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Giacometti and the Gesture of Creative Life

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This paper addresses the ontological condition of innovation. It attempts to pose the question of innovation as event or what could be phrased as 'the ethos of creativity'. The ethos of creativity inquires into the problem of what it means to be called to work, and how this ethos of 'being-called' connects innovation to a practice of self-transformation. To confront these questions the paper combines ideas of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben with the artistic work-praxis of the Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti. Giacometti turns his work-crisis into a method of impotence. Within this power, creation is subjected to destruction. The moment of creativity happens at the threshold between power and impotence, between destruction and potentiality, tying innovation to the elimination (destruction) of perfection.

Keywords: Innovation, creativity, potentiality, impotence, messianic power, destruction, Giacometti.

Throughout all the sculptures, paintings and drawings, he pursues one and the same attempt to approach reality. The work is single, unfinished, and impossible. (Jacques Dupin: Giacometti)

Introduction

For a number of years now concepts like 'creativity' and 'innovation' have become part of a worldwide jargon within creative industries, in government policy, in corporate branding, marketing, and investment strategies. The entrepreneurial person is now the prototype within business, employment, and labor-politics. The entrepreneurial character now also merges and appears with the artist. In our Post-Fordist society the boundaries between labor, politics and art are being challenged by new modes of production within knowledge society and immaterial labor (Virno, 2002). Everyone has to perform and make themselves visible and communicative. From a sociological and diagnostic perspective this might be true. However, and this will occupy us here, it also tends to put our concepts of innovation and creativity in great danger. Today marketing, communication, creative industries and computer science are all saying in an unusual ironic tone:

“This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the ideas men!” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 10). Ever since Schumpeter argued that creativity and innovation changes the reproduction of economy we have seen an inflation of the use of these concepts (Schumpeter, 1949). More so, theoretical reflection into the heart of creativity was according to Schumpeter not the task of economy. Economy should only look into the already given innovative activity and put up the frames to facilitate production and accumulation (Schumpeter, 1942) As the Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato has argued, creativity and innovation are in constant danger of being reduced to a simple externality used and applied by economy for economic use (Lazzarato, 2002) In the literature on creativity, ‘creativity’ is reduced to either something that flows from an individual mind or as a ‘synergy’ among people (Csikszentimhalyi, 1992). This paper argues for the need to investigate the ontology of innovation. Entering management and organization-related studies ontology and questions of being are rarely discussed (Rehn, 2006). Ontology is often considered obscure metaphysics, idealism and most of all irrelevant for any further inquiry into the question of value and not least the relation between economy and innovation. Nevertheless words like ‘innovation’ and ‘creativity’ have a tendency to essentialise the problem of originality relying on a quasi-romantic vision of the genius. This hidden romanticism also supports the increasing economic demands attached to the so-called unique and branded talent, not to mention its legal rights. Hence, the pressure within copyright law to rely on a static and romantic conception of originality today is constantly being challenged by new working-methods and the new media (Stapleton, 2004). Thus, in the case of Giacometti, we see a huge gap between the market value of his figure *Walking man* recently being sold by Sotheby’s for 104.3 million dollars and the question of what makes this a unique work. Furthermore the discourse on innovation repeats the iconic new speak of ‘the new’ rarely trying to confront the praxis of creativity itself, thus primarily focusing on the exterior product (Jones & Spicer, 2005). As Rehn and Vachhani remarks innovation is “assumed *a priori* to be original” (Rehn & Vachhani, 2006: 312). There is a tendency to lock up the so-called ‘new’ into a static point, to fixate creativity and innovation to either a finished product or a so-called ‘creative moment’. What is left is a vague conception of creativity and innovation as an abstraction of modernism, as something that leaves the past behind. The idea of presupposing a specific point in time creates the image of innovation and its ontology as being inherently stable that relies on technological innovation as the prototype of all innovation. Hence, the term *innovation* (*L., innovat, innovare: renew, alter, – make new*) is often used and categorized to designate every form of economic growth obtained through novelty in terms of new products or processes. Production of the new is to account for objects as new, fashionable, and as part of a collection, or in the case of art, as an event in a symbolic sense without ontology.

