on New York punk, Astor adds a lot of new information and perspective to the story. Take the album's title song for example, a well known (an often misunderstood) classic, yet I never realized that it was a combination of the chords from Ray Charles' "Hit The Road Jack" and a novelty single called "I Belong To The Beat Generation" purposefully designed to make a statement similar to The Who's "My Generation". The book also gives just due to The Voidoids, explaining the crucial role guitarists Ivan Julian & Robert Quine, along with drummer Marc Bell, had in enhancing Hell's visions in a unique and actually quite accomplished way. Astor details their pre-Voidoids resumes, showing that these were no punk amateurs or not even close. As with any volume of the 33 1/3 series, the book's success lies squarely on whether or not it makes you think

differently about the album and if it made you want to hear it again with fresh ears. Mission accomplished on both fronts.

I guess the over-intellectualization of punk rock was inevitable, but I'm pretty sure when I first heard "Love Comes In Spurts" at 15 or 16 years old, I did not give Francois Truffaut's "400 Blows" or the Theater of the Absurd or Antonin Artaud one second of thought. Frankly, if I had known who they were, it might have blown the moment. I thought the title was a very clever and naughty double-entendre and that was about all the French I knew or cared to know. You can read my review in its entirety at allmusicbooksdotcom, but I would skip the book, put on the record and fill in your own _____.

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