

The Ethics of the Unfinished: Fragment, Silence, and Negative Space as Humanistic Forms of Knowledge

Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria

President & Founder, University of Happiness and Well-Being; Founder, Liderarte; Madrid, Spain.

Abstract: Contemporary culture associates value with completion, visibility, speed, and measurable output. This article examines a contrary humanistic possibility: that the unfinished can produce knowledge when absence is formally organized rather than merely left behind. Using critical hermeneutics, comparative aesthetics, and close reading, it analyses four cross-media constellations: Michelangelo's *Prisoners*, John Cage's 4'33", literary fragments and suspended endings, and Japanese aesthetics of interval and shadow. The comparison identifies five recurrent operations - exposing process, withholding closure, preserving alterity, activating participation, and sustaining futurity - and tests them against negative cases in which incompleteness becomes obscurity, romanticized damage, or simulated participation. From this analysis, the article develops an Open Form Humanities Framework structured by trace, interval, threshold, response, and continuation. Its central finding is that unfinishedness becomes epistemically and ethically valuable only when three conditions converge: formal necessity, contextual honesty, and accountable room for interpretation. The argument therefore rejects both the cult of polished totality and the uncritical celebration of fragments. It concludes that responsible incompleteness can train attention to process, limits, material resistance, historical absence, and the autonomy of other persons. At a moment when automated systems increasingly anticipate and complete cultural expression, unfinished art offers neither nostalgia nor refusal of technology, but a disciplined practice of judgment: knowing when completion clarifies and when it closes the world too soon.

Keywords: Unfinishedness; fragment; silence; negative space; open work; aesthetics; humanities.

INTRODUCTION

A Civilization Obsessed with Completion

Modern institutions tend to treat completion as an unquestioned good: projects are closed, targets met, documents finalized, and uncertainty translated into a defect to be removed. Digital systems intensify this preference by predicting likely continuations and presenting fluency as evidence of understanding. Such tools can be valuable, yet their cultural logic encourages an old confusion between a finished answer and an adequate one. Critical accounts of computation have shown how technical systems inherit classificatory assumptions and institutional priorities rather than merely neutralizing uncertainty (Crawford, 2021).

The arts repeatedly resist that confusion. A body that remains entangled with marble, a narrative that refuses to settle the destiny of its characters, an unpainted field that carries perceptual weight, or a musical frame that permits contingent sound can shift meaning from a sealed product toward a relation among presence, absence, and response. This shift belongs to a broader aesthetic tradition in which the work is understood as an event of encounter rather than a possession exhausted by explanation (Dewey, 2005; Gadamer, 1986; Gumbrecht, 2004).

This article develops a humanistic account of unfinishedness. Its central claim is carefully

limited: incompleteness is not intrinsically profound, but it can become an ethical and epistemic form when it exposes the conditions of making, refuses false reconciliation, and preserves what representation cannot legitimately absorb. The unfinished work may reveal labor and contingency, but it may also register censorship, historical violence, or abandoned craft. Interpretation must therefore ask not only what is absent, but why it is absent and who bears the cost of that absence (Butler, 2004; Didi-Huberman, 2005).

The argument does not celebrate every fragment or defend carelessness. A work that has not been adequately developed differs from a work in which incompleteness performs identifiable formal labor. The distinction is neither intuitive nor purely authorial: it requires evidence in the composition, its production history, and its modes of reception. Eco's open work remains constrained by form, while Iser's gaps direct rather than abolish reading; both theories warn against treating openness as permission for arbitrary interpretation (Eco, 1989; Iser, 1978).

By bringing European theories of the fragment and open work into a cautious comparison with Japanese accounts of interval and shadow, the article proposes a grammar of responsible incompleteness. Comparison is used relationally, not

as a claim that non-finito, Romantic fragmentation, Cagayan silence, ma, and wabi-sabi are equivalent. The purpose is to identify how different traditions organize absence while retaining their historical and conceptual differences (Jullien, 2009; Pilgrim, 1986; Tanizaki, 1977).

RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS, AND CONTRIBUTION

Scholarship on unfinished art commonly separates into medium-specific routes. Art history reconstructs abandoned commissions and workshop processes; literary criticism studies fragments, gaps, and indeterminate endings; musicology analyses silence, chance, and open performance; philosophical aesthetics addresses negativity, nonidentity, presence, and the limits of representation (Adorno, 1997; Blanchot, 1995; Eco, 1989; Sontag, 1969). These bodies of work are substantial, but they are not often assembled into a cross-media model that distinguishes ethical openness from deficiency, imposed loss, or marketable roughness.

The study addresses that gap through four questions: (1) what distinguishes accidental or imposed incompleteness from artistically meaningful unfinishedness; (2) which formal operations recur across sculpture, music, literature, and visual culture; (3) under what conditions can unfinished form generate knowledge rather than merely defer it; and (4) which responsibilities fall on artists, institutions, critics, and receivers when a work does not close itself?

The contribution is a cross-media vocabulary and an evaluative model rather than a universal history. The article defines responsible incompleteness as structured openness: sufficient determination to orient perception, sufficient indeterminacy to prevent mastery, and sufficient contextual evidence to identify what the openness costs. This formulation extends the open-work tradition by adding provenance, historical asymmetry, and the ethical status of the remainder to formal indeterminacy (Derrida, 1987; Eco, 1989; Young, 1993).

The model also offers a specific defence of the humanities. Beyond transferable skills and cultural enrichment, humanistic study preserves encounters in which judgment must remain revisable without becoming evasive. It trains readers and viewers to distinguish uncertainty from ignorance, complexity from confusion, and humility from the refusal to decide. These capacities are central to education

for an unknown future, but they require disciplined forms rather than an abstract celebration of ambiguity (Barnett, 2012; Biesta, 2013).

METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS AND COMPARATIVE AESTHETICS

The research uses a qualitative conceptual design combining critical hermeneutics, comparative aesthetics, and close reading. It does not measure audience effects or infer universal psychological responses. Instead, it reconstructs how selected works distribute agency among maker, material, form, history, and receiver. Hermeneutic claims are assessed through textual or formal evidence, production context, dialogue with specialist scholarship, and responsiveness to interpretations that challenge the proposed ethical reading (Gadamer, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984).

The corpus was purposively selected according to four criteria. Each constellation had to (1) make absence, interval, interruption, or incomplete emergence structurally central; (2) illuminate a different medium-specific operation; (3) possess a documented production or reception history capable of testing purely impressionistic claims; and (4) generate an ethical problem concerning agency, alterity, historical loss, or participation. The four principal cases are not treated as representative of all artistic cultures, but as analytically contrasting instances.

