

# Considerations on Alberto Giacometti's Art and the Fundamental Idea for Art — Description of an object and inter-subjective introspection —

Yasuo Ishii

Laboratory of Basic Education, School of Veterinary Medicine, Azabu University,  
1-17-71 Chuouku Fuchinobe, Sagami-hara City, Kanagawa 252-5201, JAPAN

**Abstract:** Alberto Giacometti was an artist who produced many sculptures and paintings in the 20th century. Although he believed that making a sketch and describing an object were primary goods of an artist, he was temporally influenced by the idea of surrealism. The impossibility of depicting an object accurately led him to surrealistic imagination. Nevertheless he was essentially a traditional artist who inherited his father's viewpoints.

According to Sartre who evaluated and admired his works, his sculptures could be understood as being existentialistic, for thin figures like a thread seemed to symbolize the essential existence of a human in the 20th century post-war era. However, this explication may be attributed to the result of Giacometti's art activity. His actions as an artist were more simple, and he developed his own vision and form by study of all kinds of art and works.

Giacometti believed that ancient sculptures and paintings like those seen in Egypt, Sumer, or Byzantine were very important for his own art, because they were the precious products made from 'vision' and 'form' of a historical age and the culture of that age. He also suspected that European modern 'realism' was deficit of such vision and form in art. Realistic description based on realism or realistic resemblance of the object were not important for him. He supposed that 'resemblance' was obtained through persistent observation and examination of the object and his own intuition and perception.

Therefore, the importance was found his actions themselves which were based on his inter-related subjective introspection by means of an object. Phenomenological subjective examination led to the development of his own 'vision' and 'form' for his creations which resulted in ever thinner figures. Giacometti's vision and his act of describing an object based on strictly inter-related subjective examination were so innovative that he developed a post-modern perspective for art became to be recognized as the essential paradigm for art and way of thinking in the 20th century.

**Key words:** Surrealism, Existentialism, Inter-subjective introspection, Phenomenology

## 1. Giacometti's vision for art

It might be difficult to find similar points between the work of Cimabue, Giotto, or Tintoretto and the works of Alberto Giacometti. A gap of several hundred years exists between the Renaissance artists and Giacometti. It is evident that Giacometti who was a representative sculptor and painter in the 20th century left many modern art works. He had persistently presented modern creation since 1920s. For

the wide audience observing his works most will identify them as particularly very modern, sophisticated sculptures of the 20th century (Fig. 1). It is understandable that he was basically fond of the ancient, traditional art of many regions. Giacometti was never a person who created works only from the point of view of western culture and art. In fact, his personality provides a good insight into his view of art. Seemingly an obstinate, persistent person, he tended to offer frank viewpoints about art. His entire career was



Fig. 1 Alberto Giacometti, *Homme qui marche II*, 1960  
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel



Fig. 2 Giacometti, *Table*, 1933 Bronze

focused on producing a large number of works, although he also broke many of them. One who sees his works once will never forget his eccentric, energetic, honest creations which release the essence of his own art world. Like those of Paul Klee, Giacometti's works were created by profound insights that were reflected in his art. And like Klee, he devoted himself to making works that would be seen as they were.

Making an object more explicitly was one of the major objectives of his art, and thus factors that have influenced his method have to be revealed in this study.

There are a lot of clues as to what factors affect his work and ideas. His remarks about art, his transition of art styles, his lifestyle, and his works themselves, all provide important clues to explication and understanding of his art. This study focused on an examination of Giacometti's 'vision' and 'form' in art, and on his way of observation as an artist. Here, it is supposed that his vision was developed through a transition of style from surrealistic imagination to traditional style. Above all, he respected vision, form, and 'theme' in his creations.

It is necessary to note that Alberto Giacometti devoted himself to make surrealistic works in the period around 1930-36. 'Table' was one of his representative works at that time (Fig. 2). This work allows observers to feel the surrealism of his art. He was certainly influenced by surrealism temporally when he suspected his potentiality of accurate description of an object. He tried to create works by surrealistic 'imagination,' not by depicting the object before his eyes. However, he soon noticed that it was in experimental challenge that he decided to change his traditional style to

surrealistic sculptures or paintings. Such a style was not his goal as an artist. He was not a person who aimed at creating surrealistic art works. Rather, he was still a person who pursued the goal of describing an object in front of him. Therefore, after 1936 he returned his style to his original stance. In this respect, he generally followed the traditional idea for European art, namely, 'Mimesis and technique.' He was certain that he should accurately describe an object before his eyes. Surrealistic imagination was not the energy that drove him to create his works and it is understandable that he preferred ancient arts.

