

ICM



Giacomo Bucci
Portale di Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan 1969

*From photography of movement
to movement of photography:
the origins of ICM – Intentional
Camera Movement*



© Giacomo Bucci
All rights reserved

September 2026

Contemporary Terminology of ICM

Motion Blur and ICM: two forms of photographic movement

From the Prehistory of ICM to an awareness of the gesture

- **Anton Giulio Bragaglia**
the image as the trajectory of movement
- **Filippo Masoero**
the instability of the point of view
- **Ernst Haas**
movement as a perceptual experience
- **Kōtarō Tanaka**
the photographic gesture as a writing of light
- **Giacomo Bucci**
from dynamism to the ontology of the image
- **Alexey Titarenko**
movement as urban memory

Conclusion

Contemporary Terminology of ICM

Intentional Camera Movement, commonly referred to by the acronym ICM, occupies a distinctive position within the history of contemporary photography.

In its most basic sense, the technique involves deliberately moving the camera during the exposure, thereby transforming the forms recorded in the image: lines, colours, masses and silhouettes may be dragged, superimposed or elongated across the image space. Such a technical definition, however, does not fully convey the aesthetic implications of the practice.

ICM should not be understood merely as a technical procedure, but rather as a field of possibilities through which photography interrogates some of its own fundamental premises: the stability of both subject and camera, the function of the shutter, the relationship between time and space and, above all, the very meaning of the photographic act.

Although intentional camera movement as a photographic practice can be traced back at least to the mid-twentieth century, the term *Intentional Camera Movement* appears to have become established as the name of a photographic technique only at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The earliest contemporary photographic use of the expression identified thus far is that of Noel Chenier in 2009, although earlier occurrences may exist, particularly in photographic books published in the years preceding 2009.

On 16 February 2009, Chenier published a photographic exercise on his website, LearnPhoto365. Among the techniques suggested, he lists “ZOOMING, PANNING, ROTATING” and refers to the use of slow shutter speeds and intentional camera movement as a means of creating interesting photographic images.

A further verifiable occurrence of the expression being used explicitly as the name of the technique dates from the same year. Particularly significant in this regard is the Flickr group “ICM – Intentional Camera Movement – The ORIGINAL”, created on 12 June 2009. The group description explicitly identifies ICM as *Intentional Camera Movement*, provides a technical definition of the practice, and invites users to tag their images using the full expression.

This evidence is significant because it does not simply document the incidental use of three words in combination. By 2009, all the elements associated with a recognisable technical terminology were already present:

- the full expression *Intentional Camera Movement*;
- the acronym *ICM*;
- an explicit definition of the technique;
- a community devoted specifically to the practice.

It can therefore be argued that, by June 2009, the term had already acquired sufficient currency to function as the established name of a photographic technique.

Another significant testimony is provided by Freeman Patterson in his 2020 text *Intentional Camera Movement*. Patterson describes “Intentional Camera Movement (ICM)” as a relatively recent term, used as a generic designation encompassing virtually any deliberate movement of the camera. More importantly, he explains that he had been practising the technique approximately sixty years earlier, at a time when it was not yet referred to as ICM. He also recalls having included a photograph produced using this approach in the first edition of *Photography and the Art of Seeing*, published in 1979.

A further piece of evidence deserves consideration. Milan Hristev produced a photograph in 2001 entitled *Venice, Italy*, which is now catalogued as “Technique - ICM (intentional camera movement)”. Similarly, one of his photographs from 2008, *The Duomo in Florence*, is described as employing the “Technique - ICM intentional camera movement”.

These examples demonstrate that the practice clearly predates the terminology used to designate it. A photograph made in 2001 may legitimately be classified today as ICM, but this retrospective classification does not imply that the photographer himself referred to the technique as ICM at the time.

The distinction between practice and terminology is therefore crucial. The history of intentional camera movement as a photographic practice considerably predates the emergence and consolidation of the term *ICM*. What appears to have occurred in the early twenty-first century is not the invention of the practice itself, but rather the emergence of a specific linguistic framework through which a previously diffuse set of photographic procedures could be identified, discussed and recognised as a distinct technique.

Motion Blur and ICM: two forms of photographic movement

Before investigating the historical origins of ICM, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between two forms of photographic terminology: motion blur and intentional camera movement.