Critical hermeneutics is necessary because unfinishedness is never neutral. A fragment may be chosen, inherited, censored, damaged, or retrospectively aestheticized. Comparative aesthetics is therefore conducted through a two-step rule: first reconstruct the term or practice within its own genealogy; only then compare the function it performs in relation to other forms. Terms such as ma, wabi-sabi, non-finito, fragment, and open work are consequently treated as non-equivalent concepts whose resonances must not erase their historical specificity (Pilgrim, 1986; Tanizaki, 1977).

The analysis proceeds in five stages: conceptual genealogy; medium-specific close reading; identification of recurrent operations; examination of negative or limiting cases; and abductive synthesis into the Open Form Humanities Framework. The framework is evaluated by four criteria: internal coherence, explanatory reach across media, ability to distinguish responsible openness from weak or harmful incompleteness, and

usefulness for further research. Its claims are philosophical and interpretive rather than predictive.

To reduce confirmation bias, each case is read against at least one counter-pressure: the *Prisoners* against the myth of pure artistic intention; 4'33" against the romantic idea of politically innocent listening; literary gaps against the history of censored or destroyed archives; and Japanese interval against decontextualized aesthetic borrowing. These counter-readings are not supplementary cautions. They are part of the test through which an ethics of unfinishedness becomes credible.

GENEALOGIES OF THE UNFINISHED

Unfinishedness has no single genealogy. It may result from death, abandoned commissions, damaged transmission, political rupture, deliberate fragmentation, performative openness, or the material resistance of a medium. German Romanticism developed the fragment as a finite form oriented toward an unrepresentable whole; modernism used montage and rupture to expose the instability of inherited totalities; postwar practices treated silence, erasure, and process as challenges to conventional representation (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, 1988; Sontag, 1969). Japanese aesthetic discourses articulated different relations among interval, asymmetry, impermanence, light, and shadow, and should not be absorbed into a Western history of negation (Pilgrim, 1986; Tanizaki, 1977).

The Western ideal of the complete work is connected to concepts of organic unity, authorial intention, and formal closure. Yet even classical accounts of artistic form contain tensions between completion and potentiality. A work may be bounded and still exceed every interpretation. Gadamer (1986) describes aesthetic experience as an event that continues in reception rather than a static object possessed once and for all. Dewey (2005) similarly understands art as experience, emphasizing continuity between work, environment, and perceiver. These perspectives weaken the assumption that completion belongs entirely to the object (Dewey, 2005; Gadamer, 1986).

The Romantic fragment made this tension explicit. It could be self-contained and incomplete at once: a small, crafted form that points beyond itself without pretending to contain infinity. In the account reconstructed by Lacoue-Labarthe and

Nancy (1988), fragmentation is not simply brokenness but a theory of literature and self-reflexive production. Modernist and postwar fragments often acquire a harsher historical charge, becoming at once wound, montage, interruption, and refusal of synthetic consolation (Adorno, 1997; Benjamin, 1999; Blanchot, 1995).

Eco's (1989) concept of the open work gave a systematic account of artworks that require active completion in performance or interpretation. Openness does not mean that anything goes. The work offers a field of possibilities constrained by its form. Iser (1978) likewise showed how literary gaps activate the reader. What is not stated is not empty; it organizes anticipation, revision, and connection. Meaning occurs through movement across the text's structured absences (Eco, 1989; Ingarden, 1973; Iser, 1978).

A different but resonant logic appears in Japanese discussions of *ma*, often translated inadequately as gap, interval, or pause. Pilgrim (1986) emphasizes that *ma* is relational and spatiotemporal: it is not an empty container but an interval constituted by what it separates and connects. Tanizaki's 1933 essay on shadow, encountered here through the 1977 English translation, similarly makes indirect light, patina, recess, and subdued surfaces perceptually active. Koren's (2008) contemporary account of *wabi-sabi* is useful as an accessible formulation of impermanence and incompleteness, but it cannot substitute for historical study. These concepts are therefore used as situated provocations, not as a timeless national essence (Jullien, 2009; Tanizaki, 1977).

Across these genealogies, unfinishedness repeatedly unsettles sovereignty: the artist does not monopolize final meaning, matter does not disappear beneath intention, and reception does not become limitless ownership. What remains active is a remainder that guides interpretation while resisting exhaustion. The ethical question is whether that remainder enlarges relation or merely disguises weak form.

FIVE OPERATIONS OF MEANINGFUL UNFINISHEDNESS

The comparative analysis identifies five operations through which unfinishedness becomes artistically and ethically significant. These operations may appear separately or in combination. They do not define a rigid taxonomy; they describe relations that help distinguish responsible incompleteness from mere deficiency.

Table 1: Five operations of meaningful unfinishedness.

Operation	Formal mechanism	Humanistic value	Primary risk
Exposing process	Leaves traces of making, revision, and material resistance visible.	Humility about creation; respect for labor and contingency.	Turning roughness into a fashionable surface without genuine process.
Withholding closure	Suspends resolution or refuses false reconciliation.	Tolerance for complexity; responsibility beyond the ending.	Obscurity, evasion, or lack of craft.
Preserving alterity	Maintains a remainder that representation does not absorb.	Respect for difference and limits of perspective.	Romanticizing silence or failing to name injustice.
Activating participation	Requires the receiver to connect, infer, or perform.	Interpretive agency and dialogic meaning.	Relativism or simulated participation.
Sustaining futurity	Keeps the work available to revision and renewed obligation.	Openness to historical re-reading and future response.	Endless postponement of necessary judgment.

Exposing Process

A finished surface often conceals the sequence of decisions, revisions, and material resistance that produced it. Unfinished work can expose those layers. Tool marks, corrections, crossed-out phrases, incomplete transitions, and visible supports allow the receiver to encounter making as an event rather than only its polished result. Sennett (2008) connects craftsmanship with dialogue between maker and material. The unfinished surface intensifies that dialogue because resistance remains legible (Sennett, 2008; Wallace, 2010).

Exposing process has epistemic value. It challenges the myth that works emerge whole from isolated genius. Instead, creation appears as negotiation among intention, matter, accident, inheritance, and time. The receiver sees not only what the artist decided, but where decision remained open. This can humanize artistic authority without diminishing it. Mastery is revealed as responsive practice rather than domination.