In this respect, it should be pointed out that he favoured a range of art works, from Egyptian sculptures to those of Oceania. Sculptures of ancient Sumer and Egypt attracted him. In addition, he rather preferred Byzantine art to European paintings. He also liked miniature works painted in Medieval Europe and the mosaic work of Byzantine was a great artistic heritage that he particularly admired. Although he liked to make reproductions of Harmensz Rembrandts, Albrecht Dürer, and he recognized them as great artists, none of the modern European paintings based on 'realism' became his favorite works (Fig. 3). Rather, he considered that ancient art held more importance in regards to imagination and creation of his own art. He thought such paintings inherently possessed 'art vision' and 'form.'

As mentioned above, Giacometti admired Cimabue's works (Fig. 4), whose works had been considerably affected by Byzantine art and the tradition of Medieval Christian art. After the fall of Constantinople, the Osman Turks conquered the Balkan Peninsula, and numerous scholars,

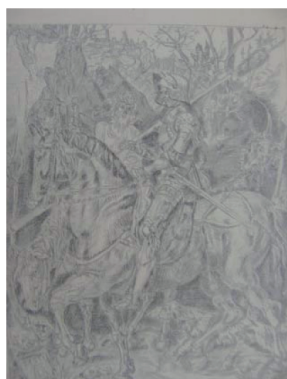


Fig. 3 Giacometti, after Dürer: *Knight, Death and the Devil*, 1915 pencil on paper, 31.2 × 23.6 cm



Fig. 4 Cimabue, *Maest di santa Trinit*, 1268-71 Tempera on wood, 385 × 223 cm Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze

technicians and artists moved to Italy. By this route, the arts of Byzantine were imported to Italy and later, north Europe. Cimabue's art is certainly influenced by Byzantine culture. Byzantine art and mosaics had been developed in the culture and history of the Empire, which acted as a link between Greek (the source of European culture) and oriental Asia. Giacometti thought that Byzantine civilization had its own cultural vision fostered by its long history and accumulation of values. He examined all kinds of art works, extending to every cultural area and to every historical age. His modern, sophisticated work was created through an examination of ancient representative sculptures (Fig. 5-6).

Through such admiration of ancient art, he defined his position as a modern artist in the 20th century. After the war and his experimentation with surrealism, describing an object accurately became the more important task for his art. It was so profoundly difficult that Giacometti thought he could not achieve it within his own time. He was con-



Fig. 5 Gruppo del Laocöonte in 2 B.C.? Musei Vaticani, Città del Vaticano



Fig. 6 Christ Enthroned, early 6th c mosaic detailed from the Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy

vinced that it was totally impossible to do so. In a sense, he perfectly understood the impossibility of 'making an accurate sketch.'

It is very important to emphasize the role of his father, who taught young Giacometti the importance of making a sketch and the meaning of art. The elder Giacometti's ideas were certainly inherited by his son, influencing Alberto's way in regards to creating art. To describe an object means representing it as it is, and Giacometti also pursued this way of describing an object. He essentially inherited the importance of making a sketch from his father: 'An artist is someone who knows how to see. And to study art means to learn how to see<sup>1)</sup>.' But in reality, he did not think it correct to make a 'real' sketch of an object. He himself had already confirmed it was impossible to completely describe a real object in his young age. A famous anecdote provides an example. When he was 18 or 19, Giacometti could not draw two pears on a table. The pears were becoming tiny as he drew then, his father became irritated, saying to him that he should draw them more realistically as he saw them. His

way of observation might be too honest for an object. For Giacometti honest observation might not be able to lead to an accurate drawing. Although honest observation enabled him to learn how to see and it was correct that observation is the fundamental base of his artistic activity, this symbolizes his essential way of thought for art. How to see an object is not equal to representing the thing in an accurately realistic way. Becoming 'tiny' is the key to understanding his art. His vision transformed the object, and the form of the object became altered in smaller form by his 'vision.'

Honest description does not always mean describing an object realistically. Honest description, for Giacometti, was related to persistent observation of the object and introspection of his own 'vision' and 'form' for art, and in this way he tried to realize reconstructed objects through reflection and subjective ideas. Therefore, subjective introspection supported his 'vision' and 'form' which were developed by his consideration of art throughout his career.