Motion blur occurs when, during a relatively long exposure, a subject or part of the scene moves in relation to the camera. The camera itself remains essentially stationary and records, on the same photosensitive surface, the path travelled by the subject over time. Blur is therefore a trace of movement in the world: bodies, cars, water, vegetation or people are transformed into trails and dissolves. Here, the camera assumes the role of observer; the movement belongs primarily to what lies in front of the lens.

ICM, by contrast, introduces movement directly into the act of photographing. The camera is deliberately moved during the exposure along a trajectory chosen by the photographer: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, circular, or freer and more gestural. The scene is therefore not simply recorded while something moves; rather, it is reinterpreted through the movement of the camera itself. The image becomes the outcome of a physical relationship between photographer, device, space and time.

The distinction, however, does not lie solely in the movement of the camera. It is, above all, a difference in the authorship of the gesture. In motion blur, movement is captured; in ICM, movement is produced. In the former, the camera records a transformation that is already taking place in reality; in the latter, the photographer actively intervenes in the manner in which that reality is translated into an image.

Both approaches therefore challenge one of the fundamental premises of photography: the presumed ability of the photographic image to arrest an instant. Motion blur demonstrates that the photographic instant can contain duration; ICM brings that duration into the very gesture of photographing. In both cases, what would ordinarily be perceived as an error — the loss of sharpness — becomes instead an aesthetic and conceptual choice.

These two practices should not, however, be regarded as rigidly separate categories. A single image may simultaneously contain both the movement of the subject and that of the camera, producing a visual complexity in which the respective traces overlap. The distinction is therefore primarily a critical tool: it enables us to understand where the movement made visible by the image originates.

From the Prehistory of ICM to an awareness of the gesture

To demonstrate that ICM is far more than a simple photographic technique — as the name itself might suggest — it is necessary to place it within a broader history. The use of photographic movement did not, in fact, originate with contemporary photography.

The representation of movement has been part of photographic culture since the second half of the nineteenth century, when the chronophotographic experiments of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge transformed movement into an analysable sequence. In this context, however, photography primarily assumed an analytical function: breaking movement down in order to make its structure legible.

With the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, a fundamental shift took place. Movement no longer necessarily had to be broken down into a series of individual exposures; it could instead be synthesised within a single image. Italian Futurism is an essential precursor in this respect. As an autonomous artistic function, *movimentist photography* sought to represent not simply a body in motion, but the dynamic trace of the action itself.

In the decades that followed, and throughout the twentieth century, almost all artists experimented, even if only occasionally — as did Man Ray and Andy Warhol — with motion blur as part of their search for new expressive possibilities within the photographic image.

The history of *Intentional Camera Movement* therefore does not coincide with the emergence of the term ICM, nor can it be traced back to a single author or a single photographic tradition. The practice of intentionally moving the camera can already be found throughout the twentieth century, emerging from experiments developed within geographical, aesthetic and theoretical contexts that differed considerably from one another.

What unites the authors discussed below is not necessarily their use of the same terminology, nor an identical conception of the photographic image, but rather the progressive transformation of movement from a merely unintended effect into a conscious instrument of photographic construction.

Anton Giulio Bragaglia

the image as the trajectory of movement

The genealogy of ICM begins, at a theoretical level, with the experiments of Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890 – 1960) within the context of *Fotodinamismo futurista*, developed principally between 1911 and 1913. This dating is significant because it marks the emergence, for the first time, of a *Photodynamic* technique that would later come to be regarded as motion blur.

Bragaglia did not practise ICM in the contemporary technical sense: in his images, it is predominantly the subject that moves in front of a stationary camera. His importance, however, lies in having formulated, with remarkable precocity, a principle that would become central to the photographic representation of movement: the image can record not merely a body, but the duration of its action.

In opposition to the *Chronophotography* of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, which decomposed movement into an analytical succession of images, Bragaglia sought to condense movement within a single frame. The moving body is therefore not simply photographed at one particular instant; its trajectory, energy and duration become part of the photographic form itself.

Bragaglia's contribution to the genealogy of ICM can be summarised as a fundamental shift: from photographing movement to making movement itself a material of photography. His work thus establishes the first major dynamic paradigm: photography no longer necessarily has to arrest the instant but can instead attempt to convey the continuity of becoming.