Withholding Closure

Closure organizes expectations. It can provide satisfaction, recognition, and formal balance. Yet closure can also become ideological when it reconciles conflicts that remain unresolved in life. An unfinished or open ending withholds that consolation. It asks the receiver to carry the contradiction beyond the final page or image. In this sense, withholding is not deprivation but a transfer of responsibility (Adorno, 1997; Ricoeur, 1984).

Adorno's aesthetics is crucial here. For Adorno (1997), the artwork's truth is bound to its

nonidentity with the social world and with conceptual capture. A work that refuses easy closure can preserve antagonism rather than converting suffering into consumable harmony. The ethical question is whether the refusal deepens attention to conflict or merely performs obscurity. Responsible withholding gives form to difficulty; it does not hide the absence of thought.

Preserving Alterity

To complete another person, culture, memory, or event within one's own explanatory system is a subtle form of appropriation. Unfinished representation can preserve a remainder. It acknowledges that the represented exceeds the representation. This is particularly important when art approaches trauma, historical violence, or cultural difference. Total depiction may imply a false possession of experiences that are not fully available to the observer (Butler, 2004; Derrida, 1987; Young, 1993).

Preserving alterity does not require silence about injustice. It requires forms that distinguish witnessing from ownership. The fragment can mark damaged transmission; the blank can register missing archives; the interrupted voice can reveal conditions under which speech was made impossible. Such absences must be contextualized so that they do not aestheticize erasure. The ethical power lies in making the limit of representation visible.

Activating Participation

The open work gives the receiver a role, but participation should not be confused with unlimited freedom. Every meaningful interpretation answers to the work's material and historical demands. Ranciere (2009) rejects the

simple opposition between active performer and passive spectator; spectators interpret, compare, and connect. Unfinishedness can intensify this activity by making the receiver's contribution perceptible (Eco, 1989; Iser, 1978; Rancière, 2009; Winnicott, 1971).

Participation is ethical when the work invites response without manipulating it into a predetermined reaction. The receiver becomes neither consumer nor co-owner, but a temporary custodian of possibilities. This relation resembles hospitality: the work makes room, yet the guest must respect the house. Interpretive freedom is inseparable from attentiveness.

Sustaining Futurity

An unfinished work can remain oriented toward what has not yet occurred. Its meaning is not exhausted by origin. Each encounter may continue, revise, or reactivate it. Benjamin's (1999) method of montage in *The Arcades Project* offers a powerful example: quotations and fragments are arranged so that historical constellations can flash into legibility without being subsumed by continuous narrative (Bakhtin, 1981; Benjamin, 1999).

Futurity is not the same as endless postponement. It is the capacity of a form to remain available to new responsibility. A fragment survives because it asks later readers to decide what to do with its remainder. The future enters the work not as prediction, but as unfinished obligation.

CASE STUDY I: MICHELANGELO'S PRISONERS AND THE BODY STILL IN STONE

Michelangelo's four *Prisoners* in the Galleria dell'Accademia - conventionally called the Awakening Slave, Young Slave, Bearded Slave, and Atlas - are generally dated between 1519 and 1534 and belong to the repeatedly revised history of the tomb of Pope Julius II. Their present grouping encourages a unified reading, yet their production history is marked by changing plans, interrupted labor, and unresolved questions of intended placement. That history matters because the sculptures' non-finito cannot be reduced confidently to a single deliberate aesthetic programme (Wallace, 2010).

It is tempting to interpret the works through a heroic narrative in which spirit defeats matter. Such a reading captures part of their drama but risks reducing stone to passive obstacle. The unfinished sculptures can instead be read as a

negotiation of mutual resistance. The body is not simply hidden inside the marble waiting for liberation; it becomes perceptible through marks, pressure, and incomplete separation. Matter retains agency. It does not disappear beneath representation (Didi-Huberman, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

The visible chisel marks transform spectatorship. Before a polished sculpture, the viewer may admire the illusion that stone has become flesh. Before the *Prisoners*, the viewer also confronts the labor and violence of transformation. Every emerging shoulder or twisting torso is accompanied by evidence of what has been cut, struck, and left unresolved. The sculpture refuses to let the image fully erase its material conditions (Sennett, 2008; Wallace, 2010).

This refusal is ethically suggestive. Human beings are often represented through finished identities: professional labels, social categories, psychological profiles, or narratives of success and failure. The *Prisoners* offer a different anthropology. A person is neither pure potential waiting to be released nor a finalized essence. Personhood occurs in tension among history, material circumstance, aspiration, and resistance. To see another humanely is to perceive form without denying the stone that still bears weight.

The non-finito also redistributes authorial power. The artist's mastery is undeniable, yet incompleteness leaves the relation between intention and accident open. Were the works abandoned, strategically suspended, or transformed by later reception into a coherent group? Historical answers matter, but the aesthetic experience exceeds them. Their unfinished state has become part of what the sculptures now are. Reception does not correct the absence; it inhabits it (Wallace, 2010).

The case therefore supplies a decisive methodological lesson: ethical interpretation must not derive intention from appearance alone. The sculptures can support a phenomenology of emergence even if their incompleteness was circumstantial, because reception has incorporated roughness, arrested transition, and material resistance into the works' public meaning. Yet that meaning remains answerable to the archive. The strongest reading holds aesthetic experience and historical uncertainty together rather than making one erase the other.

CASE STUDY II: JOHN CAGE'S 4'33" AND THE COMPOSITION OF ATTENTION

John Cage's 4'33", composed in 1952 and premiered by David Tudor at the Maverick Concert Hall on 29 August of that year, comprises three movements during which no intentional instrumental sounds are produced. Calling it a silent piece is therefore accurate only if silence names a frame rather than an acoustic void. The performance makes breathing, weather, architecture, movement, impatience, and expectation newly audible (Cage, 1961; Gann, 2010; Kahn, 1997).

The unfinished quality of 4'33" is temporal and participatory. No performance can contain the same sonic events. The score determines duration and behavioral restraint, while the world supplies an unrepeatable field. Composition therefore shifts from producing all content to arranging conditions of attention. Cage's work is highly disciplined precisely because it does less. It demonstrates that withholding can be a positive act when the frame is clear (Gann, 2010; Kahn, 1997).

The ethical implication lies in listening, but it should not be overstated. 4'33" suspends the hierarchy between intended musical event and environmental interruption, yet the concert frame still distributes authority: a named composer, a performer, an institution, and an audience determine when contingent sound will count as art. The work is therefore less an egalitarian acoustic commons than an experiment that exposes the politics of framing itself (Kahn, 1997).