Again, he thought he was conscious of living in the 20th century. He knew the vision and form of the Renaissance, and of the 18th and 19th century, and had a thorough knowledge of western art. With regard to the 20th century, he was well versed in expressionism, cubism, and surrealist vision. His remarks on Piet Mondrian are interesting and helpful for understanding his art; 'I am convinced that paintings are nothing but a vision. a painting is only able to recreate another thing which is not a painting...Mondrian tried to create an object itself which is equal to another thing. ... that was like an evidence of Mondrian himself<sup>2)</sup>.' Alberto Giacometti thought that the most important thing was observation of an object, and based on the idea, he would recreate another thing through his vision and form. It might be supposed that this process is similar to that of expressionism or other modern artists. The process is developed in the creative reproduction of transformation and reflection of the artist's vision, which might be same as other modernists. However, it should be noticed that his insight was encouraged by more profound consideration of art and himself. In order to explicate Giacometti's consideration on art, it is necessary to examine the concept of pre-modern art and modern art in the 20th century which, perhaps, Giacometti wished to overcome by his peculiar vision and form.

## 2. Pre-modern concepts of art; Hegelian idea and phenomenological concept

With regards to the fundamental question, for what art exist? there might be various answers. Art exists for contribution to God, religion, or the realization of the world of myths. Alberto Giacometti also proposed a similar answer: 'First of all, art had contributed to religion and society until the 18th century. An artist was convinced that artistic activity was necessary for the society he lived ...The unique way for obtaining ideas of outer-world was paintings or sculptures<sup>3)</sup>.' This recognition of Giacometti's is partly true. To describe the world of god, or myth was the role of paintings and sculptures in Western art. To depict portraits of rich people, aristocrats, and emperors, and all historical affairs was also art's role. In the 19th century, the role of art was gradually altered. As he pointed out, artists gained a kind of freedom from this period onwards. As the role of art as a reflection of society, people, the dignity of gods and religion or reproduction of myths declined, freedom of description was included in the activities of 'individuals.' More independent acts of expression were attributed to individual determination.

It is clear that the meaning of paintings was found in realistic portraits and mythical motives that had been popular among people until the 18th century. The value of beauty in the Western world was established in the age of Romanesque and Gothic art. Few people suspected that the role of art, paintings or sculptures was to describe objects realistically according to the idealism, beauty, and value of Western civilization. The ideas of pre-modern western societies had been developed through the age of Renaissance, and the great reason of the enlightenment of Europe in the 17-18th centuries. Western realism in art was nurtured in the transition of philosophical concepts. Moreover, the spiritual movement of Renaissance art succeeded in establishing the beauty of western idealism. The subsequent age of the 17th and 18th centuries began the process of the formation of civil society and enlightenment by human reason. According to the transition of the age of enlightenment, more sophisticated techniques of painting had been developed by painters. Not only portraits of the aristocrat class,

but daily activities of common people were also described. Realistic depictions became the core of art. To describe an object as it was became one of the most important tasks delegated to art. Artists exploited the concept of Renaissance, and transformed it into that of western 'realism.' A stability in western art was established through the transition of the age. It was true that realism in art was promoted by ideas based on human reason, which provided stability.

More developed and sophisticated concepts of 'individualism' emerged after the French revolution, going beyond the stability of human reason. People were aware of belonging to their country which was equal to nationalism, and convinced of their life as an individual life of a civil person. People learned the spirit of criticism that dialectically leads to more improved results which affect their real lives. According to the idea of Jürgen Habermas, Hegel regarded 'modern times' (in this case, the 'modern' age Hegel referred to is the 19th century) as a totally different age from pre-modern times<sup>4</sup>).

Hegel's idea is important and provides a clue for understanding Giacometti's art or modern art in general. The reason why Hegel is referred to in this section is that it was Hegel who dealt with his era as 'modern,' separating pre-modern times in Western civilization. And Habermas explicates and introduces his ideas, binding them to the idea of western arts.

The basis of Hegel's idea states that the Reformation, discovery of the New World, and the Renaissance were the primary landmarks which divided modern times and the Medieval age in Europe. Both self-recognition as an individual and development of the ability of criticism were the important factors which served to develop the modern ideas of the Western world. People living in the Medieval age lived under the law and order of feudal systems and religion which regulated their life. Their ability of self-recognition was so limited that it was difficult to criticize the standard of society which surrounded their social system and lifestyle. The movement of the Renaissance allowed the development of ideas beyond such confined the pre-occupational views supported by feudalism and dogmatic Catholicism. The movement, which originally aimed at the recovery of values of ancient Greek culture, instead enhanced western

civilization to more enlightened spirits which drove it to modernized societies. Of course, at first, the effect was subtle, for the movement was shared only by a restricted class of people. Second, the Reformation changed 'the faith' that was controlled by the Catholic church and the Pope into freedom of praying and faith by individual persons. The development of a civil class supported individual faith, because Protestantism recommended economic activities which brought about economic profits to those who agreed with the new ideas. The medieval age was an extended period when religion and faith united with nations, and pervaded people's values such that they were not allowed to criticize the accepted recognition of self or the prevailing way of thought. Individual faith could reflect upon self-recognition and evaluate its truthfulness. This great religious change promoted self recognition and individualism.