Filippo Masoero

the instability of the point of view

A second significant stage is represented by the aerial photographic experiments of the Futurist photographer Filippo Masoero (1894 – 1969).

In images such as *Scendendo su San Pietro*, dated to around 1930, movement does not belong solely to the subject being represented: it also affects the point of view itself. The long exposure, the vibration of the camera during the aerial descent, and the particular conditions of the

photographic process produce distortions, blurring and shifts in perspective. The camera thus becomes part of the event it records.

Here too, it is important to avoid anachronistic interpretation: Masoero cannot be described as an ICM photographer in the contemporary sense. It is more appropriate to speak of proto-ICM, since his practice anticipates one of the fundamental conditions of ICM: the possibility that the movement of the camera itself may directly alter the structure of the image.

This represents a substantial difference from Bragaglia. Whereas in *Photodynamism* the movement of the subject is synthesised within the image, in Masoero it is the point of view itself that becomes unstable. His contribution therefore introduces the paradigm of instability: the photographic image is no longer necessarily produced from the position of an immobile observer.

Ernst Haas

movement as a perceptual experience

Within the international genealogy of ICM, Ernst Haas (1921 – 1986) occupies a fundamental position.

According to the chronology established by the Ernst Haas Estate, Haas's investigations into movement began in 1957, particularly through his celebrated work on Spanish bullfighting. In 1958, *LIFE* magazine also published the essay *The Magic of Color in Motion*, in which Haas explored the expressive possibilities offered by the use of slow shutter speeds to transform and visually blend colours.

Haas cannot simply be described as an ICM photographer in the contemporary sense of the term. His significance is more profound: he demonstrated how movement could transform photography into an instrument of perceptual experience.

The issue was not to represent a dynamic scene faithfully. Rather, Haas sought to convey, through the image, a sensation that in ordinary perception belongs to the dimension of time. Movement thus becomes a visual quality in its own right.

The research that began with bullfighting subsequently extended to sport, speed and a variety of situations in which motion blur and colour transform action into dynamic chromatic form. The referent, however, does not disappear entirely. Even when movement reduces the subject to traces

and fields of colour, the meaning of the image remains connected to the world: the bull, the rider, the car, the runner, the horse.

Haas therefore introduces the perceptual paradigm: movement does not distance photography from the world; rather, it allows photography to reveal a dimension of the world that instantaneous vision does not normally register. This constitutes the principal difference from the more radical approaches that would follow.

Kōtarō Tanaka

the photographic gesture as a writing of light

With Kōtarō Tanaka, the genealogy of ICM enters a particularly significant phase, as the movement of the camera becomes explicitly part of the construction of the image.

A Japanese amateur photographer (1901 – 1995), active primarily in the Osaka area, Tanaka developed an extensive photographic practice centred on colour and the Japanese social landscape. From 1962 onwards, he began photographing fireworks displays in colour, using the movement of his body and camera to transform luminous trajectories into graphic and calligraphic forms.

Here, a decisive shift takes place: it is no longer solely the subject that moves; the camera itself physically participates in the formation of the image.

A firework, by its very nature, is a temporal phenomenon: it appears, expands and disappears. Tanaka does not simply seek to record it; he accompanies its duration through the movement of the camera. The result is a form of chromatic writing of duration.

Tanaka thus occupies an intermediate position between Bragaglia and Haas. With Bragaglia, he shares an emphasis on trajectory and gesture; at the same time, he anticipates the central role that colour, light and perception would assume in movement-based photography during the second half of the twentieth century.

His contribution may therefore be described as perceptual-gestural: the camera does not merely record movement; it follows it, accompanies it and transforms it into a sign.

Because of the close affinity between this procedure and the contemporary definition of *Intentional Camera Movement*, Tanaka represents one of the most important precursors of ICM in its proper sense.

Giacomo Bucci

from dynamism to the ontology of the image

From the 1970s onwards, the work of Giacomo Bucci (1949 –) introduced a decisive shift in the history of ICM, probably representing the most radical case in Europe.

Bucci developed a practice based on the controlled movement of the camera during exposure. The operational principles governing the relationship between shutter speed, focal length and photographic gesture, published in the June 1973 issue of *Photo 13*, constitute an avant la lettre definition of ICM.