In recent years we have seen a rise in art studies, innovation, and organization (Monthoux, 2004 and 2007) using art as a kind of laboratory for investigating creative energies within organizations. The idea of ethos, or working-ethos, will be the means through which this paper bridges art with organization. Particularly, we will be interested in combining Agamben's thought of the event with the artistic praxis of Giacometti capturing a unique pathos for what it means to be called to one's work, to have an ethos, something that fosters an investigation into the spiritual root of modern work. Previous studies that combine Agamben's concept of the event and organization focus on the negative consequences of his political thinking addressed the problem of de-subjectivation and bio politics within organization, and the threshold between order and disorder (ten Bosch, 2005: 18-19). This paper stresses the use of Agamben's key concept for the event - potentiality- to address its positive element as a possible value for organization and innovation studies. The idea is to show how innovation and creativity are tied not to a linear view of time, but to a more discontinuous praxis that demands a serious attention to the contingent aspect of the working-process itself. Despite the different focus, this has clear affinities with Rehn & Vacchani's notion of the event as an "ontological time-value-continuum" (Rehn & Vachhani, 2006), since they want to extend the ontological dimension of innovation by embracing a more extended field of relevance for innovation including the mode of post-production. However, in this paper I want to go a step further when it comes to addressing the time-element of innovation of the working-ethos: Creation and innovation belongs to a sensibility of time that involves being attentive not to the final result, but to the phases that take place within this process. This innovation as event has received some attention in relation to management and leadership (Jeanes, 2006). Other studies have combined design with the event (Kwinter, 2005). Sanford Kwinter working with architecture and design has defined innovation as a unique event, that novelty is what happens in time, as "no novelty appears without becoming and no becoming without novelty" which turns into a vision of the future (Kwinter, 2002: 5). In different ways these studies show how the relation between the event and creativity stresses the ethos of acting and its ethical and political implications. In the conclusion of their article *Innovation and the Post-Original: On Moral Stances and Reproduction* Rehn and Vachhani claim that literature on management and innovation are much aware of innovation as a unique event that replaces earlier modes of creation, but these studies they emphasize tend to miss how the creative agent, or better the creative activity, relates to the event itself. Is the event something that can be objectified and valorized, or is it something that avoids a clear objectification, something that has to be understood from within its own mode of production? Referring to the French philosopher Alain Badiou's theory of the event, the authors stress Badiou's idea of *fidelity*, the point of staying true to the event, something they see as the crucial additional element which is absent in innovative and management studies. "The

innovation, says Badiou, can never be proven in the event, as the event simply does not have any objective content. Rather, the event must be affirmed and repeated by those who believe in it, those who *stay true*. This is the way in which innovations come into being, by way of fidelity. What innovation management has tended to do, however, is to look for the provable content of the event – paradoxically the part of innovation that cannot be proven” (Rehn & Vachhani, 2006: 321).

To a certain extent this paper takes off from where Rehn & Vachhani work ends; with the ethos of staying true to the event contributing to the field of creativity, and management analyzing the ethos of creativity. Using the case of Giacometti as a unique laboratory to shed light over what happens within the work-praxis the paper stresses the problem of being called to work. Our analysis of *Giacometti's call*, or what he himself has addressed as ‘an obsession’, presupposes at several levels the fidelity to the event. This fidelity, or call, is apparent in his praxis, in confronting his own crisis, and in his relation to the finished work: the point of creation of a complete artwork, and in relation to his urge of interrupting and eliminating perfection and originality.

Potentiality: The eventness of creativity:

What is ‘productive life’? To speak about life in relation to production is to deal with ‘life’ as a concept that is never left to itself, but always something being produced in human capacity and imagination. This life always has a form, a form made by the use of language and thoughts. As Agamben writes, “a life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself” [...] ”It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simple *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all *power*.” (Agamben, 2000: 4). Agamben then asks if such a power today is available (Agamben, 2000: 9). Agamben locates the problem of innovation as a problem of thought, or the *potentia* of thought. In Aristotle’s treatise this was compared to that of a writing tablet: “the *nous* is like a writing tablet [*grammateion*] on which nothing is actually written” (Agamben, 1999: 244). From Aristotle, the scholastic, the Latin tradition, the Arabic and Jewish mystics, and further on to Hölderlin, the image of the white board or *tabula rasa* has been seen as the image of the wonder of creation. The problem that occupies them all was; ”how it is possible to conceive of its passage to actuality. For if thought in itself had a determinate form, if it were always already something (as a writing tablet is a thing), it would necessarily appear in the intelligible object and thus hinder intellection. This is why Aristotle takes care to specify that *nous* ”has no other nature than that of being potential, and before thinking it is absolutely nothing” (Agamben, 1999: 245). The mind therefore is not a thing but a being, which is pure potentiality. In returning to Aristotle’s *dynamis*,