Subsequently, the discovery of the New World also resulted in expanded perspective of western culture. The existence of the 'other,' and unknown culture provided European people with a new geographical dimension. Although they first regarded the other culture as a primitive and uncivilized one, it was nevertheless true that Europeans confirmed that their geographical areas were not the unique, civilized world. The expanded horizon provided the Old World with infinite potentiality which guaranteed exploitation and profits unheard of in their own countries. Habermas explained that Hegel thought it was these three important factors, the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the discovery of the New World, which transformed Europe into a more 'modern' civilization of European countries. Moreover, the French revolution was the historical event that enabled Europe to evolve further towards modern cultural communities in each country. People felt nationalism, a negation of the right of kings, and recognition of the main rights as a nation through the drastic change of revolution and the wars caused by Napoleon. They came to think that a state should be governed and controlled by law and order based on rules and human reason. However, the concept of idealism does not correspond to reality. Law and order founded in human 'reason' could not necessarily control each country. Habermas supposed that on this point, Hegel interpreted art as the most sophisticated 'reconciled' form

of human activities which could realize human aims at a more highly-cultured level of consciousness, morality, ethics, and beauty. Western romanticism was regarded as a realization of such ethical, sophisticated, beautiful idealism. Romanticism in the 19th century was defined as the cultural realization of sophisticated, reconciled human reason. Hegel's conceptual assumption was that such modern spirit enabled civilization to evolve and improve its culture by philosophical reflection upon past civilization and historical events such as the Renaissance and the Reformation. Grounded in such progression, societies could be continuously developed and attained by dialectic reflection of every phenomenon of society. Art could be the ultimate 'form' created by human activities based on 'reason' and freedom of the individual. This conception is logical and seems reasonable when one considers how European civilization steadily developed through its 'history' of Hegelian modern times, the 19th century. In addition it was commonly understandable that the role of art helped promote modernization of its culture. A consideration of Western art, sculptures, paintings, or architecture and ornaments, demonstrates that most western concepts of 'beauty' were evidently established and visualized during the 18th and more sharply in the 19th century. Industrialized, enlightened, and sophisticated western culture has continued to produce many aspects of beauty since the concept of 'Baroque' emerged. The Palace of Versailles provides an example of an excessively splendid building, overemphasizing the authenticity of the right of French king. Together with the church of Kern, with its sharp pinnacles towards the sky, it could be regarded as a representative religious western architecture. European architecture, based on that of the ancient Greeks, succeeded in showing its fruitful dignity in the 18th century<sup>5)</sup>.

As for literature, in the age of Romanticism in the 19th century, Friedrich Novalis, Johann F. Hölderlin and Goethe proved that individual spirit surely enabled them to realize personal imagination and spirit to more sophisticated expression in their poems. Poems by John Keats, Samuel Coleridge and George Byron were also the very essential representation of Romantic poetic imagination. They confirmed that poetical words and verse could express human



Fig. 7 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *De anatomische les van Dr. Tulp*, 1632 216.5 × 169.5 cm Mauritsuis, Den Haag

emotion, enthusiasm and individual freedom subjectively.

Frans Hals, Diego Velázquez, Rembrandt, Jan Vermeer or Anthony van Dyck were the representative painters of the 17th century (Fig. 7). The realism of their paintings make those who see the works believe that these artists are among the superlative painters in art history. They showed that the idea of western 'realism' was established by them in this pre-modern time. The act of depicting an object was certainly possible, and in doing so demonstrated that they knew their role as painters of their age.

In the 19th century, more sophisticated methods and new ideas inspired artistic development. The modern era was an age when European nations developed through colonialism, nationalism and industrial progression. In particular, new and revolutionary ideas were introduced to paintings. Cezanne, Monet, or Van Gogh were among those who most drastically transformed the idea and technique of art. Colors and forms based on more subjective examination were reflected in works. Real or natural ideas of objects were re-considered by them. For instance, the colors used by Van Gogh had essentially never been imagined in pre-modern times. What was important was individual reflection and criticism. Consideration and criticism through subjective reflection presented more sophisticated and impressive art works. This sophistication was disclosed as a high degree of reconciliation between the human mind and social development. At least, before the advent of expressionism, Western art seemed to have reached a zenith in its role of 'description' of beauty, real depiction and expression of an object. Even if Impressionism or Symbolism included subjective ideas on colors and forms like Van Gogh, there were, at least, no factors of destructive and vio-

lent expression which were to appear in the following age.