This does not mean that all sounds become equal in every context or that social noise loses its politics. Listening is never innocent. Access, safety, sensory difference, and cultural expectation shape the event. Yet the piece offers a disciplined experiment in non-sovereign attention. The composer creates a work by not monopolizing its audible space. The receiver is invited to discover that the world was already sounding before artistic intention claimed it (Cage, 1961; Kahn, 1997).

In contemporary digital culture, where pauses are rapidly filled and attention converted into a measurable resource, the work acquires renewed force. Its value is not that it abolishes composition, but that it reveals how selection, duration, and withholding organize perception. 4'33" consequently tests the article's thesis in a difficult

form: doing less can heighten responsibility only when the frame and its power remain visible.

This reading also guards against a sentimental claim that silence is universally restorative. For some listeners, enforced quiet, sensory exposure, or the etiquette of the concert hall may be exclusionary. A responsible aesthetics of listening must therefore include accessibility and situated embodiment rather than presuming a single ideal spectator.

CASE STUDY III: LITERARY GAPS, FRAGMENTS, AND SUSPENDED ENDINGS

Literature has a distinctive relation to unfinishedness because every text depends on what it does not state. Description selects; narrative omits; metaphor joins unlike fields without exhausting either. Iser (1978) identifies gaps as structures that stimulate the reader's activity. The reader must connect perspectives, revise assumptions, and infer relations. A fully explicit text would not eliminate interpretation; it would suffocate it beneath instruction (Ingarden, 1973; Iser, 1978).

The modern fragment makes this ordinary condition visible. Kafka left all three of his novels unfinished, and *The Castle* breaks off abruptly; its posthumous publication and editorial history make incompleteness both a textual fact and a mediated legacy (Kafka, 1998). The novel's inaccessible authorities, deferred explanations, and endlessly displaced procedures create an uncanny consonance between material incompleteness and thematic structure. That consonance is powerful, but it should not be used to convert every accident of transmission into authorial design.

Beckett radicalizes suspension by making waiting, repetition, failed communication, and minimal action the substance of dramatic time. *Waiting for Godot* withholds the event that would retrospectively organize endurance, thereby resisting the consoling plot in which suffering is redeemed by an eventual lesson (Beckett, 1956). The work does not eliminate form; its repetitions, pairings, and rhythms compose expectation with severe precision.

Fragments can also be records of historical violence. Lost manuscripts, interrupted testimonies, censored letters, and damaged archives carry absences that should not be romanticized. The critic must ask who was prevented from completing, whose materials were

not preserved, and which institutions benefit from the surviving canon. Here unfinishedness is not chosen openness but evidence of unequal power. Ethical reading must distinguish invitation from deprivation (Blanchot, 1995; Taylor, 2003; Young, 1993).

The most responsible literary encounters therefore move between formal and historical attention. A gap may activate imagination, but it may also mark a silenced voice. Readers should neither fill every blank with themselves nor fetishize absence. They must learn to infer, hesitate, investigate, and sometimes leave the blank unclaimed (Barthes, 1975; Iser, 1978).

This double attention changes the critic's vocabulary. Instead of asking only what a blank permits the reader to imagine, criticism must ask what documentary chain produced the blank, whether a lost voice can be responsibly reconstructed, and how uncertainty should be marked. Literary openness and archival absence may resemble each other on the page while demanding opposite ethical responses.

CASE STUDY IV: INTERVAL, SHADOW, AND THE NON-OCCUPANCY OF SPACE

Visual cultures shaped by strong ideals of fullness often treat unoccupied space as background. In Japanese discussions of *ma*, however, interval can function as a relation in space and time rather than a deficiency awaiting content (Pilgrim, 1986). In ink painting, architecture, performance, and everyday design, the significance of the interval depends on proportion, sequence, breath, and the elements it holds apart and together. The comparison is functional rather than exhaustive: the article does not claim a single Japanese doctrine of emptiness.

Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, first published in Japanese in 1933 and read here in the 1977 translation, meditates on environments in which indirect light, patina, recess, and subdued surfaces cultivate perception. The essay is a stylized response to modernization, and recent criticism rightly cautions against treating it as transparent evidence of an unchanging national aesthetic. Its relevance lies in a precise proposition: maximum visibility is not identical with maximum perceptibility (Tanizaki, 1977).

This proposition complicates the modern equation of clarity with total illumination. To illuminate everything can erase texture, mystery, and the right

not to be immediately available. Negative space teaches that presence does not need to occupy the entire field. It can coexist with room for relation. Such room is both spatial and ethical (Jullien, 2009; Tanizaki, 1977).

Cross-cultural comparison therefore requires discipline. Romantic fragments, Michelangelo's rough surfaces, Cagean silence, and *ma* are not interchangeable tokens of a universal absence. Their histories, metaphysics, institutions, and material practices differ. Comparison becomes legitimate only when it identifies a limited relation - here, resistance to saturation - and allows each case to correct the others. Japanese interval prevents the Western fragment from monopolizing absence as negativity; the history of damaged archives prevents interval from becoming a decorative ideal.

The ethical gain of comparison is consequently not a global synthesis but a more exact provinciality: each tradition becomes visible as one historically situated way of organizing presence, not the hidden norm of all aesthetics.

Ruins, Archives, and the Difference between Repair and Completion

The unfinished enters cultural memory not only through deliberately open artworks but also through ruins, damaged objects, partial archives, and interrupted testimonies. These forms raise a difficult question: when should incompleteness be preserved, and when should it be repaired? The answer cannot be derived from aesthetics alone. It depends on material safety, historical evidence, community meaning, and the purpose of conservation. A ruin may communicate duration and loss, but it may also represent neglect. A damaged manuscript may need stabilization even when missing pages cannot and should not be invented (Taylor, 2003; Young, 1993).

Conservation theory has long debated the relation between restoration and authenticity. The ethics developed here supports a distinction between repair and completion. Repair sustains the conditions under which an object can continue to exist and be encountered. Completion supplies what is absent in order to restore an imagined wholeness. The first may be necessary; the second requires greater caution. When reconstruction hides uncertainty, the public receives confidence where evidence is incomplete. When absence is clearly marked, repair can preserve both legibility

and historical honesty (Didi-Huberman, 2005; Young, 1993).

Archives make the politics of incompleteness especially visible. No archive is simply a neutral collection of what happened. Selection, preservation, classification, and access determine which traces survive. Missing voices may reflect ordinary loss, but they may also result from censorship, colonial administration, economic exclusion, or the low institutional value assigned to everyday lives. The blank in an archive therefore cannot be treated automatically as poetic space. It may be an index of power (Hirsch, 2012; Taylor, 2003).