Agamben rethinks our modern problem of innovation in terms of the relation between potentiality and actuality. In this analysis he describes what it means for something to change from one thing into another. In his famous example of the architect and the lyre-player, Aristotle tells us that by building a house or playing the lyre the architect and the lyre-player can both actualize and uphold their skills without actualizing them. Skills not being actualized are as much real as skills being actualized. If this were not the case we wouldn't be able to describe the very possibility of change and the character of this change. The point is that potentiality is something in itself. Potentiality, whether it is the creation of an artwork or the production of labor, can both actualize itself and abstain from such an actualization. No matter what happens, 'potentiality' will not disappear, it maintains itself. "It is a potentiality not simply to potential to do this or that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality." (Agamben, 1999: 179f). This isolation of impotence is something specific that belongs to humans. Innovation and creativity are deeply connected to this negativity at the heart of our existence. (Agamben, 1991: 4). Something that is only potential can both be and not be. "To be potential means: to be one's own lack, to be in relation to one's own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own impotentiality; and only in this way do they become a permanent chance of life as power, *potential*" (Agamben, 1999: 182). Hence, "To be potential means: to be one's own lack, to be in relation to one's own incapacity (Agamben, 1999: Ibid)." The paradox of innovation therefore is to locate the power of life within one's own incapacity. "Everything rests here on the mode in which the passage from potentiality to act comes about" (Agamben, 1993: 35). One thing is to be in an act directed towards a goal, another thing is to affirm "potentiality to not-be", in which the "act can never consists of a simple transition *de potentia ad actum*: It is, in other words, a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, *a potentia potentiae*." (Agamben, 1993: 35f). The problem of creativity and innovation is to understand not 'the new' but this passage itself from potentiality to act. The passage addresses the question of reality: How do things become real? Agamben writes: "The passage from potentiality to act, from language to the word, from the common to the proper, comes about every time as a shuttling in both directions along a line of sparkling alternation on which common nature and singularity, potentiality and act change roles and interpenetrate" (Agamben, 1993: 20). Agamben here addresses the difficulty of isolating the innovative element into a specific point. In fact we will lose the element of what it means to stay true to the event: To affirm the time-dimension of innovation is to affirm not only life as potentiality, but the constant oscillation between production and interruption. As will become clear, innovation as potentiality draws our attention towards the indistinction between production and interruption, between the power of creation and impotence, rather than focusing on the actual product. Secondly we will see

how impotence links creativity to the problem of innovation and self-transformation, what is here addressed as the call to work.

How to make things real



There is no other origin of beauty than the wound.
Jean Genet, Alberto Giacometti 1958

As soon as Giacometti settled down in Paris, he rented a small apartment at Montparnasse consisting only of two small rooms where he was able to concentrate on his work. Alberto's brother, Diego, was his 'right hand'. Not only was he his best critique, he was also his manager taking care of all communication to the outside world, making arrangements with local art-galleries. He would take care of all practical problems. And most of all Diego was Alberto's most utilized model. Diego gave up his own 'small' career as a designer to help and facilitate the art-project of his brother (Lord, 1997). Stories of Diego saving figures that Alberto had left lying on the dirty floor, or figures fallen from his small working-table in the tiny atelier are numerous. One is reminded of Max Brod saving Franz Kafka's manuscript from being destroyed. The difference is that Diego only succeeded in saving a limited number of the figures that Alberto had discarded whereas Max Brod managed to save most of Kafka's posthumous manuscripts. In relation to the problem of art and management we should be careful not to draw the obvious conclusions of a 'practical' Diego bringing Alberto's art into the world and a 'creative' Alberto, living a withdrawn, isolated existence creating revolutionary art. This will give us a wrong picture of Alberto being 'the lonely genius', as the production of art as being a withdrawn existence producing one piece of art after another. If there was anyone who gave up the romantic idea of the creative artists being a

gifted genius, it was Alberto Giacometti. It is true that Giacometti for many years lived and worked in his small atelier in Montparnasse, and that people had to come to him. But the truth is that Giacometti, despite always working at home, had a constant need of social encounters, the need of having a daily dialogue about what he was doing while he was doing it, a dialogue with himself, and with the people who sat as models. Giacometti also had a lively exchange with writers such as Sartre, Beckett, Dupin, Leiris and Bataille.

In his early days Giacometti was occupied by surrealism and the spontaneous idea of treating the unconscious as a reservoir for creative energy. Around the beginning of the forties there was an important turning-point in Giacometti's work which in a profound sense affected his way of looking at things. It happened one day when stepping out on Boulevard Montparnasse after watching a movie: he began to see other people as deforming drops, as something unknown and fantastic, and yet this de-figurative vision was the beginning of a more direct expression of likeness with man and nature. An expression of how people really are. Things and humans lost their weight and all their strange power of life came back. Giacometti himself has described this episode as an experience of the Arabic nights, as like *Thousand and One Nights* (Sylvester, 1994: 97). After this experience he went back to clay, his old material. But he also returned to another way of shaping. He needed to start from scratch. He needed to experiment with a new form. This process lasted for the rest of his life. At this stage he gave up surrealism and the idea of the subconscious as an inner world placed beneath or outside the visible world. From now on his art was a search not of what we see but of the *conditions of seeing* (Sylvester, 1994: 12). As shown above the portrait of his wife Annette resembles an Egyptian goddess and yet this likeness cannot be reduced to artistic genre of mimesis. Giacometti here did work his way back, a thousand of years back. His approach to mimesis was indeed an attempt to confront the impossible. The Egyptian gave him a distant point from where he explored another concept of likeness. The Egyptian gave Giacometti an idea of how one keeps something alive, something far away, something impossible. When he was asked why he took up an old craft like sculpturing, a craft having been practiced for 300 years, he answered that, until now one has only made sculptures of corpses. He re-articulated the problem of innovation as mimesis (to have found a new expression of likeness with nature) to that of innovation as a problem of reality, of how things become real. The Norwegian scholar Espen Stueland writes: "Giacometti wanted to see the human body from a point beyond art itself, to annul art for the advantage of a kind of realism as something more than a representation of reality" (Stueland, 2000: 33). None of Giacometti's figures stem from what we see with our eyes. In all his late sculptures he deviated from the figurative. He wasn't interested in mimicking reality and yet he was obsessed with reaching another 'more true' form of 'likeness', which in his case was the same as making things more real. For a period his figures had a size able to fit into a tiny matchbox. In this respect,