'Subjectivity' in the 20th century which was combined with freedom or independence beyond reason caused a form of destruction to the culture of art in Europe. Destructiveness of a type resistant to human reason was introduced to visions and forms of western art. Expressionism was a movement which promoted more independent colors and forms, and had a major impact on the art scene. Cubism was an idea which effectively provoked radical new thinking about human vision of an object. Moreover, surrealist vision was regarded as resistance to human reason. In this respect, it seems clear that in the 1930s Giacometti attempted to experimentally realize something based on his imagination, not by depicting an object but by surrealist thought. However, as mentioned above, this transpired to be a temporary trial which led him to believe that this use of imagination was in some way mistaken, and that describing an object, describing a truth, was the most important aspect for him. To describe truth was a fundamentally difficult problem for him, leading to profound and continued reflection of the object and himself, and which required his utmost excessive contemplation of art.

Hegelian ideas on art, the fruitful 'reconciliation' of human reason, idealism, history and society were transformed through the transition of the age. The 20th century completely changed Hegel's idea, and the idea of art was plunged into a more individual, subjective sensitivity and 'vision.' The vision of art was separated from reason, ethics, morality and 'reconciliation' which Hegel referred to as realization of human's sophisticated idealistic concept. The vision of art in the 20th century saw more confused, violent and energetic styles which attested to each artist's perception, intuition, and subjectivity. Giacometti made a statement that 'an artist began to devote himself not to kings or churches, but to a vision for art (in modern times). Humans' responsibility is left to humans' judgment by themselves<sup>6)</sup>. Giacometti recognized the responsibility and independence of the individual in modern times. However, the concept of the age in which Giacometti had lived was also completely different from the definition Hegel presented for that of modernity. Giacometti's subjective

introspection was partly dialectic, but more unique and phenomenological, — a transcendental reflection which was charged with his contribution to art. Giacometti's sculptures and paintings suggest more sophisticated and evolutionary ideas which emphasize the essence of the 20th century, and which decisively contain more independent and energetic impacts or violence as an 'individual.' The Hegelian paradigm which was still based on ideal and metaphysical discourse was no more applied to the concept of art in the 20th century. Giacometti's subjective vision through which his works were realized and constructed arose from more practical and cognitive conception of the post-modern paradigm which requires examination in more details<sup>7)</sup>.

### 3. Phenomenological subjectivity and Giacometti's art

In the post-war period, Giacometti tried once more to describe the object directly in front of him. At the end of the 1940s, most of his characteristic phenomena had appeared. The figures became thin and haggard as if only the skeleton of a body remained (Fig. 8). The image of a haggard figure might remind us of Buddha who practiced asceticism (Fig. 9), but Giacometti's thin figure is deprived of any philosophical, religious or social implication and allusion. He continued to create these spindly figures, which became the main characteristic of his post-war masterpieces. Jean Paul Sartre interpreted Giacometti's sculptures, explaining that Giacometti's sculptures contained philosophical implications<sup>8)</sup>. Without doubt, no one had created such thin peculiar figures in the history of art. Giacometti's emaciated



Fig. 8 Giacometti, *Femme assise*, 1946 Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel



Fig. 9 *Fasting Buddha* as Gandhara art, in 2th c?  
Lahore Museum, Pakistan

skeleton-like figures seemed to imply something maximum from the subtly tiny minimum. The fact that this skeleton-like body could express both the minimum and maximum implication of a human existence suggested that these figures might symbolize the essence of human existence living post-war era<sup>9)</sup>. As for the phenomenon of creation of thin figures, Giacometti provided interesting clues, such as the time when he was in a café in Montparnasse, and perceived the movement of people as being ‘mechanic.’ People on the street were perceived as more mechanic and even represented on inorganic existence for him, an image that was surely expressed in his works (Fig. 10-12). This mechanical and inorganic existence of figures keenly reflected Giacometti’s observations on humans, whom he considered to be people that were an essentially ‘living mechanical mass.’ Furthermore, this image helps to lead us to an interpretation that Giacometti’s sculptures presented implications of the existentialism of modern people.

Although it might be true that Giacometti admired the art of Byzantine, or Renaissance paintings, Giacometti himself did not intend to create works with western ‘beauty.’ Rather, he was indifferent to the Western traditional ‘beauty’ found in European art for his own works. As the dialogue with André Parinaud indicates, what he was interested in was not related to Western beauty<sup>10)</sup>. He directed his efforts to realize the description of an object, pursuing the true figure of humans through persistent observation, an important point in gaining an understanding of his work. Extremely honest and persistent observation transformed an object. An fervent desire to describe the object, persistent observation, and consideration of the theme significantly affected the process of description and complicated the



Fig. 10 Giacometti, *La place*, 1948 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 11 Giacometti, *La clairière*, 1950 Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections



Fig. 12 Giacometti, *Le chariot*, 1950 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung, Zurich

procedure of ‘how to see it.’ Theme was also important for Giacometti. Only persistent consideration enabled him to make clear the true essence of the object. Theme for Giacometti was to describe the figure and the core-like essence which constitutes the figure.

