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ONUK or Photography as a medium of acceleration (2005)

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The industrial revolution in the 19th century was a machine-based revolution. Since then, the natural time as well as the siderial time, deduced from the stars, increasingly loose their function in favor of the techno-time determined by machines. The phenomenon of accelerated time arises at the historical moment when machines are faster than men.
The more efficient and faster machines get, the faster we experience time and the perception of reality. The subjective perception of time undergoes a radical acceleration through machines so that, as a countermove to this, standardization of time through scientific methods becomes more and more necessary. Around about 1900, Taylorism tried to force machines in movement and bodies in movement into a common objective time. In the wake of the cycles of technical innovation, having worldwide effects and becoming faster and faster, the life of more and more people on our planet is dominated by acceleration. We as inhabitants of the First World live within a chronocracy, under the rule of techno-time. The industrial revolution generated machines for movement, such as the railroad and the automobile, and machines for communications and imaging, such as telegraphy and photography. The machines for movement cause an improvement of physical mobility, the machines for communications cause an improvement of virtual mobility. The automobile shapes a mechanical artificial body, accelerated by motor, for the traveling of human bodies. In the case of telegraphy, signs travel without body. This may lead to an extreme acceleration in communications, almost in synch, as it takes place without the body of any messenger. Thus, in the 19th century the machines for movement and communications caused a general acceleration and mobilization. At an early time, the famous writer Victor Hugo, who was also a great but unknown painter, pointed to these changing kinds of perception in the age of acceleration. He wrote that during a journey by train he did not saw the flowers on a field but just blurred colors. In the age of machines for movement in the 19th century, the perception of movement became a central aesthetic problem field. Art explored this field, though still vaguely, first in impressionism, later on and in a deepened way in futurism (the depiction of a moving object by a static observer) and in cubism (the depiction of a static object by a moving observer). If not earlier, in 1905 we could learn by Albert Einstein that a uniform movement is a linear movement and, therefore, every curved movement inevitably is an accelerated movement. With the special theory of relativity, the problem of acceleration and the observer's system of references entered the field of physics.

However, it was left to the medium of chronophotography (chronos, Ancient Greek: "time"), as photography originally was called by one of its inventors, E. J. Marey, to become the real medium of movement. It is therefore from that kinematography developed, the script of movement, in plain language cinema.
To find an adequate metaphor for this modern age of globalization characterized by radical acceleration, ONUK Bernhard Schmitt falls back upon this origin of photography. The symbol of acceleration is not nature, landscape or village, of course. There, the illusion of natural time more ore less is still predominating. The place of accelerated techno-time is the metropolis, the town, the city. Against the background of globalization, the capitals of several countries, such as Bangkok, London or Paris, become subject to visual reconnaissance. Not local symbols such as the Tower in London or the Eiffel Tower in Paris become objects of depiction but the town and its inhabitants itself.
As an example, one of the best and most famous novels of the 20th century, "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften" ("Man without qualities") by Robert Musil, starts with the so-called hectic hustle and bustle in a town, the accelerated movement of its inhabitants. ONUK thus deals with a photographic and literary topos that today, in the age of globalization, is of increasing urgency. Here, as a photographic idea he makes movement

become a principle, according to the subject of his exploration. The moving camera and the moving observer respectively follow the moving object or subject. This produces shots of urban spaces, showing humans and objects as moving machines, and as moving objects in zones of fuzziness, respectively. We realize a paradox of quantum theory, so to speak: Measuring objects does not only change the object's position, but also its image. Between the observer and the world, between camera and "object". There is an uncertainty principle coming from acceleration. The shots are taken while walking and without using the viewfinder of the special panoramic camera. The moving viewfinder seeks moving subjects, thus: the moving people and machines. Nevertheless, the pictures are deliberately chosen details which, after corresponding attempts, can be evaluated quite precisely. In this universe of accelerated movement the camera – as picturing machine being just another result of mechanical acceleration – is able to be a privileged witness of this acceleration. Photography, the script of light, works in the realm of the speed of light, thus within the domain of the biggest acceleration. As the script of light, so to speak, photography is the ideal medium of becoming master of acceleration, and of being a medium of art that masters acceleration. ONUK's photos show this mastery.