one of the famous statements from this period came from his good friend, the novelist Jean Genet, who wrote that Giacometti's figure, "finally knows death" (Genet, 2007: 8). Genet is right, although he is not right that this was a final or ultimate realization. Knowing death was an ongoing discovery of the creative force in the negative, that life is death and that death is also life. This negative force is in Giacometti's case connected to a kind of a re-creation of the unfamiliar in oneself and oneself in the absolute unfamiliarity. This is what he learned from the Egyptian: That death is the power of life; that innovation rests on giving form the impossible. His tiny figures are a translation of this 'remoteness' as Dupin puts it (Dupin, 2003: 56). The Egyptian inspiration was no accident. It was after all the Egyptians who were occupied by distance (Wilson, 2003: 28f, 167ff). Life only has a meaning through the infinite distance of death. The Egyptian figures of death, birth and rebirth expressed a living reality, a sense of living a true life among the dead. The Egyptian gave Giacometti an idea of how one keeps something alive, how one maintains the spirit of life where life is being imprisoned. "I wanted to create this lightness," he said. (Giacometti, 1992: 268). And also: "To me the figures were never a solid mass but a kind of transparent construction" (Giacometti, 1992: 40) and: "The gaze is determined by what frames the eye. The eye itself always looks cold and distant. It is what confines it that determines the eye" (Giacometti, 1992: 271). It has been said that there was a likeness between his sculptures and the faces of the old Byzantines, partly because of the way the nose stood out from the head and made its line in contrast with the rest of the head (Sylvester, 1997: 76). But the point of this crisis was the search for a method, and as we shall see, this method became to express a remarkable fidelity to the event of creation. The Japanese philosophy Professor Yanaihara, who was sitting as a model for several months in the latter part of Giacometti's life, once said: "Giacometti had told Duclos that his reason for making sculpture was in order not to die." [...] "The goal was not to make a picture but to approach reality. To succeed in this goal, Giacometti asserted to Yanaihara, 'I need to find some new method...like a revolutionary finding that changes the basic method, like the tactical switch from arrows to guns. There must be some principle to capture the reality. I must have some simple rules to follow'" (Wilson, 2003: 295).

Innovation, or to eliminate perfection

My next point in studying Giacometti's work-praxis is to demystify the innovator as the 'heroic figure' and deconstruct the romantic vision of perfection and originality. The unusual thing about Giacometti was his constant withdrawing from completing a work. No matter what detail of the body he worked with – the eye, the head, the neck, the leg – completion was never the issue. In several statements he came back to emphasize the importance of the detail in this process of incompleteness:

”It was impossible to get hold of a whole figure (we were too close at the model), and when talking about a certain detail; a heel or a nose, there wasn’t any hope of ever reaching the whole. If one on the contrary started to analyze a detail, the tip of the nose for instance, then I would also be lost. I could keep going the rest of my life. The form dissolves itself, and it is as if there are only a few corn left, that moves on a dark background, the distance from one tip of the nose to the next is like Sahara; there is no limit, nothing firm to stick to, everything slips away” (Giacometti, 1992: 38f).

