

## **DAD IN CONVERSATION with**

**Nigel Green**

Lives and works in Pett Level, East Sussex

**“How have you interpreted/responded to the project title transmettre/transmit?”**

My primary interpretation of the project has been to look at the urban architectural environments of both Saint-Omer and Dover in relation to photography's ability to 'transmit' an image of the past to the present. In both towns I have used postcards as a starting point for the development of my own photographic documentation.

In Saint-Omer the focus was on how the postcard image could introduce me to a place that was unknown to me. Many of the images that I sourced through the internet were being returned to the town for the first time in nearly a hundred years. By reversing the status of the postcard from souvenir to that of a visual guide I was able to trace the transformation that had taken place in the sites that were represented. My intention was never to make a comparative study of the town, but rather to use the historic images to indicate a specific configuration of cultural memory, which could then be placed in discourse to my own contemporary photographic survey. My intention was to focus on aspects of the made environment that would perhaps remain foreclosed to the official endorsement of the postcard image. I wanted to identify spaces that were overlooked and which would most likely remain unrepresented, something, which is common to both parts of my project.

The Dover project has a different focus, which is based on my own existing interest in the post-war redevelopment of the town. Again I am using postcard images, this time from the 1950's through to the 1970's, to establish a dialogue with the site. However, the emphasis is less on the ability of these images to transmit time and more on the way they transmit a particular ideology rooted in the aspiration of modernism. My project aims to acknowledge the processes of urban change in which the outmoded past becomes written over by the new

forms of the present. This will involve the documentation of sites earmarked for demolition. Equally I want to question the loss that accompanies this, by suggesting that more complex solutions need to be sought which address the necessity of continuity in the urban environment. The work itself will comprise of historic and contemporary photographs of 'modern' Dover along with a single image that radically reworks examples of this material. The process involved in the production of this piece represents an intervention into the utopian aspects of modernism that remain latent within the 'afterlife' of its photographic representation.

**In addition to your references to Transmettre/Transmit, how has the project's location in heritage sites impacted conceptually on your practice?**

I think that there are distinct differences between the Jesuit chapel in Saint-Omer and the castle sites of Dover, Deal and Walmer. The Chapel has retained an authenticity, which makes it an intrinsic part of the contemporary town and its civic identity. Its very evident history is allowed to be part of the present in a way that the packaging of history in the English sites lack. There is a sense that the desire to 'present' history precludes its experience at a fundamental level. So, in response to the question, I see the work I made in Saint-Omer as having an affinity with the space itself, whereas the project I am developing in Dover has a more complex relationship to the sites in which it will be shown. One of the buildings that interests me in Dover, Burlington House, was voted to be amongst the worst buildings in the country and its demolition will see it pass into historical oblivion. To exhibit an image of this building, which is seen to have no historical value, in an official 'heritage' site will, I hope, acknowledge the ambiguous and arbitrary nature of historical value and the mechanisms of its production.

**What does showing with other artists and in two places at two different times mean to you?**

Transmit/Transmettre has provided a space, which by virtue of its shifting borders, different cultural contexts and timings, has meant that there is always a question about where exactly the work is centered, who are we addressing etc. This kind of indeterminacy for me has been accompanied by a degree of openness and negotiation about how these elements might be resolved. Although my work has been determined by specific aspects of the two geographic locations, I feel that the project has been a process where the outcome is continually unfolding. For me this has been a positive framework to work within.