Giacometti once referred to Jacques Callot, and his copperplates which dealt with the awful disaster of the Thirty Years’ War. Giacometti sought to explicate Callot’s works and his ideas. According to Giacometti’s explanation, Callot’s images are directly related to the essential cruelty





Fig. 13 Jacques Callot, *Les Grandes Misères de la Guerre* (the detailed part), 1633 Etching 7.9 × 18.4 cm

of humans and aim to represent human's innate cruelty through the theme (Fig. 13). In this sense, theme is equivalent to the motif of cruelty. Callot intended to describe not the awful historical scenes, but human's ugly and debased minds through consideration of theme<sup>11</sup>). The cruelty of humans was theme.

Giacometti's theme was simple. To describe the object was the ultimate true purpose for him, and in order to realize the purpose, it was necessary for him to see and try to understand the object. This act required few models. Annette, his wife, or his brother, Diego became representative models for him (Yanaihara, the Japanese philosopher and Caroline, a model were known as his models.) But honest observation and attempt to understand the object were so difficult that Giacometti was forced to repeatedly depict the same models.

At every moment, he considered the meaning of the object which he tried to describe. Humans are alive, breathe, tremble, palpitate, and move make small movements incessantly; humans live fundamentally as an organism. Giacometti thought it was impossible to confine all of these aspects into a sculpture or painting. Moreover, it was important for him to 'understand' the true essence that constitutes the object. This act of understanding required intuitional perception, introspective reflection, and careful examination of his own mind. He was thus compelled to doubt what his description was truly correct. He must have grappled with the difficulty of understanding how he saw the object and the theme. This dedication to persistent observation and introspective examination led to subsequent, interrelated subjective introspection which was a

form of phenomenological transcendental subjectivity.

Of course, he was an artist, not a philosopher. It is necessary, however, to suppose that Giacometti introduced a different perspective to the act of creation as an artist in the 20th century. This alternative perspective was based on the paradigm of pre-modern times. Artistic perspective in the modern times encouraged artists to create more logically, meaning that artists were free to describe what they would prefer, and express works according to the idealism of European beauty. Expressionism was the art movement of modern western paintings. L. Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Otto Mueller and other painters created works within the movement. Yet the colors and forms were never so innovative, rather influenced by Cezanne and Gogh, the great pioneers of western art. Even Surrealistic art, as the works of Ernst, Dali, or Delvaux showed, were based on western art and the idea of beauty. Although it might be an exaggeration, those art works, in a sense, were based on the perspective of a modern paradigm which had been inherited from western idealism. Post-modern perspective is innovated through interrelated subjective introspection, which is neither metaphysical nor idealistic, but rather linguistically communicative consideration. Thus, it is necessary to examine the subjective consideration of Giacometti.

Giacometti who thought making a sketch was the most important thing above all stated that the more accurately he carved a figure, the thinner it became, to the point that it seemed as if nothing remained. Again, it is confirmed that his sculptures of the post-war period clarified the most impressive form (Fig. 14). All parts of the body seemed to be surplus and excessive. It is supposed that Giacometti



Fig. 14 Giacometti, *Femme debout*, 1948-49 Humburger Kunsthalle

tried to leave a 'core' of the object, the ultimate remnant for an existence. It is possible to assume that the core means the essence of humans, or in a more symbolical meaning, the human soul. Explication from the point of view of existentialism might be understandable.

Nevertheless, Giacometti's own comments are probably more reliable for explication. He sometimes commented that looking more closely at the model, the depiction became smaller or even seemed to disappear. Close observation was constantly disturbed by other visions or forms, and he could not describe anything but a remnant of a figure-like body. His comments in the letter to Pierre Matisse suggests more concisely his true feeling: 'to my surprise, the sculpture became smaller, based on my memory. I supposed only being small could resemble the object, but I resisted this a little. ...and the smaller sculptures became more minute as if they were disappeared by a little prick with a small knife. Even this condition, I believed that only the smallest heads or figures could express truth....I wished to make larger sculptures after making a sketch many times. In this case, however, to my surprise, thin figures could only resemble reality<sup>12)</sup>.'

