

TALES FROM THE CITY: New York

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It is a dangerous thing, writing about Martin Creed, and I can no longer do it. I'm quitting Creed, and I will tell you why. Celebration or dismissal would seem to offer the only safe havens for comment, given that the artist's entire activity thwarts any kind of real intellectual prying. Creed's late-March visit to New York for two performances of his *Variety Show* managed to confirm this fact. (There were two performances because the first one sold out so quickly that the Public Art Fund, which produced the show, decided a second would be necessary to satisfy Creed's rapidly growing fan base, aka Creedies.)

What can one say about Martin Creed that has not been or will not soon be said by Creed himself? It seems to me the answer is nothing, which means Creed can have no critics

Now, as for the *Show*, you could either love it or hate it. I'm ambivalent about whether you could be ambivalent about it, but I think most people loved it; it was a Creedie-heavy crowd, after all (Gavin Brown, or Public Creedie Number One, was in attendance, as were others high up in the pecking order of Creediness, Matthew Higgs included). Once the show was over, you could debate whether or not the young woman who gets sick in the short clip of Creed's *Sick Film* (2006) could really be expelling, let alone housing, that much material; you could question whether Creed's stuttering, giggling and, to a Creedie, mostly endearing delivery was simply a stage persona, an 'act' - which of course it was (wasn't it?); you could choose favourite songs - here is one exchange I overheard while making my way out of the theater: "I liked *Fuck Off*." "Of course you would." "I liked *I Feel Blue*." "Of course you would." Typical Creedie banter.

What you couldn't do, what you can't do, Creedie or no, is ask what the point of it is - mostly because that needs to be sung, usually by Creed himself ('what's the point of it' being the single lyric for the *Variety Show*'s opening number - that is, if you don't count as the actual opening number the stage lights going on and off for the half hour it took the audience to get settled into seats). Loyal Creedies will of course recognise that everything I have mentioned thus far as being part of the *Variety Show* has already appeared in one form or another as one of Creed's numbered *Works*, which is simply the straightforward and serial manner in which Creed self-consciously tracks his own oeuvre (itself a tongue-in-cheek nod to the artist's entire career as one ongoing serial 'piece'; this is a very Creedie manoeuvre).

The *Show* thus takes shape as an elaborate vehicle of self-quotation, a literal rehearsal of Creed's previous 'acts', his 'greatest hits', designed, as Creed himself stated during the performance, to do nothing except please the audience, which of course it does. But I am now a recovering Creedie. Once entertained, my system can no longer take the unremitting pre-emption. Asked by a not-quite-Creedie seated at my side to offer a brief take on his work, I called it reticent. A good description, I thought, right up until that moment during the *Show* when Creed, addressing the audience directly about his general discomfort with addressing the audience directly, described *himself* as reticent. Feeling neither proud nor reaffirmed, I thought to myself, 'What can one say about Creed that has not been or will not soon be said by Creed himself?' It seems to me the answer is nothing, which means Creed can have no critics. Or rather, you cannot be a critic of Creed, let alone a Creedie too, because there will simply be nothing for you to say, *quod erat demonstrandum* (I think; are Creedies supposed to know Latin?). In other words: what's the point of it?