This self-reflection of the problem of the finished work in relation to the unfinished work captures what Agamben calls “the passage from potentiality to act” (Agamben, 1993: 20). In Giacometti’s case this passage is related to how he looked at ‘the product’, the ‘final work.’ Sylvester is very clear on this point: “He [Giacometti] proceeded in traditional fashion from studies to the finished work, at the same time aiming to give the finished work the vitality and directedness of a spontaneous production. Giacometti’s sustained spontaneity leaves no room for a distinction between preparation and execution” (Sylvester, 1994: 8). The question of the unfinished work is a well known problem within the art-community. Giacometti included this problem into the essence of his praxis. He had a habit, as Sylvester writes, “of including in his exhibitions plaster casts or original plasters of works in progress along with those cast in bronze but also in the roughness of the surfaces of the bronzes themselves”(Sylvester, 1994: 9). He was able to work on the same figure for several months and then end up destroying it. And, he destroyed a rather substantial amount of his work. James Lord who sat as a model in the last years of Giacometti’s life has described how he was never able to finish anything (Lord 1980). In his vivid portrait of the artist he writes: “I understand that in order for him to be able to see what was before him vividly and as though for the first time, it was necessary at any given moment for him to doubt his ability and to call into question not only what he was doing then but everything he had ever done” (Lord, 1980: 13). The rumors of this monomaniac form of his working-method are legendary (Schneider, 2008). From the early nineteen-thirties until the mid forties Giacometti didn’t have a single solo-exhibition. For months he could work on the same head.

Art books are full of stories of artists destroying their own work. In Giacometti’s case something else is at stake. For a rather long period, destroying a figure seems to be the only way for Giacometti to proceed. Again and again he expressed his doubt as to the present expression of a face; that it wasn’t good enough, that he was just reproducing himself. What he had spent months working on, perhaps years, might not be any near of what he was looking for. Giacometti’s *potentia* (*his power to act*) was directed towards his impotence, his own *impotentiality*. His constant problem of finishing a work, of directing his actions towards a final expression, was a daily issue.

We rarely include this dimension in our study of innovation since it has the flavor almost directing us in the opposite of what we attribute to innovation that is, the great accomplishment, the skillful master, the heroic figure, the unique, etc. But perhaps impotence lies at the heart of innovation. Agamben writes: "Only the power that is capable of both power and impotence, then, is the supreme power" (Agamben, 1993: 36). Such a comment shifts the focus from valuation of the product to the ethos of the creative act. 'Gesture' is a name used by Agamben to address this element of praxis. Gesture is "a third type of action alongside the other two: if production is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality and presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of modality without becoming, for this reason, ends" (Agamben, 2000: Ibid). What is being endured is the new as style. One does not destroy a finished work but a bad style.

The gesture of hesitation

My point is to show how Giacometti's reluctance to finish a work has everything to do with the style. To approach this we should look at the ethos of creativity. I shall call this ethos the gesture of hesitation. Being reluctant to speak about a finished work he went as far as saying that a work cannot be finished:

"I have no interest, what so ever, if a work has succeed or not. What has failed is much as interesting as what has succeeded. And rather than to exhibit what is safe one should choose the failed one. If this works, then the best probably also will work. If one chooses what appears to be the best, it is only an illusion. What is less good, that hasn't achieved the proper integrity, lies somewhere else, and exists even if one doesn't show it. Looking carefully one sees the weakness even in the best kind of work. Therefore, one should begin at the very bottom" (Giacometti, 1992: 291).

To face his own limits, to impose limitations on himself, eventually became a strategy in his praxis. He depended on the limits for his moment of creativity. This eventness of innovation was a gesture of hesitation. What he could *not do*, was endured in this gesture. "Gesture," Agamben writes, "is the name of the name of this intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution. It is the moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure praxis. The gesture is neither use value nor exchange value, neither biographic nor impersonal event: it is the other side of the commodity that lets the "crystal of this common social substance" sink into the situation" (Agamben, 2000: 80). Hesitation becomes the weak power of creation consigned to incompleteness. It is no secret that Giacometti looked at man as the creature constantly being on the edge of falling, yet even this creature is dancing. We are used to think

about man as the erect animal. Human beings are able to speak, to walk, to talk. They have *potentia*, not impotence. Giacometti's point is different. He wants to learn to walk, to see and to live, but he starts somewhere else. For him impotence is not a lack, but something that points out that there is something humans can do and something they *cannot do*. Giacometti addresses both. His method is to include this moment of hesitation, this fumbling mode of acting as the basic principle and drive in his work (Sylvester, 1994: 127). Agamben evokes what he calls a "falling movement" in the moment of the creative gesture. This "threshold between doing and not-doing" Agamben calls *decreation*. "It is this point of decreation [*decreatione*] (...) where the artist... no longer creates but decreates." (Durantay, 2009: 22) However, Agamben's use of decreation is deeply connected to his reading of Paul's concept of the 'call' [*klesis*], the messianic event: "It is [...] therefore not a matter of eschatological indifference, but of change, almost an internal shifting of each and every single worldly condition by virtue of being "called." (Agamben, 2005: 22). Within theology 'decreation' is a concept used by the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil in which man should withdraw and resign himself in order for the other to exist. The mystics called this the death of the ego; not unlikely the point in which God in his moment of creation renounce his claim to be everything, we should renounce the claim to be anything (Weil, 2005: 51-52). This is almost the opposite of Agamben's concept of potentiality that addresses creation not to the actualized thing. The power of creation is consigned to incompleteness.