A humanistic practice of archival unfinishedness combines imaginative reconstruction with explicit limits. Scholars may infer contexts, connect fragments, and recover marginalized histories, but they should distinguish evidence from speculation. This distinction does not weaken narrative. It allows readers to see the labor of knowledge and the points at which the past resists completion. The archive becomes a threshold between responsibility to traces and responsibility to those whom the traces do not fully contain (Benjamin, 1999; Hirsch, 2012).

The same principle applies to monuments and public memory. Communities sometimes inherit unfinished memorials, contested statues, or sites whose meanings have changed. The choice is not always between preservation and destruction. Counter-monuments, contextual additions,

temporary interventions, and participatory reinterpretations can keep conflict visible. Here continuation may be more truthful than completion: the public object remains open to democratic revision because the history it carries is not settled (Young, 1993).

Repair, then, is a practice of care rather than a fantasy of returning to an untouched origin. It acknowledges fracture while enabling future relation. In this respect, repair belongs to the ethics of the unfinished. It does not celebrate damage; it refuses to falsify it. It asks how culture can continue without pretending that every loss has been recovered.

The Open Form Humanities Framework

The preceding analysis is synthesized in an Open Form Humanities Framework. Its five dimensions - trace, interval, threshold, response, and continuation - were derived abductively from the cases and are intended for comparative interpretation, not mechanical scoring. Trace asks how making, damage, or transmission remains visible; interval asks how absence organizes relation; threshold identifies the boundary between formal guidance and receiver contribution; response evaluates the agency and obligations created by the encounter; continuation asks what further thought, performance, repair, or public action remains possible. The framework extends open-work and reception theories by integrating material history and ethical remainder (Eco, 1989; Iser, 1978).

Table 2: The Open Form Humanities Framework.

Dimension	Guiding question	Evidence in the work	Interpretive responsibility
Trace	What remains visible of making, damage, revision, or transmission?	Tool marks, drafts, seams, corrections, archival gaps.	Do not erase labor or historical interruption.
Interval	How does emptiness, silence, or pause organize relation?	Unpainted field, rest, ellipsis, spacing, delay.	Attend to what the interval enables rather than rushing to fill it.
Threshold	Where does the work stop and the receiver begin?	Open ending, incomplete figure, performative score.	Distinguish evidence-based interpretation from projection.
Response	What action of perception or judgment is invited?	Inference, listening, comparison, co-performance.	Accept agency while remaining answerable to form and context.
Continuation	What remains possible after the encounter?	Re-performance, revision, unresolved obligation, new reading.	Carry the question forward without denying needed decisions.

HUMANISTIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED BY THE UNFINISHED

The framework clarifies four forms of knowledge generated by responsible incompleteness. First, unfinished art produces process knowledge. It reveals how form emerges through revision, resistance, and contingency. This knowledge counters fantasies of effortless creativity and invites respect for labor. Second, it produces limit knowledge. By marking what cannot be fully represented, it makes the boundary of the maker's perspective visible (Dewey, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Gumbrecht, 2004).

Third, unfinishedness produces relational knowledge. Meaning occurs between elements, between media, between work and receiver, and between present interpretation and future revision. The artwork becomes less an isolated object than a structured encounter. Fourth, it produces ethical knowledge. The receiver practices patience, humility, and answerability. These are not messages contained in the work; they are dispositions enacted through engagement (Bakhtin, 1981; Gadamer, 1986).

Such knowledge is particularly important when public discourse rewards certainty without depth. The unfinished work slows the conversion of complexity into position. It does not ask the receiver to abandon judgment, but to let judgment become responsive. The humanities contribute to democratic life not only by supplying cultural information, but by cultivating forms of attention capable of living with plurality without collapsing into indifference (Greene, 1995; Rancière, 2009).

This perspective also reframes creativity. Creativity is often presented as production of novelty. Unfinished art shows that creativity may consist in making room: removing excess, allowing silence, preserving a question, or refusing an imposed ending. The creative act is not always addition. Sometimes it is the courage to stop before the other has been absorbed (Beghetto, 2019; Sennett, 2008).

THE UNFINISHED SELF: PORTRAITURE, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND IDENTITY

The ethics of unfinishedness also transforms how the self is represented. Portraits, autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs often appear to promise a coherent person behind the work. Yet the self that speaks or appears is never fully available as a completed object. It is shaped by memory, social

language, bodily change, and the expectations of an imagined audience. A humanistic portrait therefore does not simply capture identity; it stages the tension between recognition and remainder (Butler, 2004; Smith & Watson, 2010).

Autobiographical writing makes this tension explicit. The narrator looks backward and organizes dispersed experience into a meaningful sequence, but the act of narration changes the past it seeks to recover. Lejeune (1989) describes the autobiographical pact that links author, narrator, and protagonist, while later life-writing scholarship emphasizes the social and relational production of the autobiographical subject. The promise of identity does not eliminate the gaps of memory, the influence of others, or the future from which the life will be read again (Lejeune, 1989; Smith & Watson, 2010).

An unfinished approach to selfhood resists two opposite reductions. The first is essentialism: the belief that beneath every change lies a fixed, discoverable core. The second is pure fluidity: the idea that identity has no continuity or accountability. Ricoeur (1992) offers a more useful distinction between sameness and selfhood. A person changes while remaining answerable for promises, actions, and relationships. Identity is narrative, but narrative is not arbitrary (Ricoeur, 1992).

Portraiture can embody the same insight. A face may be recognizable without becoming transparent. Cropping, blur, shadow, serial repetition, or visible revision can resist the fantasy that the image possesses the person. The ethical portrait allows the sitter to remain more than what the viewer sees. It grants appearance without converting appearance into total knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

This matters in a culture of profiles, predictive classification, and biometric legibility. Data systems can support recognition and access, but they also encourage the belief that a person is the sum of available traces. The unfinished portrait offers a counter-model: every representation is partial, situated, and revisable, and human dignity includes a resistance to being exhausted by another's description (Crawford, 2021).

The unfinished self is therefore not an excuse for irresponsibility. Because no account is final, revision becomes an ethical obligation. People can reconsider inherited narratives, acknowledge harm, and create new continuities. The self remains open

not because nothing is stable, but because human life is capable of response. Art gives form to this capacity by showing identity as a work that is never merely finished and never wholly without form (Ricoeur, 1992; Smith & Watson, 2010).

Disability aesthetics sharpens this claim by challenging the norm of a finished, self-sufficient, and visually harmonious body. Siebers (2010) shows that disability can transform aesthetic categories rather than merely supply a subject to them. Unfinishedness should therefore not romanticize bodily vulnerability; it should expose the standards by which some bodies are classified as incomplete in the first place.