A fundamental aspect of his practice is the creation of the image through a single exposure, without subsequent graphic or painterly manipulation. This technical choice, which he continues to impose rigorously upon himself today, has a precise theoretical consequence: the abstraction is conceived before the exposure and emerges directly from the photographic act itself.

Publications such as the article in *Photo Technique* in 1974, together with his solo exhibitions in London at *The Photographer's Gallery* in 1974 and in Milan at *Il Diaframma* in 1975, as well as his continuing photographic production, confirm Bucci's exclusive commitment to experimental photography. During the 1970s, he referred to this practice as *movimentist photography*; today, he calls it ICM.

In traditional photography, the photographer tends to position himself as an observer of something that exists independently of his gesture. In Bucci's work, by contrast, the photographer's gesture intervenes directly in the construction of the photographic phenomenon, defragmenting and transforming the image of reality in a search for its "soul".

Whereas Haas uses movement to intensify the perception of the world, Bucci transforms the movement of the camera into the very principle through which the image is constructed, seeking to free the subject from a vision limited to what merely appears and to reveal a deeper, ontological dimension.

Bucci therefore introduces a phenomenological-ontological paradigm: the movement of the camera makes it possible to superimpose different configurations of the subject across time and becomes the means through which to question what the world may be beyond its immediately recognisable form.

Alexey Titarenko

movement as urban memory

Following the 1980s, when many photographers experimented with motion blur, the work of Alexey Titarenko (1962 –) in the 1990s brought movement-based photography into a new dimension: that of memory.

In the project *City of Shadows*, made in St Petersburg in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, prolonged exposure and camera movement are integrated into the practice of street photography. Crowds become flows, semi-transparent presences, trails and apparitions; architecture, by contrast, tends to retain a greater degree of stability.

The contrast is striking: the city remains, while individuals pass through it. Movement therefore no longer serves primarily to represent urban dynamism or to produce an abstract image. Instead, it becomes a visual form of the transience of existence.

Titarenko's work is inseparable from the historical context of post-Soviet Russia: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic crisis, poverty and the social transformation of the city become integral to the interpretation of the images.

People are not merely individuals moving through urban space; they become traces of time. Blur therefore assumes a properly semantic function. It is no longer simply an optical effect, but a device capable of making memory visible.

Titarenko thus introduces the historical-mnemonic paradigm: movement becomes a metaphor for the transience of the individual and the permanence of the city.

Although Titarenko's photography of the 1990s cannot be defined as ICM in the strict sense, his position is particularly important because it creates a bridge between documentary photography and abstraction: the real world remains recognisable, but its representation is permeated by memory.

Conclusion

The chronological succession of the artists considered here allows us to view the emergence of *Intentional Camera Movement* (ICM) not as the sudden appearance of a photographic technique, but as the outcome of a much longer transformation in the relationship between photographer, camera, subject, movement and time.

This progression makes it possible to reconsider the significance of the term itself. The emergence of *Intentional Camera Movement* in the early twenty-first century did not name the birth of a new practice so much as provide a new conceptual framework for a set of photographic procedures whose origins extend deep into the twentieth century. The term gave a shared identity to practices that had previously been described through different vocabularies — photodynamism, motion blur, movementist photography, experimental photography, or simply photographic gesture — and enabled them to be understood as manifestations of a broader principle.

The decisive transformation is therefore not simply from sharpness to blur, but from movement as an object of representation to movement as a means of photographic production. In Bragaglia, movement is something the photograph records; in Masoero, it begins to affect the point of view; in Haas, it expands the possibilities of perception; in Tanaka, it becomes inseparable from the gesture of the camera; in Bucci, that gesture becomes a fundamental principle in the construction of the image, acquiring ontological significance; and in Titarenko, movement becomes a vehicle for historical and mnemonic meaning. Contemporary ICM inherits and converges these different possibilities.

From this perspective, ICM represents the evolutionary continuity of the movement in photography that today, following a century-long transformation, becomes explicitly conscious of itself. What began as the recording of movement gradually became the manipulation of perception; what was initially an effect of exposure became a gesture; and what was once regarded as a deviation from photographic accuracy became a deliberate mode of image-making.

The deepest significance of ICM lies precisely here: the camera ceases to be merely an instrument for recording a world that moves and becomes an instrument through which movement itself generates the image.