As with Glenn Gould, Giacometti had the ability to abandon his *potentia* to not mastering an art, and yet his mastery conserves and exercises some of the failed or annulled potentialities within the act; not his potential to draw but his potential to not-draw (paraphrasing Agamben, 1993: 36). It is something different than the craft, although the basic craft of drawing is crucial for what comes after. Here, we are interested in what comes before, "the dynamic moment preceding the creative act" (Durantaye, 2009: 21) Referring to the Italian writer Italo Calvino, Durantaye quotes Calvino for saying the following regarding the creative moment of literature: "my point of departure will be...this moment so decisive for the reader-that of moving from unlimited and multiform potentiality towards something that does not yet exist and can only exist by encountering limits and rules" (Durantaye, 2009: 21). The question to be asked is: "Is not the potentiality figured in the imagination always richer than the actuality that follows, born as it is of the compromises that reality inevitably imposes?" (Durantaye, 2009: 21). Being of member of the literary group Oulipo (*Ouvre la literature potentielle*), Calvino saw the self-imposed limitations as the necessary tool for this very moment of creativity: "Before the passage to the act, before the realizing of possibilities and the actualizing of potentialities latent in the mind of the artists, the inspiration that lies at the origin of the work of art exists, for Calvino, in a state of "unlimited and

multiform potentiality”” (Durantaye, 2009: 21). Rather than clear rules Giacometti was a master, an obsessive master, of articulating his own limits. Almost every page in James Lord's portrait of Giacometti articulates Giacometti's confrontations with his own limits, as if these limits are the presuppositions for being creative at all (Lord, 1980: 13, 43, 53, 100). My point is that Giacometti's 'skill' (what he could master) was not only the basic art-craft (he was a master of drawing like Glenn Gould was a master of playing the piano) but a particular mode of beginning an act, a mode of affirming a passage that moves from unlimited opportunity to a condition of limited and therefore precise explosive potentiality. Walter Benjamin would call this 'a weak messianic power', Th. Aquinas 'a halo' (Benjamin, 1968: 254; Agamben, 1993: 52). Within this weak power our given reality is changed even though everything appears the same. The so-called 'new' (innovation) is the ability to accept a frame in order to break it. Innovation is brought back to the potentiality of creation. The experience of hesitation is an important twist in this stage: You search for your limit in order to exceed its imperfection and the disruptive application of the rules, which will then implicate a new level of understanding. Destroying his figures became part of the strategy of innovation. In fact his method could be seen as an attempt to destroy the idea of perfectibility as such. To destroy any figure that attempts to represent perfectibility and to give back the power to the profane, in Giacometti's case, the banal bodies, bodies in crisis, bodies in exposure, in fragility, in solitude. To eliminate the sense of perfection and to obstruct his own attempt at fulfillment.

Like Glenn Gould's ability to make everything new, to be an artist even when not sitting at the piano, Giacometti had the ability to turn impotence into a life of power. During his daily visits to the café, he would see people as slim rushes turning in the wind. As Dupin has emphasized in his marvelous essays, the art of Giacometti cannot be separated from the art of living in all its profanity which includes his everyday gestures, his way of speaking in a dialogue with himself, with others, his writings, his way of touching things, of smoking cigarettes, almost eighty a day; he might as well have chewed the dust lying around him. But the point is this: He could not do anything without being an artist. He was innovative while not doing art. To make the new could not be separated from the art of living, from an immense integrity exposing the struggle of his limits constantly searching for his power within his weakness. When he wasn't sculpturing, he was sculpturing. When he wasn't painting he was painting. All the gestures were already there. The way of holding the cigarette, the pencil, the coffee cup, the tone of his voice, the manner of speaking.

The call to work: The method of impotence

I am obsessed; everyday I have to start again...

Giacometti in Jean-Marie Drot, 2000

The messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation.

Agamben, *The Time That Remains*

My last point is to address the problem of spirituality within work and organization. *Beruf* (call) was used by Max Weber to address the particular ethics of the modern capitalist worker. Only by following this call will he be able to transform his present hard working existence into a rewarding and redemptive existence (Weber, 2001). Agamben has argued that this call is somehow similar to the call of the working class described by Marx. Both rely on a substantial identity, and therefore “ends in losing its revolutionary vocation” (Agamben, 2005: 31). As previously indicated, the call of Giacometti’s artistic work-praxis relies on a ‘destructive’ moment of impotence. The point here is that Giacometti’s call to work and to create does not rely on a substantial notion of identity, a political party, or an organizational vision or image, but rather a call that calls all worldly conditions into question. In modern organizations the call to work is identified with the actualization of one’s skills and competences. Nevertheless, the worker in modern organizations is often left in a state very similar to that of Joseph K. in Kafka’s *The Trial*. He will never reach the point of freedom or salvation since there will always be another competence to fulfill. It’s a never-ending process of negotiating for another profile, another competence. One competence will be replaced by another. In the case of Giacometti, we have seen how creativity is given back to potentiality, to the power of incompleteness.