SILENCE, TESTIMONY, AND THE ETHICS OF WITNESSING

Silence becomes most ethically difficult when art approaches testimony. In aesthetic contexts, silence may create openness or intensify attention. In contexts of violence, however, silence can also result from fear, coercion, trauma, social disbelief, or the destruction of witnesses. To treat every silence as beautiful would ignore the conditions that produced it. The ethics of the unfinished must therefore distinguish chosen restraint from imposed muteness (Sontag, 1969; Taylor, 2003).

Testimony is never a simple transfer of an intact event into language. Felman and Laub (1992) describe witnessing as a relation in which speech becomes possible through an address to another. Caruth (1996) emphasizes the belated and disruptive structure of traumatic experience. These approaches suggest that gaps, repetitions, and interruptions may belong to the truth of testimony rather than represent failures of communication. Yet they also warn against making trauma valuable because it produces compelling form (Caruth, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992).

The listener or reader bears a specific responsibility. The task is not to complete the witness's account by supplying a coherent story too quickly. Nor is it to admire fragmentation from a safe aesthetic distance. Responsible reception remains close to what is said, marks what is inferred, and recognizes that the demand for a satisfying narrative may reproduce pressure on the witness. Sometimes the most ethical interpretation is one that refuses to smooth contradiction (Felman & Laub, 1992).

Artistic works based on testimony face an additional layer of mediation. Editing, performance, staging, and visual design can make

neglected voices audible, but they can also redistribute ownership. The artist must ask whose silence is being used, who controls the final form, and whether the represented person or community retains agency. Acknowledgment and collaboration are not external administrative matters; they shape the ethics of the artwork itself (Taylor, 2003).

The concept of postmemory developed by Hirsch (2012) further complicates completion. Later generations inherit images, stories, and absences from events they did not experience directly. Their creative responses are neither primary testimony nor detached invention. They are acts of mediated relation. The unfinished archive becomes a field in which descendants seek connection while confronting the impossibility of full recovery (Hirsch, 2012).

Silence in witnessing is therefore neither empty nor automatically sacred. It may signal a limit, a wound, a refusal, a protection, or a demand for another form of listening. Humanistic art does not solve this ambiguity. It creates conditions in which the ambiguity can be approached without being consumed.

ANALYTICAL CRITERIA FOR RESPONSIBLE INCOMPLETION

The preceding sections allow responsible incompleteness to be evaluated through a set of analytical criteria. The first is formal necessity. The critic should ask whether the fragment, silence, rough surface, or open ending performs identifiable work within the composition. If removing the incompleteness would not alter the work's perceptual or conceptual structure, the device may be decorative rather than necessary (Eco, 1989; Iser, 1978).

The second criterion is contextual honesty. The work should not present imposed loss as freely chosen openness, nor conceal the historical causes of damage. Contextual honesty includes provenance, conditions of production, and the distribution of voice. It is especially important when incompleteness results from censorship, displacement, poverty, or violence (Taylor, 2003; Young, 1993).

The third criterion is relational agency. Meaningful openness gives the receiver room to respond while preserving the resistance of the work. A work fails this criterion when participation is merely simulated, when every path leads to the same prescribed reaction, or when ambiguity is so

unstructured that evidence no longer matters (Rancière, 2009; Winnicott, 1971).

The fourth criterion is ethical remainder. The work should permit something to remain unpossessed: the autonomy of a person, the opacity of another culture, the uncertainty of an archive, or the complexity of a conflict. Remainder is not a mysterious surplus added by critics. It is the visible limit of the work's authority (Butler, 2004; Derrida, 1987).

The fifth criterion is continuability. An unfinished form should support further thought, performance, research, repair, or public conversation. Continuability differs from endless deferral because it can coexist with decisions. A museum may decide how to conserve an object while leaving contested interpretation open; a reader may defend an argument while acknowledging unresolved evidence. Responsible incompleteness joins judgment to revisability (Bakhtin, 1981; Benjamin, 1999).

Table 3: Medium-specific forms of responsible incompleteness.

Medium	Unfinished device	Knowledge made possible	Ethical question
Sculpture	Rough stone, visible tool marks, partial emergence	Knowledge of process, resistance, and material agency	Does the image reveal making without turning matter into a defeated obstacle?
Music	Silence, pause, indeterminate sound, open performance	Knowledge of environment, duration, and shared attention	Does restraint create listening, or merely withdraw responsibility?
Literature	Fragment, ellipsis, suspended ending, missing archive	Knowledge of inference, limit, and historical absence	Is the gap an invitation, an imposed silence, or both?
Visual art	Negative space, shadow, erasure, incompletely occupied field	Knowledge of relation, opacity, and non-saturation	Does emptiness preserve difference or aestheticize erasure?
Public memory	Ruin, counter-monument, contested or revisable memorial	Knowledge of historical conflict and civic continuation	Can a community act without pretending that memory is settled?

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITIES EDUCATION AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

A humanities curriculum shaped by the ethics of the unfinished would not merely assign incomplete works. It would teach students to distinguish evidence from projection, ambiguity from confusion, and revisability from relativism. Close reading becomes a discipline of provisional judgment: every interpretation advances a claim, identifies its evidence, and marks what remains unresolved (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995).

In the classroom, this can be practiced through unfinished comparison. Students might examine a sketch beside a completed painting, multiple endings to a narrative, a score and contrasting performances, or a damaged archive and its institutional history. The purpose is not to rank completion against incompleteness, but to observe how each distributes agency and meaning. Assessment can also recognize revision as intellectual maturity rather than treating the first confident answer as the strongest (Barnett, 2012; Beghetto, 2019; Biesta, 2013).

Museums and cultural institutions can use unfinishedness to challenge authoritative display. Instead of presenting only stable conclusions, exhibitions can reveal restoration choices, contested attributions, missing provenance, and alternative interpretations. Transparency about uncertainty does not weaken expertise. It demonstrates that expertise includes knowledge of limits (Didi-Huberman, 2005; Young, 1993).

Creative practice benefits from the same ethic. Artists and writers can ask whether a work needs more material or more space; whether explanation serves the encounter or closes it; whether another culture is being translated or consumed; whether silence protects complexity or merely avoids responsibility. These questions do not prescribe a style. They cultivate reflexive craft (Sennett, 2008).

The framework also has relevance for technologies of automatic completion. Predictive systems reduce friction by generating likely continuations, but probability is not judgment and fluency is not contextual adequacy. Humanities education should therefore preserve situations in which learners

must pause, verify, revise, and decide whether the most likely continuation is also the most responsible one (Crawford, 2021).