Once, when he went to Lake Geneva, he incidentally looked at a female figure on the lake shore. He memorized the figure as a 'pin,' but the pin-like figure was so impressive, he considered it was rather bigger than Mont Blanc which rose majestically behind the figure<sup>13)</sup>. Or according to another conversation he suggests, 'From then on my vision of everything changed...as if motion were no more than a series of points of immobility...These people walking up and down the street (Montparnasse) were unconscious automatons...like ants; everyone went his own way but himself, entirely alone, in a direction none of the others knew<sup>14)</sup>.' These comments are rather understandable. His close observation of people or modes led to his process of fundamental consideration of inter-subjective introspection which consists of his own intuition and perception with reflection of various visions he had developed through his experience, and of course, imagination. And this subjective process transformed the object into thinner and smaller figures. Giacometti's peculiar intuition and perception, with such persistent interrelated subjective introspection have

points in common with the phenomenological consideration of Edmund Husserl, in terms of thought by subjective idealism and recreated the concept of inter-subjectivity as a post-perspective philosophical idea.

Husserl re-considered idealism based on reason and the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, which were principles of European metaphysical idealism inherited from Descartes and Kant. It was Hegel who synthesized idealism as the concept of absolute mind based on human reason in modern times. Husserl doubted that dialectical idealism could not confirm the certainty of human subjectivity. He believed that metaphysical idealism should be corrected by interrelated subjective reflection on a more pragmatic and linguistic level which was applied to more daily activities concerned with individual life.

According to Husserl's ideas, when one individual thinks of the surrounding world around him or observes an object, there is always a conjecture which affects the individual's idea with various modifications. In effect, the conjecture proposes some doubts or predictions which serve to confirm the certainty of understanding of the first idea. One never knows whether the idea is true or not, nor knows whether the object in front of one is real or not. Husserl's phenomenology proposed a way of thinking in which all things, including the conjecture that might confirm the certainty and provide modification of the idea, may be doubtful due to the ambiguity of both the outside and inside of an individual. Continuous and subjective reflection and examination of the self is thus required. Interrelated subjectivity aims at the correction of ideas and conjectures. In addition, this interrelated subjectivity does not imply the objective of any dialectical progression of ego. From dialectical (or Hegelian) point of view, interrelated subjectivity aims at the reconciliation and sophisticated progression of one's own individuality, for the purpose of further refinement of reason, understanding, morality in a society. This view includes the improvement of ethics, morals, and laws of both of individuals which also spread into and lead to social standards. Hegel's modernity was supported by the transition of such dialectical ideas based on human reason and understanding. Until the 19th century, it was generally supposed that subjection-objection relationship could be

supported by dialectical understanding for the purpose of further progression and development inside an ego.

But Husserl proposed a fundamental modification to the idea of 'how one's subjectivity was to be.' Subjectivity must always be examined in order to suspect whether judgment is absolutely certain or not, and whether the process of understanding by conjecture is certain or not. Thus, such examination did not aim at any sophistication and dialectic higher progression. In a sense, Husserl's phenomenology was thorough criticism of an individual's self-recognition. For Hegel, human reason was thought of as the reconciliation of self-recognition with an absolute mind<sup>15</sup>). For Husserl, human subjectivity (or human reason) was the object of critical examination. Inter-related subjectivity or the idea of transcendental ego were necessary to examine the system of an individual's subjective understanding based on reason, intuition, and perception. To ascertain the certainty of every understanding of an individual, Husserl proposed interrelated introspective ideas as phenomenology.

Giacometti's essential ideas on art had similar to points to this idea of this interrelated subjectivity. Giacometti attempted to continuously observe and examine the objects which he tried to describe and express in sculptures or paintings. He made efforts to evaluate the certainty of his judgment and understanding of the object and also criticized his own way of observation and consideration of the models and objects in front of him or in his imagination. He basically doubted aspects of 'realism' of modern times which had been developed and refined since the 17th century of Europe. He had his own 'vision' and 'form' on art, based on his study of every art vision and forms, and particularly he deepened his insights on ancient art of civilizations. Therefore, his interrelated subjectivity was never based on self-sufficient consideration, but rather supported by sharply critical understanding and perspectives, followed by constant reflection and examination which doubted his own values and understanding. The result was represented in many of his works (Fig. 15).

#### 4. Conclusion

It is certain that Giacometti deserves to be recognized as



Fig. 15 Giacometti, *L'homme qui chavire*, 1950 Kunsthaus Zürich, Vereinigung Zürcher Kunstfreunde

one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. In particular, his sculptures have made an overwhelmingly impressive impact on the world of modern art. Though he was neither a philosopher nor a poet, his works contain implications which confronted the profound ideas of human existence in his age. In the first instance, honestly inherited his father's goal; to make an object be seen more clearly. Making a sketch in order to describe the true essence of an object was the most important task for him. His essential way of thinking for art and creating his works was strictly inter-related subjective consideration. As Husserl proposed innovative ideas on philosophy in the 20th century presenting post-modern perspectives in his age, Giacometti proposed his vision and forms based on his profound insights and consideration for creation in his age. Both ideas are, in a sense, aimed at the alteration of the values of the world. Particularly, in the post-war era, subjective idealism in modern times was no longer effective in the consideration and examination of the world after the World War II. Giacometti's perspectives proposed a new paradigm in the area of modern art. Humans can not describe and express the object as it is, in a realistic way.