My point now is that the gesture of hesitation operates on the intersection between life and art. Giacometti’s working-praxis connects the creative dimension with the power of impotence because only this power upholds our attention to the past possibilities, past expressions of humanity, that mark the present, but never took place. Giacometti’s way of being an artist is to try to understand history as a loss takes place on an ontological level in which ‘the fulfillment’ of art is consigned to incompleteness; it is in Benjamin’s words “a weak messianic power” (Benjamin, 1968: 254). Agamben has put our attention to the fact that this can be seen as a direct comment on Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in particular chapter 12: 9-10 in which Paul, having asked the Messiah to free him from that thorn in his flesh, hears the answer, *hé gar dynamis en astheneia teleitai*, “power fulfills itself in weakness.” And to continue Agamben’s comment: ““Therefore,” the apostle adds, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for the sake of the Messiah: for when I am weak, then I am strong [*dynatos*]”” (Agamben, 2005: 140). In contrast with many other artists what we mean by ‘method’ came to have an

unusual impact in all of Giacometti's activities. His method *is* this call, an obsession where the practice of innovation can be seen as a practice of self-transformation (Foucault, 1988). "The transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?" (Foucault, *Ibid.*) Let me take a small detour to another modernist artist whom we normally not will associate with Giacometti. Yet, he exemplifies something profound about the working-ethos extremely close to that of Giacometti. It is well known that a man like Rimbaud ended his career as a writer at the age of only twenty-four. After completing two collections of poetry *A Season in Hell* and *Illuminations* he quit writing and made his way out into the world as a businessman, a traveler all the way until his death. In the romantic sense writing was directly attached to one's mode of existence, writing could be described as a particular form of subjectivation. "The strife about literary form is a strife about what counts as literature" (Johansson, 2008: 24). But as Johansen adds: "after romanticism all literature is a compromise, it's a result of negotiations with exterior circumstances" (Johansson, 2008: 24). To be modern, to break up from one's form of life, and to criticize things from the bottom now has to be balanced with "the power of the audience, the economy of publishers, the need of the state" (Johansson, 2008). According to Johansson Rimbaud "was never interested in those kinds of negotiations. Hence, he became something else" (Johansson, 2000: 26). What did he become? A man of society or something else? Rimbaud's exit from literature is in literary criticism described as an 'exit'. He gave up literature for the benefit of something else, another life, something that wasn't related to literature at all. The point is rather this: If one looks closer at what he did - his adventure in Africa, his constant failures of succeeding as a business man, plans that didn't work out, daring projects, travelling under false name - this does not at all look as a farewell to literature but on the contrary it appears to be its logical presupposition for its existence, his mode of being that he tried to live out when writing his poems. Johansen writes that Rimbaud to a certain extent "continues with other means but *on the same plane of restlessness* that established the literary work" (Johansson, 2008: 28).

This leaves us with an important question as to how one's praxis is connected to one's call to work. In the case of Giacometti the praxis of creating is connected to the production of subjectivity as an *ethos of de-subjectivation*. As we saw in the case of Rimbaud one continues now with other means, but one can only continue with other means because one has become someone else, hence his famous words: "I am another" [*Je est un autre*]. One does not write to imitate nature[mimesis]; one creates new images, visions, to become something else, to maintain the power of what cannot be reduced to a given image of the people, be it Jews, gentiles etc. Giacometti's obsession was a power of being called into a change "of every single worldly condition". This is the call in the Paulian sense, a call expressed in Giacometti's working-praxis as

one of a 'falling movement', a gesture on the border between doing and non-doing. Paul himself speaks about the messianic life as the life in which one revocates all concrete factual vocation (Paul, 2008: Corinthian, 7:29-32; Agamben, 2005: 23). Giacometti's artistic praxis calls everything into question, not only his own artistic expression, but also his way of seeing, his way of living, his everyday gestures, his way of being human. Jacques Dupin, one of his closest friends, wrote of Giacometti that he was not occupied with being an artist at all, that he was not occupied about art as such, the institution, the public, the narratives of art, but about the "art of living or rather of burning up one's life, to the intensity of a life entirely possessed by the search for its truth. [...] Every day, every minute, even if he doesn't write he speaks or mutters, or he grumbles. He needs words, he needs the murmur of language to whet his cannibal hunger, so as to bite living reality, so as to expose himself and to call himself into question, to strip himself bare, devour his prize – and to continue the journey" (Dupin, 2003: 95, 52). In Giacometti's case the question of method cannot be reduced to a matter of skills; the method melts together with the praxis of subjectivation. His method became a plane for a restless energy shuttling in both directions between potentiality and act (Agamben, 1993: 20). Giacometti's struggle was to maintain a praxis that gave himself back to potentiality.