COUNTERARGUMENTS AND RISKS

A theory of unfinishedness faces several objections. The first is elitism. Ambiguous works may privilege receivers already trained in specialist codes. Openness can become a flattering name for exclusion. This risk is real. Institutions should not assume that difficulty is automatically profound or that accessibility requires simplification. Mediation can provide historical and formal orientation while preserving interpretive agency (Rancière, 2009).

The second objection concerns romanticization. Incompleteness caused by war, poverty, illness, censorship, or colonial extraction should not be aestheticized as creative openness. The distinction between chosen and imposed unfinishedness must remain central. Even deliberate open form may borrow the appearance of rupture without engaging its historical cost (Caruth, 1996; Young, 1993).

The third objection is that closure is sometimes ethically necessary. Testimony may require clear attribution; law requires decisions; public memory may need names, dates, and accountability. The ethics of the unfinished cannot become an excuse for avoiding truth claims. Its purpose is not to abolish completion but to prevent completion from pretending to be totality (Butler, 2004; Ricoeur, 1984).

The fourth objection is practical: every work must stop somewhere. Unfinishedness cannot literally continue forever. The response is that open form concerns the quality of the boundary, not the absence of boundaries. A responsible work can be materially complete and semantically open. Conversely, an abandoned draft can be materially incomplete and imaginatively closed. The ethical question is how the boundary relates to what exceeds it.

Finally, incompleteness can be commodified. The aesthetic of roughness, visible process, or curated imperfection may be used as a marketable style while concealing highly controlled production. Critical attention must therefore ask who benefits from the appearance of openness and whether the receiver's participation is genuine or merely simulated (Sennett, 2008).

DISCUSSION: FROM MASTERY TO ANSWERABILITY

The deepest challenge posed by unfinished art concerns the ideal of mastery. Modern knowledge often imagines understanding as successful capture: the object becomes transparent, classified, and available for use. The cases examined here support a different account. Understanding may become more exact when it identifies the point at which its own concepts cease to be adequate. This is not anti-intellectual surrender but answerability to material, historical, and personal remainder (Adorno, 1997; Derrida, 1987).

The five operations identified in this article - exposing process, withholding closure, preserving alterity, activating participation, and sustaining futurity - converge in a relational ethics. The work is neither sovereign nor empty. The receiver is neither passive nor omnipotent. Meaning is produced in a field of obligations. Form guides; absence opens; response continues (Eco, 1989; Gadamer, 1986).

This relational view helps explain why unfinished works can feel intensely human. Human lives are not experienced as completed wholes. Identity is revised, memory is partial, promises remain open, grief changes form, and relationships continue beyond any single account. Art does not become humanistic simply by representing human subjects. It becomes humanistic when its form respects becoming, vulnerability, and plurality (Ricoeur, 1992).

The unfinished also offers a politics of pace. Saturated environments push experience toward rapid recognition. A fragment interrupts fluency; a silence makes duration felt; negative space slows visual capture. These forms create time for perception to become ethical. They do not guarantee empathy or wisdom, but they make hurried possession more difficult (Lyotard, 1991).

The argument therefore extends beyond a preference for incomplete objects. It concerns the kind of civilization imagined through form. A civilization that can tolerate meaningful incompleteness may be better able to recognize unfinished histories, revise institutions, hear minority voices, and resist premature consensus. The arts provide rehearsal spaces for this capacity.

One further dimension deserves emphasis: waiting. Unfinished form often places the receiver in a temporal condition that cannot be accelerated without changing the work. The eye waits for a

figure to emerge from stone; the listener waits through silence; the reader waits for a resolution that may never arrive. This waiting is not empty delay. It is an aesthetic discipline in which expectation becomes perceptible (Beckett, 1956; Lyotard, 1991).

Modern systems frequently treat waiting as inefficiency. Yet human relations, historical understanding, grief, and creative judgment do not obey the tempo of immediate delivery. The arts give waiting a form and therefore protect it from being dismissed as nothing. They show that attention matures through duration and that some meanings appear only after the impulse to finish has weakened (Barnett, 2012; Biesta, 2013).

Aesthetic waiting also redistributes power. The receiver cannot force the work to disclose itself on demand. This temporary frustration can become ethical when it teaches respect for rhythms not governed by the self. The point is not passive patience in the face of injustice, but the capacity to distinguish urgent action from premature interpretation.

Seen in this light, the unfinished work is not simply open in space or meaning; it is open in time. It asks whether the receiver can remain present before possession. That question may be among the most important contributions of art to a culture of speed.

There is also courage in leaving room. Artists are often encouraged to prove value by adding explanation, detail, and visible effort. To stop can feel like exposure because the unfilled space reveals confidence in the receiver and acceptance of uncertainty. Responsible incompleteness therefore involves risk on both sides: the maker relinquishes control, and the receiver accepts the burden of response (Beghetto, 2019; Sennett, 2008).

This mutual risk distinguishes openness from neglect. Neglect abandons relation; open form prepares relation without determining its result. The difference can be subtle, but it is decisive. A work that leaves room must still offer orientation, tension, and care. Its restraint becomes meaningful because something has been composed around the absence.

The unfinished is therefore not the opposite of commitment. At its strongest, it is a demanding commitment to form without totalization: to accompany a process without falsifying its closure, to preserve truth claims without claiming

exhaustive knowledge, and to make room for another consciousness without reducing that consciousness to a function of the work. The term responsible incompleteness names this union of craft, humility, and revisable judgment.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conceptual and comparative. It does not establish how different audiences actually experience unfinished forms, and it cannot assume that patience, humility, or interpretive responsibility arise automatically from exposure to ambiguity. Reception research could test how expertise, culture, age, disability, sensory conditions, and institutional framing affect the operations proposed here.

The selected cases are necessarily partial and heavily weighted toward European and Japanese examples. The article does not offer a global history of unfinishedness. Future work should begin within Indigenous, African, Latin American, Islamic, South Asian, and other aesthetic genealogies before constructing comparison, thereby allowing different concepts of transmission, repair, collective authorship, ritual restriction, and impermanence to challenge the present framework.

The framework could also be applied to architecture, cinema, digital art, oral traditions, conservation practice, and community archives. In each field, the relation between deliberate openness and imposed incompleteness will require distinct criteria. Research should pay particular attention to disability aesthetics, where conventional ideas of finished bodies and normative form are directly contested (Siebers, 2010; Taylor, 2003).