However, above all, there is nothing important more than his own remarks on art and creation, which provide us with the most important and reliable window on his true feelings: 'People think I deliberately shorten a human's head or make figures thinner. But I try to understand the resemblance of the object, and to describe the model honestly, for a human's figure shortened or became thinner. A human's head is only a sphere, and the body is nothing but a thin



Fig. 16 Giacometti, *La cage*, 1949-50 Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

stick. I look at and understand a human's figure in a space in such a way<sup>16)</sup> (Fig. 16).

#### Notes

- 1) Véronique Wiesinger. 2009. 'Giovanni and Alberto Giacometti: Father and Son' in *Giacometti* (Beyeler Museum AG, Basel; Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern) : 24. Wiesinger refers to the close relationship on artistic view point between father and son.
- 2) Michel Leiris et Jaques Dupin. translated by Isaku Yanaihara, Eiji Usami, and Kanako Yoshida. 1994. *Alberto Giacometti. Ecrits*. Misuzu Shobo: 373-4. (translation in English by the author)
- 3) Op.cit., 414.
- 4) Consideration on Hegel's thought on modern times and art was based on Jürgen Habermas. Jürgen Habermas. 1990. translated by K.Mishima, O.Kutsuwada, T. Kimae, and A. Onuki. *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* Iwanammi Shoten Pub.  
Habermas interpreted Hegel as a person who considered human reason based on ideas of Descartes, Kant presented a conception of 'individual ego' with reason in the modern times which is completely separated from pre-modern times. The modern era was remarkably excelled in the areas of history, religion, geography, and individual consciousness which obtained independence. An individual or a society could develop its existence dialectically on the basis of human reason and understanding, ethics and morality. Art in the modern times could realize and express human's ideal values and views of the world based on reason and understanding.
- 5) The palace of Versatile was constructed in 1682 when Luis 14 transferred his capital; the whole palace with its huge park was completed in the 19th century. The cathedral of Kern started its construction in 1248, and was completed in 1842-80. These buildings and others are regarded as a pinnacle of European architecture in pre-modern history. The concept of Romanesque, Baroque or Rococo are the representative ideas of western beauty.
- 6) *Alberto Giacometti, Ecrits*: 418. Giacometti appeared to suggest that humans in the 20th century were all charged with their own activities.
- 7) Habermas explained Hegelian metaphysical conception extended from Kant's transcendental idealism on reason, and linked Husserl's phenomenological cognition and Heidegger's recognition of 'being' with ideas of post-metaphysics. Habermas thought that the ideas of Husserl or Heidegger corresponded to the post-metaphysical thoughts in the 20th century which separated the metaphysical ideas synthesized by Hegel. Jürgen Habermas. Translated by K. Gujisawa and K Kutsuna. 1990. *Nachmetaphysisches Denken, Philosophische Aufsätze* Miraisha: 10-73.
- 8) Sartre's remarks: "To sculpt, for him (Giacometti), is to take the fat off space." "He was the first one to take it into his head to sculpt man as he appears, that is to say, from a distance." Véronique Wiesinger (Director.) 2007. *The Studio of Alberto Giacometti* Centre Pompidou / Fondation Annette et Alberto Giacometti: 309.
- 9) Ibid., 328. John Kobler's view is based on symbolism; 'They (sculptures) powerfully and poetically symbolize the malaise of 20th century man, his aloneness, his insecurity, his terrors.' But this understanding seems not to think about Giacometti's true feelings on art.
- 10) *Alberto Giacometti. Ecrits*: 412. 'I do not create in order to realize beautiful paintings nor beautiful sculptures.'
- 11) Alberto Giacometti, *Ecrits*: 73-6. 'Callot's constantly and uniquely positive essence is "vacancy ." In the vacancy, people killed and destroyed each other.'
- 12) *Ecrits*: 98-99.
- 13) *Giacometti. Op.cit.*: 94
- 14) Ibid., 114.
- 15) J. Habermas *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*: 146.
- 16) Alberto Giacometti. Translated by I.Yanaihara and E.Usami. 1976. *Ecrits D'Alberto Giacometti Et ses Entretiens* Keiso Shobo: 206.