Conclusion: L'atelier D'Alberto Giacometti

In our time of stress, dishonesty, performativity, and cynicism, our true call to work seems to be an unavoidable test for any modern worker. How are we called? And, how are we to be called? In this respect the artist has become a prototype for our ideal-vision of being called and yet the true transformation of the self-being at stake in this call is not an easy task. Despite there being a powerful moment of conversion in Giacometti's artistic work-praxis, a transformation of the self, an extreme demand of how to embody logos, ethos, and pathos in our praxis. Giacometti's famous *L'atelier* [Studio] was a microcosm of a modern organization, a place of constant work, of constant dialogue, of a constant mess. Perhaps the lesson of Giacometti has to do neither with the innovation of 'the new', nor with the institutions of organization, but instead with how we manage our character within this place, how we with the Greeks and Romans practice our *exagoreusis*, our ascetic self-care, a practice of self-transformation (Foucault, 1996). Spirituality, work and organization is an issue of what the scholastics called *principium individuationis* (Agamben, 1993) and this call is the call of time within time (Ibid). Summing up this theme in relation to Giacometti, his constant urge to destroy his own work is an *interruption of time*, innovation as an ethos brought back to the *power* of acting itself. His struggle against the law of mimesis was an attempt to seize time in the moment of uncertainty, what Benjamin called *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin, 1968: 261). This time is not equivalent to the present, rather it is the time of the now (*ho nyn*

kairos). In his reading of Saint Paul Agamben points to this dimension of time arguing that Paul offers us a connection between the fulfillment of the law and the messianic time, a time that divides or destroys the existing order only to remain within an internal relation to it. "Messianic time is that part of secular time which undergoes an entirely transformative contraction." (Agamben, 2005: 64). In other words, messianic time (*jetzzeit*) is a time for what happens within chronological time without being identical with it. Hence, fulfillment of the law is not a salvation of eternal life (eschatology) but a transformation of our worldly conditions. 'Remnant' is the name Agamben reserves to the time that is left which is the "impossibility of the Jew or the Greek to coincide with himself" (Agamben: Ibid., 53). Agamben refers to a comment by Blanchot who said "that man is the indestructible that can be infinitely destroyed" (Agamben, 2005: 53) but "if man", Agamben writes, "is that which may be *infinitely* destroyed, this also means that something other than this destruction [...] remains, and that man is this remnant" (Agamben, 2005: 53). In the case of Giacometti innovation is related to an infinite destruction of a given image. Giacometti turned art into the sphere of pure means, "of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings" (Agamben, 2000: 60). Several statements by Giacometti confirm this unique link between inspiration and impotence. His friend Jacques Dupin writes in the preface to *Ecrits*, that Giacometti was so special that when he died, «an immense expenditure of gestures and words forever lost, disappeared, burned up, all as precious, significant, and revelatory as those which are left for us to read or see..." (Dupin, 2003: 97). In his famous book *L'atelier D'Alberto Giacometti*, Genet after several visits in Giacometti's small room gave words to a similar experience: "Perhaps of sympathy he has taken the color of dust" (Genet,2007: 9). And: "If he could, Giacometti would turn himself into dust, how happy he would be" (Genet,2007: 70). Not only had the color of dust fallen down and placed itself on and around things in the studio and on Giacometti's own body; the color of dust and the color of material itself almost had the function of a map through which he looked at things, through which he touched things, the use of his voice, his way of breathing. Giacometti could never give up his tiny atelier and move with his wife Annette to something bigger, not even when he became famous. The place had a rhythm that he needed to be able to create. The atelier was a tactile face creating a kind of 'impersonal pulse' within which he subjected himself. Listening to James Lord, Yanaihara, Genet and others who visited Giacometti in his studio it is clear that this was the place where he could work with his own limits, where he could think and experiment despite the place being very small and in a miserable condition. When Ernst Scheidegger did the shooting for his film just before Giacometti's death it is as if the figures were never meant to leave this place, the place in which they were born and the place they perhaps were going to die. Capturing the impersonal pulse that permeated this studio Genet writes: "This atelier, that lies at the basement is, by the way, going to collapse one of these days. The place

consists of worm-eaten wood, of grey dust, the statutes are of plaster, the rope, the tow or some piece of wire that sticks out from one of them, the canvas are grey-painted, and they have for long lost their stillness they had at the paint dealer, everything is full of spots enigmatic, everything is fragile and is about to collapse, everything strives to break into pieces, everything flows: and all this seems to be maintained in an absolute reality. [...] In this atelier a man is slowly about to die, of burning, and in front of his eyes he is about to transform himself into a goddess” (Genet, 2007: 76).

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