Finally, future inquiry should study automated completion systems as cultural forms rather than only as tools. Their influence on writing, image-making, interpretation, and educational assessment raises a central humanistic question: which uncertainties should technology reduce, and which must a free culture preserve because judgment depends on encountering them?

CONCLUSION

Unfinishedness is neither a single style nor an automatic virtue. It may result from accident, violence, historical interruption, material resistance, deliberate choice, or disciplined restraint. Its humanistic significance arises only when absence is formally necessary, contextually

honest, and capable of sustaining accountable response.

The comparison of Michelangelo's *Prisoners*, Cage's 4'33", literary gaps, and Japanese aesthetics of interval demonstrates four distinct ways in which incompleteness can produce knowledge: by revealing process, marking representational limits, organizing relation, and preserving future obligation. The Open Form Humanities Framework translates those findings into five dimensions - trace, interval, threshold, response, and continuation - while its negative cases prevent openness from becoming a synonym for obscurity or neglect.

In a culture increasingly organized around immediate answers and automated completion, the unfinished is not nostalgia for vagueness. It is a discipline of freedom and judgment. Completion remains necessary in law, testimony, conservation, scholarship, and craft; totalization does not. Some works endure because they do not finish speaking, and some forms of knowledge become more exact when they leave a responsible space in which another person, another archive, or another future can answer.

DECLARATIONS

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author contribution: Sole authorship. The named author conceived the study, approved the final manuscript, and assumes responsibility for its content.

Data availability: No empirical dataset was generated. The analysis is based on publicly available artistic works and published scholarship cited in the reference list.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, T. W. "Aesthetic theory (R. Hullot-Kentor, Trans.)." *Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. (Original work published 1970)* (1997).
- Bakhtin, M. M. "The dialogic imagination: Four essays." Vol. 1. University of Texas Press, (2010).
- Barnett*, R. "Learning for an unknown future." *Higher education Research & development* 23.3 (2004): 247-260.
- Barthes, R. "The pleasure of the text (R. Miller, Trans.)." *Hill and Wang*. (1975).
- Beckett, S. "Waiting for Godot." *Grove Press*. (1956).
- Beghetto, R. A. "Beautiful risks: Having the courage to teach and learn creatively." *Bloomsbury Publishing USA*, (2018).
- Benjamin, W. "The arcades project." *Harvard University Press*, (1999).
- Biesta, G. J. "Beautiful risk of education." *Routledge*, (2015).
- Blanchot, M. "The writing of the disaster (A. Smock, Trans.) *Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska* (1995).
- Butler, J. "Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence." *verso*, (2004).
- Cage, J., & Jandl, E. "Silence." *Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press*, (1961).
- Caruth, C. "Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history." *JHU press*, (2016).
- Dignum, V., & Crawford, K. "Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence." (2021): 499-500.
- Derrida, J. "The truth in painting (G. Bennington & I. McLeod, Trans.)." *Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press (original work published 1978)* (1987).
- Dewey, J. "Art as Experience. New York: Perigee." *Trabalho original publicado em* (1934).
- Didi-Huberman, G. "Confronting images: Questioning the ends of a certain history of art." *Penn State Press*, (2005).
- Eco, U. "The open work." *Harvard University Press*, (1989).
- Eisner, E. W. "The arts and the creation of mind." *Language arts* 80.5 (2003): 340-344.
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. "Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history." *Taylor & Francis*, (1992).
- Gadamer, H. G. "The relevance of the beautiful and other essays." *Cambridge University Press*, (1986).
- Gann, K. "No such thing as silence: John Cage's 4'33." *Yale. ORIM*, (2010).
- Greene, M. "Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change." *John Wiley & Sons*, (2000).
- Gumbrecht, H. U. "Production of presence: What meaning cannot convey." *Stanford University Press*, (2004).
- Hirsch, M. "The generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture of the holocaust." *New York: Columbia UP* 3 (2012).
- Ingarden, R. "The literary work of art (G. G. Grabowicz, Trans.)." *Northwestern University Press*. (1973).

26. Barnouw, D. "The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response." (1979): 1207-1214
27. Jullien, F. "The great image has no form, or on the nonobject through painting." *University of Chicago Press*, (2009).
28. Kafka, F. "The castle (M. Harman, Trans.)." *Schocken Books*. (1998).
29. Kahn, D. "John Cage: silence and silencing." *The musical quarterly* 81.4 (1997): 556-598.
30. Koren, L. "Wabi-sabi for artists, designers, poets & philosophers." *Imperfect publishing*, (2008).
31. Lacoue-Labarthe, P., & Nancy, J. L. "The literary absolute: The theory of literature in German romanticism." *Suny Press*, (1988).
32. Lejeune, P. "On autobiography (P. J. Eakin, Ed.; K. Leary, Trans.)." *University of Minnesota Press*. (1989).
33. Lyotard, J. F. "The inhuman: Reflections on time." *Stanford University Press*, (1991).
34. Edie, J. M. "Eye and mind." *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (1964): 159-90.
35. Pilgrim, R. B. "Intervals (" Ma") in space and time: foundations for a religio-aesthetic paradigm in Japan." *History of Religions* 25.3 (1986): 255-277.
36. Rancière, J. "The emancipated spectator." *Verso Books*, (2021).
37. Ricoeur, P., & Ricoeur, P. "Time and narrative, Volume 3." *Vol. 3. University of Chicago press*, (1984).
38. Ricoeur, P. "Oneself as another." *University of Chicago press*, (1992).
39. Sennett, R. "The craftsman." *Yale University Press*. (2008).
40. Siebers, T. "Disability aesthetics." *University of Michigan Press*. (2010).
41. Smith, S., & Watson, J. "Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives." *U of Minnesota Press*, (2010).
42. Sontag, S. "Styles of radical will." *Farrar, Straus and Giroux*. (1969).
43. Tanizaki, J. "In praise of shadows (T. J. Harper & E. G. Seidensticker, Trans.)." *Leete's Island Books. (Original work published 1933)* (1977).
44. Taylor, D. "The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas." *Duke University Press*, (2003).
45. Wallace, W. E. "Michelangelo: The artist, the man and his times." *Cambridge University Press*, (2011)
46. Winnicott, D. W. "Playing and reality." *Tavistock Publications*. (1971).
47. Young, J. E. "The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning." *Yale University Press*. (1993).

Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Alzuria, I. B. "The Ethics of the Unfinished: Fragment, Silence, and Negative Space as Humanistic Forms of Knowledge." *Sarcouncil Journal of Public Administration and Management* 5.4 (2026): pp 26-40.