

structured textures formally interwoven without sacrificing a physical painterliness. They appear more convincing than Baumeister's self-conscious tachist derivations, but still seemed uncomfortable in this context, which points to the nature of the exhibition itself. Although it provided some fascinating glimpses into the nature of crossed paths, influences and collaborations, there also seemed to be some discrepancy between the intention of the investigation as a whole and the quality of some of the examples themselves. In one sense it provided us with two fragmented exhibitions – one around an expanded vision of new music from the classic Avant Garde via Stockhausen and his circle together with Cage's interaction; the other examining the lesser known history of English Modernism's attempt to learn from such dialogues. While there were some gems here, equally they felt like pieces from a jigsaw puzzle where most of the pieces were absent. Clearly, each aspect of this project would need to be larger and more comprehensive for it to function as a working document or as a coherent and visually engaging exhibition. ■

DAVID RYAN is reader in fine art at Anglia Ruskin University and a contributor to the forthcoming book, *The Ashgate Companion to Experimental Music*, ed James Saunders, Ashgate Academic Press.

## ■ Tsang Kin-Wah: What Are You Looking At?

Chinese Arts Centre Manchester

June 27 to September 28

The Chinese-born artist Tsang Kin-Wah's text-based works combine violence and beauty, calligraphy and wallpaper. His work has been seen in Paris and New York recently, and he's even created stage designs for a concert of music in Tokyo. His first solo show in the UK features two installations under one umbrella title, 'What Are You Looking At?', which refers, of course, not only to the texts threading through both works, but also to the act of looking. And you have to look closely, in both cases.

Appearances, in Tsang's work, prove deceptive, and the process of getting close, and really reading the embedded text, when located, reverses our expectations completely. If at first the Chinese Arts Centre's main ground-floor gallery seems to be empty and unlit, a more thorough examination of the space reveals gloss-white painted lettering on a matt white ground in ribbon-like phrases that zig-zag across certain parts of the ceiling, and down certain walls. Entitled *I love you more than anything else in the whole world and I would never do anything to hurt you*, the installation's painted lines of language are at first difficult to make out until you position your eyes to make the letters reflect in the only available light, which leaks in from doorways and an office window. The decorative, snake-like movement of the lettering around the space is amusing at first, but on closer examination, the words read like unpunctuated quotations from disturbing encounters in a dark alley. The language is English and some of it is very strong. Phrases include 'I am not gonna hurt you or fuck you', 'I would never cut you up in pieces', and 'I would correct you fucking little naughty cunt'. One phrase, 'I would never burn you', uncoils from the gallery's actual press-button fire alarm.

The experience of slowly making out the phrases is



Tsang Kin-Wah  
*I Love U* 2008

accompanied by a low-level, ambient audio-clip of Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind's soundtrack for the film *The Shining*, played through speakers. The entire piece, in fact, consciously echoes Stanley Kubrick's 1980 movie in the way that the artist masks the threat of violence under a blanket of seemingly innocent and pure whiteness. You rapidly become aware of the fact that these white phrases on white walls are malevolent. Their threat is intensified by isolating the experience in an almost unlit, and therefore increasingly claustrophobic, space. This uncomfortable realisation is only increased by the subtle disorientation that results from trying to discern the elusive words while kneeling down with your head bent round at an acute angle. The result, in this viewer's mind, was a growing feeling of creepiness.

To view Tsang's other installation, *I Love U*, a visit to the basement washrooms is necessary. These spaces, and the way they are lit (as well as used) are in complete contrast to the main gallery upstairs. The washrooms have been lined with a cream-coloured wallpaper carrying an ingenious, attractive, pink pattern which, from a distance, resembles the delicate curling image of a potted plant, repeated. Close up, however, the lines of the drawing are also lines of tiny words, in English and Chinese. Overhead lighting, as unforgivingly and uniformly bright as you would normally expect in any functioning washroom, allows legibility without the aid of a magnifying glass. Again unpunctuated, the words form phrases such as: 'I love your house darling', 'I love your white skin blue eyes', 'I love your money power wealth man', 'I love your credit card', and 'I love your sexual powers sexy guys'. The longer you stare, the more you can read, but feelings of self-consciousness inevitably accompany any act of standing and staring in a public convenience. You think you ought to leave, but the wallpaper makes you want to stay. Finally, though, the humour of the situation overwhelms the fear of what other toilet-users might be thinking, and the bright, fashion-conscious paper decor seems to end up smiling at the viewer, reflected in the washroom mirrors. ■

BOB DICKINSON is a writer and broadcaster.